

# REINCARNATION AND THE GOLDEN URN IN THE 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY: THE RECOGNITION OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> PANCHEN LAMA

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Anachronistic elements abound in different aspects of the present-day Tibet issue and perhaps nowhere is this more strikingly obvious than with regard to the question of reincarnation, i.e., the means by which the incarnations of high-ranking lamas are recognized and accorded both sectarian and popular legitimacy. This has been a particularly charged issue and the source of tremendous tensions and rancor since 1995, when the Chinese government—hardly renowned for traditional sympathy to religion—accorded recognition to a young boy as the incarnation of the late Panchen Lama, in outright opposition to the Dalai Lama’s recognition of another child as the sought-for incarnation.

The rationale for the dismissal of the Dalai Lama’s choice, according to the Chinese government, was his disregard for traditional practices in the recognition of high incarnations.<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying that the underlying—albeit, quite obvious—reason was the need for the Chinese government to retain control over the structure and content of the Buddhist apparatus insofar as what are perceived as state interests were concerned. And permitting the Dalai Lama—residing outside the People’s Republic of China and beyond its direct control—a role in this important process was unacceptable. The politicization of certain elements of Tibetan Buddhism has been a given for decades, of course, and at times has manifested itself in some rather pointed pronouncements about the approved role of the religion, such as those asserting a link between fidelity to Buddhism and patriotism.<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, the Chinese government maintained that Tibetan incarnations needed to be selected through the drawing of lots or tally sticks from a “Golden Urn” (Ch. *jinpíng* 金瓶; Tib. *gser-'bum*), a procedure that had been ordained by the Qing

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1 Ainam, “How the Soul Boy of the 10<sup>th</sup> Bainqen is Determined,” *China’s Tibet* 7.1 (1996), p. 9: “There was no historical precedence [*sic*] indicating that the Dalai could nominate the reincarnated soul boy of the Bainqen.”

2 Hua Zi, “Tashilhunpo Monastery: Ceremony Unveils The Gold-Character Board,” *China’s Tibet* 7.4 (1996), p. 4: “Safeguard the Country and Benefit the People is a praise [*sic*] of the patriotic tradition of the religious people;” Hua Zi, “Another Grand Event of Tibetan Buddhism—The 11<sup>th</sup> Bainqen Erdeni Initiated into Monkhood,” *China’s Tibet* 7.4 (1996), p. 9, describes Buddhist authorities in China “wishing that the 11<sup>th</sup> bainqen Erdeni would continue to study hard and be a Living Buddha who loves the country and Tibetan Buddhism.”

Dynasty at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the Dalai Lama was castigated for his wanton violation of the requisite norms for identifying the Panchen Lama:<sup>3</sup> rather than awaiting the verdict of the Golden Urn, he had made a choice based upon his own divinations and consultations with representatives of Bkra-shis lun-po. It is not possible to deal with all elements of this issue in this short paper. Rather, I would like to turn to one or two strands of the story found in Tibetan historical materials.

The way in which the use of the Golden Urn came to be mandated for the selection of Tibetan incarnations has a generally well-known common explanation: in the aftermath of the Qing campaign against the Gurkha state in Nepal, the Qing court made a sweeping reassessment of Tibetan affairs, seeking to find a way of understanding what circumstances had left it with no option but to mount a difficult and costly military expedition to the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley. The Qianlong 乾隆 Emperor (1711-1799; r. 1736-1799) was particularly exasperated with the state of affairs at the upper levels of the Tibetan government and considered the selection of incarnate lamas and lay ministers to both be subject to corrupt influences. In 1793 the emperor promulgated articles that comprised the “Twenty-Nine Regulations for Resolving Tibetan Matters” (Ch. *Qinding Zangnei shanhou zhangcheng ershijiu tiao* 欽定藏內善後章程二十九條).<sup>4</sup>

The formulation of the various articles is reflected in a variety of Qing sources, such as the *Wei-Zang tongzhi* 衛藏通志 and others.<sup>5</sup> However, such sources have not contained a complete Chinese-language text of the regulations. Perhaps the most thorough study of them, a series of articles by Liao Zugui 廖祖桂, Li Yongchang 李永昌, and Li Pengnian 李鵬年, published in *Zhongguo Zangxue* 中国藏学 in 2002 and 2004,<sup>6</sup> makes it clear that the complete texts which have been cited in various Chinese publications since the 1950s are translations from two somewhat different Tibetan-language copies of the regulations. While several memorials on the reform of Tibetan affairs are extant, including those drawn up by the Manchu general Fu Kang'an 福康安 and the Grand Secretary of the Grand Secretariat (Ch. *Neige daxueshi* 內閣大學士) Heshen 和珅 and others,<sup>7</sup> the actual, final regulations are

3 See Doje Cedain, “The Dalai’s Disregard for Precedence,” *China’s Tibet* 7.3 (1996), pp. 2-6.

4 The very first of the regulations specifically refers to the need to avoid deceit (*ham-rdzun*) in choosing the incarnations of high lamas. See Liao Zugui 廖祖桂, Li Yongchang 李永昌, and Li Pengnian 李鵬年, “«Qinding Zangnei shanhou zhangcheng ershijiu tiao» banben kaolue (1)” «欽定藏內善後章程二十九條» 版本考略 (一), *Zhongguo Zangxue* 中国藏学 2004.2, pp. 36-37;

5 See the various statutes derived from the regulations in Songyun 松筠, *Wei-Zang tongzhi* 衛藏通志 (Taipei, 1965), 12.1a-17a.

6 Liao Zugui 廖祖桂, Li Yongchang 李永昌, and Li Pengnian 李鵬年, “«Qinding Zangnei shanhou zhangcheng ershijiu tiao» banben kaolue” «欽定藏內善後章程二十九條» 版本考略, *Zhongguo Zangxue* 中国藏学 2002.3, pp. 50-54; 2004.2, pp. 30-43; 2004.3, pp. 69-87; and 2004.4, pp. 57-75

7 See the long 19-point memorial on reforming Tibetan affairs composed in 1789 by Heshen and others in *Zhongguo Zangxue yanjiu zhongxin* 中国藏学研究中心, et al., eds., *Yuan yilai*

available only in these Tibetan copies, one of which can be found in the volume *Xizang lishi dang'an huicui* 西藏历史档案荟萃 [= *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus yig-tshags gces-bsdus*; *A Collection of Historical Archives of Tibet*].<sup>8</sup>

The articles covered a wide variety of subjects, including military affairs, taxation, and, as noted, the appointment of secular officials and the selection of high-ranking incarnate lamas. During the time the regulations were being drawn up one of the Tibetan ministers considered responsible for the Gurkha war was being investigated in Beijing. I have elsewhere commented on Qianlong's observations on that case and on Tibetan official corruption and incompetence in general during this period.<sup>9</sup>

The regulations for selecting Lamas were quite clear: the names of the candidates were to be put into a Golden Urn granted by the emperor as soon as those names were adduced by the four great oracles of Tibet. If all four agreed on one candidate, then that candidate's name would be entered into the urn, along with a blank wooden tally slip. The choosing of the blank slip would eliminate the chosen candidate, regardless of the inclinations of the oracles. When used in the cases of high Dge-lugs-pa incarnations, the names of the candidates were to be written in Manchu, Chinese and Tibetan.<sup>10</sup>

The position of some has been that the use of the Golden Urn was generally ignored or carried out in a few rare cases simply pro forma.<sup>11</sup> While Qing authority went into a deep decline after the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the dynasty did exert influence in Tibetan affairs. And in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Golden Urn was used in selecting incarnations. Indeed, in 1814/1815 the Qing resident officials in Tibet, the *Amban* (Ch. *zhu Zang dachen* 駐藏大臣), had a register of incarnate lamas compiled bearing the title *Bod dang/ Bar-khams/ Rgya Sog bcas-kyi bla-sprul-rnams-kyi skye-phreng deb-gzhung*.<sup>12</sup> The register contained the names and different incarnations of the lamas within the various incarnation lineages and, as concerned the most recent incarnations, noted whether they had been recognized via the use of the Golden Urn. And in fact, the lamas who were young enough to have been affected by the 1793

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*Xizang difang yu zhongyang zhengfu guanxi dang'an shiliao huibian* 元以来西藏地方与中央政府关系当案史料汇编 (Beijing, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 641-654. See the memorials by Fu Kang'an on pp. 713-723. On Heshen, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period* (Taipei, 1970), pp. 288-290; on Fu Kang'an see pp. 253-255;

- 8 *Xizang zizhiqiu dang'anguan* 西藏自治区档案馆 [= *Bod rang-skyong-ljongs yig-tshags-khang*; The Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region], *Xizang lishi dang'an huicui* 西藏历史档案荟萃 [= *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus yig-tshags gces-bsdus*; *A Collection of Historical Archives of Tibet*] (Beijing, 1995), doc. 50.
- 9 Elliot Sperling, "Awe and Submission: A Tibetan Aristocrat at the Court of Qianlong," *International Review of History* 20 (1998), pp. 325-335.
- 10 Liao Zugui, et al., *op. cit.*, 2004.2, pp. 36-37.
- 11 E.g., Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa, *Tibet. A Political History* (New Haven, 1967), pp. 174-176; and Hugh Richardson, *A Short History of Tibet* (New York, 1962), pp. 70-71.
- 12 *Bod dang/ Bar-khams/ Rgya Sog bcas-kyi bla-sprul-rnams-kyi skye-phreng deb-gzhung*, in *Bod-kyi gal-che'i lo-rgyus yig-cha bdams-bsgrigs* (Lhasa, 1991), pp. 281-369. The register was revised in 1820/1821.

regulations had been recognized using the Golden Urn. These included quite a number of important lamas, such as the Karma-pa.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the use of the Golden Urn in the recognition of the Dalai Lamas, we have evidence from the biographies of the 9<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lamas that indicates that the authority of the Qing in Tibet during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was such that due acknowledgement had to be accorded the Golden Urn as a procedural tool mandated by the emperor. As will be seen below, it was indeed used in confirming the recognition of most of the Dalai Lamas during this period. With regard to the Panchen Lamas, we find evidence that is particularly unequivocal when we look at the recognition of the 8<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, Bstan-pa'i dbang-phyug (1855-1882), the first to have the Golden Urn figure in his recognition. Given that the present *contretemps* over the issue began with the recognition of the present Panchen Lama in 1995, it is appropriate to look closely at the circumstances of the use of the Golden Urn when it was first introduced into the process of recognizing a Panchen Lama. But such appropriateness aside, the account of the recognition of the 8<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama is important for what it tells us about the attitudes of the Tibetan clerics participating in the process with regard to the use of the Golden Urn.

The nuances derived from examining this particular instance of the urn's use add an important element to the usual understanding that the Golden Urn was implemented simply as one of many measures intended to deal with a debilitatingly corrupt Tibetan state of affairs. This is surely a part of the issue. But there is more. And it is linked to the religious identity of the Qing ruler, specifically the Qianlong Emperor. For this we need only turn to the biography of the 8<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama and its description of the circumstances of the lama's discovery, recounted in large part in a missive from one of the administrators at Bkra-shis lhun-po in the period following the death of the 7<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama in 1853. The missive, meant for presentation to the Qing *Amban* in Lhasa is quoted in the biography:

[39r] Thus, the master, Dbyings-sa No-min-han, etc., came and then from among the Brul-tshang, Ri-sbug and Rtsed-gdongs boys, the three who had been investigated, as well as the two children from the Dbus region of Tshag-gur-zhag-pa and Dngos-grub sdings who [emerged] through examinations by the regent Rwa-sgreng, the great Vajradhāra, along with the high steward and aristocratic monk, Mgon-po, there were [finally] two, the aforementioned Brul[-tshang] child and the [Tshag-]gur-zhag child, who were, through it all, greatly miraculous. And via a message the Great Emperor was also asked to attend to the recognition of these two.

Thus, in the Fire-Dragon Year [1856-1857], so that the recognition could be well prepared beforehand, the venerable Dbyings-sa, in connection with the orders, had the *rtse-phyag mkhan-po* Dka'-chen chos-mdzad go to *gung*

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13 Ibid, p. 291-292.

Bshad-sgra's residence in Shel-dkar, specifically to request his impressions of what was in the messages [Tib. *wang-zhu* = 文書] along with other instructions. Similarly, [39v] the venerable lord, *gung* Bshad-sgra, also, with regard to route descriptions, places of residence, etc., i.e., Chinese and Tibetan ways of doing [such things], promulgated secret instructions that stood by themselves and transmitted them to the ears of the venerable Dbyings-sa. Again, together with the great steward Dpal-ldan shes-rab, he travelled to Lhasa; on that occasion he had to come to hear a report of the message of the Great Emperor, transmitted via the senior *Amban*.

Starting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the Fire-Dragon Year [July 24, 1856], in conjunction with the trip to Lhasa, he presented a missive to the high officials stationed in Lhasa by imperial order, i.e., the [senior and assistant] *Amban* together as follows:

Rnam-rgyal chos-'phel, the *Ze-le-spen no-min-han* of Bkra-shis lhun-po has written: "With regard to the supreme incarnation of the Paṅ-chen Er-te-ni, the excellent, golden words of the Heavenly Divinity, the Mañjuḥōśa Emperor and Great Lord, have come upon the crown of our heads and holding in our hearts the instructions of the [previous] Paṅ-chen Er-te-ni himself and adhering diligently to the rites of dharma practice, we divided up and dispatched people to investigate what miraculous children there are..." etc. And so the parents, times of birth, and the signs accompanying the births of the two children from Brul-tshang and Tshag-gur-zhag were recorded. Afterwards a request was made to the Precious Dalai Lama, Refuge and Protector, to look into the matter and determine whether the Paṅ-chen Er-te-ni, Refuge and Protector, was unmistakably to be found among these two children. [40r] On the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the Wood-Hare Year [January 19, 1856] he responded: "I've diligently investigated and the incarnation of the Omniscient Panchen is among the two children; this is quite likely. Thus it can be reported to the Emperor..." etc.

Afterwards, on further investigation, [it was ascertained that] after the 6<sup>th</sup> Panchen Er-te-ni Blo-bzang dpal-ldan ye-shes had travelled to meet the Great Lord Qianlong [Tib. Gnam-skyong] and on that occasion passed away in the imperial capital, his incarnation, the 7<sup>th</sup>, Blo-bzang dpal-ldan bstan-pa'i nyi-ma phyogs-las rnam-rgyal dpal bzang-po, was born and the suspected candidates, and the bases for their being suspected and all, were reported via the imperially-appointed high officials [i.e., the *Amban*] to the Emperor, in response to which there came an excellent imperial edict [dated] the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the 47<sup>th</sup> year of Qianlong [=January 22, 1783]:<sup>14</sup> "No sooner had I opened and looked at the missive presented

14 It is assumed that the date here is given according to the Chinese calendar, given the use of the reign title Qianlong. If it is the Tibetan calendar that is meant the date would be January 23, 1783, one day later.

to me about deciding upon the unmistakable incarnation of the very Panchen Lama who had been here in Beijing [*Pi-cin nge-can = Pi-cin nges-can*] than I saw immediately that there had been born, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month of the Tiger Year [May 20, 1782],<sup>15</sup> a child in Bsname-skyid gshong in Gtsang to the father *sde-pa* Dpal-ldan don-grub and the mother 'Chimed rgyal-mo. Immediately I thought 'this is the incarnation!'" With the wisdom of great insight [the Emperor] discerned the matter and [40v] immediately made for [the child's] nomination to the throne, as made clear in the text. And with [shouts of]: "Long life to the one and only Paṅ-chen Er-te-ni!" I and other followers and attendants [after reading the Emperor's words] made prayers for [the sought-for Panchen Lama's] long life, for his extensive works, etc., and that in the future, when this very Paṅ-chen Er-te-ni came [back] to work for the benefit of others, his incarnation would be identified correctly. Later instructions [from the 6<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama] had said that: "If it is suspected that a most miraculous child has appeared as my rebirth, when a report is made to the Great Lord Emperor, then in accord with the order that the decision on my recognition shall be made by the Divine Heavenly Father, the Great Lord Qianlong [Tib. Chan-lung], the grace of investigation and recognition of the candidate suspected to be the incarnation [*skye-srid*] by the Great Lord Emperor with his complete wisdom shall be sought; and however the instructions come down, if the birth is recognized and decided thusly all will be fulfilled."

Thus was it stated. And so, with regard to the present incarnation and in harmony with earlier good customs, the [previous] Paṅ-chen Er-te-ni himself has taught that imperial orders obtained concerning investigation by the Great Emperor through his complete wisdom were the most revered hope of all humble subjects. And now that we have come to request, as we must, an investigation of the two aforementioned greatly miraculous children who are suspected candidates, apart from other children whose good signs are not clear, although we must request an investigation [by placing] the names of [only] those two aforementioned [children] within the precious Golden Urn, [41r], we are [formally] requesting that permission of the Great Lord, the Emperor, as per his imperial orders. And so, for that purpose we send our request via the [two] *Amban* together, in a report for the Great Lord, the Emperor, for His investigation, with proffers of our immediate gratitude on this date in the Fire-Dragon Year.<sup>16</sup>

15 Here it is assumed that the Tibetan calendar is being used, given the animal designation for the year. However, since it is a Qing imperial edict that is being cited, it is quite possible that a Chinese date is meant. If that is the case, the date would be one day earlier: May 19, 1782.

16 Blo-bzang bstan-'dzin dbang-rgyal, *Rje-btsun Blo-bzang dpal-ldan chos-kyi grags-pa bstan-pa'i dbang-phyug dpal-bzang-po'i rnam-thar dad-ldan pad-tshal bzhad-pa'i nyin-byed snang-ba* (Bkra-shis lhun-po blockprint [available from the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center], completed

on Dec. 10, 1888 (f. 333r: *Sa-Mo-Glang-gi bgrang-bya'i tshim-byed zla-ba'i dkar-po'i phyogs*)), ff. 39r-41r: *De-ltar Dbyings-sa No-min-han sku-ngo sogs phebs-nas rtsad-gcod gnang ba'i Brul-tshang/ Ri-sbug Rtsed gdong bcas-su yod-pa'i sras gsum dang/ rgyal-tshab Rwa-sgreng Rdo-rje 'chang chen-po/ gsol-che/ las-cha rje-drung Mgon-po bcas-nas thugs-zhib skyangs-pas Dbus-khul Tshag-gur-zhag-pa dang/ Dngos-grub-sdings gnyis-kyi sras bcas-kyi khongs-nas-kyang gong-du brjod-pa ltar Brul-sras dang/ Gur-zhag-pa'i sras gnyis snga phyi kun-tu ngo-mtshar che-zhing/ de-nas 7Gong-ma chen-por yang de-gnyis snyan-sgron thog ngos-'dzin bzhed-bskyangs-te/ de-yang Me-'Brug-lo nang-du mdzad-bzhed-la sngon-tshud thugs-gra legs-'grig yong-ched bcas-la 7Dbyings-sa mchog-nas bka'-'brel-gyis rtse-phyag mkhan-po Dka'-chen chos-mdzad lags/ gung-shad sgra-ba Shel-dkar-du bzhugs yod-pa'i sar wang-zhu'i 'char-zin dang bcas gang-ci'i bka'-slob zhu-bar ched phebs-bzhin [39v] mi'i dbang-phyug gung Bshad-sgra mchog-nas kyang/ lam-gsung/ gzhugs-yul sogs Rgya Bod gang-ci'i byed-phyogs skor-la nang-ma'i bka'-slob gzhan-dring ma-mchis-pa stsal-ba rnam Dbyings-sa mchog-gi snyan-du zhib-lhongs zhu gnang mdzad-de/ star-yang gsol-dpon chen-po Dpal-ldan shes-rab lags dang mnyam-sbrel-du Lha-ldan phyogs-su chibs-bskyod thog am-ban chen-po brgyud Gong-ma chen-po'i gser-snyan sgron-rgyu'i skor-la phebs dgos byung-ba ltar/ Me-'Brug zla-ba drug-pa'i tshe nyer-gnyis nyin-nas bzungs Lha-bskyod thog bka'-mngags Bod-bzhugs blon-chen am-ban lhan-rgyas-la/ wang-zhu phul-ba'i tshig-gzhir/ Bkras-lhun Ze-le-spen No-min-han Rnam-rgyal chos-'phel-nas zhu-ba/ 7Pan-chen er-te-ni nyid-kyi mchog-sprul skor/ Gnam-gyi lha 'Jam-dbyangs 7Gong-ma bdag-po chen-po-nas gser-gyi bka'-bzang spyi-bor phebs-pa dang/ 7Pan-chen er-ten-de-nyid-nas bka'-slob gnang-ba snying-la bcangs-te chos-spyod sku-rim-la 'bad-zhus zin-pa'i thog-nas/ yul-phyogs tshang-mar khye'u ngo-mtshar che-ba ji-yod zhib-'jug byed mi-khag bgos-kyis btang-ba-mams-nas zhes sogs Brul-tshang-gi sras dang Tshag-gur-zhag-pa'i sras gnyis-kyi yab-yum 'khrungs-tshes 'khrungs-ltas sogs 'khod-rjes/ de-dag-gi gnas-tshul zhib-gsal thog khye'u 'di-gnyis-kyi khongs-su skyabs-mgon Pañ-chen er-te-ni'i sprul-sku 'khrul-med phebs yod-med [40r] 7skyabs-mgon Ta-lā'i bla-ma rin-po-cher thugs-brtags zhus-par Shing-yos zla-ba bcu-gnyis-pa'i tshes bcu-gsum nyin bka'-lan phyir-phebs-la brtag-pa nan-tan bgyis-par gong-gsal gnyis-kyi khongs Pañ-chen thams-cad mkhyen-pa'i mchog-sprul yod ngo che-bas 7Gong-ma bdag-po chen-por gser-snyan sgron thus phebs-shing zhes sogs dang/ yang de-rjes zhib-na Pan-chen er-te-ni sku-phreng drug-pa Blo-bzang dpal-ldan ye-shes gnam-skyong bdag-po chen-po'i gser-zhal mjal-bar phebs thog-nas gser-gyi rgyal-khab chen-por zhing-du gshegs-pa'i 7mchog-gi sprul-sku bdun-pa Blo-bzang dpal-ldan bstan-pa'i nyi-ma phyogs-las rnam-rgyal dpal-bzang-po de-nyid 'khrungs-te dogs-gnas dang ring dang bcas bkas-mngags blon-chen brgyud gser-snyan rin-po-che sgron-bar Gnam-skyong dgung-lo zhe-bdun-pa'i zla-ba bcu-gnyis-pa'i tshes nyi-shu-la bka-yig phyir phebs-su/ Pi-cin nge-can-gyi Pañ-chen er-te-ni'i sprul-sku 'khrul-bral nges-par thag-gcod-rgyu'i skor zhu-shog phul-ba ngas kha-phye-nas bltas-ma-thag Stag-lo 'di'i zla-ba bzhi-pa'i tshes brgyad-la Gtsang-khongs Bsnam-skyid gshong-gi sar pha sde-pa Dpal-ldan don-drub dang/ ma 'Chi-med rgyal-mo gnyis-la bu gcig skyes-zhes-pa'i mithon-ma-thag nged-kyi dgongs-par sprul-sku yin 'dug snyam-du nges-byung-zhes-pa'i gser-gyi bka' bzang-po phebs-nas ye-shes-kyi gzigs-pa chen-pos dpyad [40v] dpyad-de 'phral-du gser-khrir mnga'-gsol mdzad-pa deb gsal-la Pañ-chen er-te-ni de-nyid sku-tshe ring-zhing-zhes sogs sku-tshe ring-ba dang mdzad-'phrin rgyas-pas sogs dang/ yang de-rjes Pañ-chen er-te-ni de-nyid gzhan-don-du phebs skabs phran sku-bcar zhabs-zhu-ba-mams-nas mchog-gi sprul-pa'i sku nges rnyed yong-ba'i gsol-ba tiab-par/ bka'i phyir-phebs-su ngos-kyi skye-bar dogs-pa'i khye'u ngo-mtshar che-ba byung-na dngos-gnas zhib-gsal 7Gong-ma bdag-po chen-po'i gser-snyan-du sgron-tshe gnam-gyi lha yab-rje Chan-lung chen-pos ngos-rang ngos-'dzin thag-gcod-kyi bka'-phebs-pa ltar dogs-gnas skye-srid de'ang / Gong-ma bdag-po chen-po-nas rnam-mkhyen ye-shes-kyis*

And thus the 8<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama was duly recognized:

On the 24<sup>th</sup> [day of the ninth month of the Fire-Snake Year: November 11, 1857] most of the high-ranking Tibetan and Chinese clerical and lay figures gathered and the Ministers resident in Tibet, the *Amban* He[tehe] and Man[qing] [i.e. the Senior *Amban* and Assistant *Amban*] took [charge] and when the recitations [of texts] ended the Golden Urn was shaken and [the tally stick] drawn, a buzz arose that there was only one name [that had emerged]: from the Golden Urn the name Rnam-rgyal dbang-'dus rgyal-mtshan came into the long fingers of the Senior *Amban* He[tehe] and immediately a *lha rgyal* [-lo] like the roar of a thousand dragons rose up.<sup>17</sup>

Returning to the question of context, we must conclude that the prescription of the Golden Urn stems not simply from a cynical assessment of Tibetan affairs, which is largely the way it is presently understood. An overwhelmingly important element is the religious positioning of the Qianlong Emperor, for the use of the urn is surely connected to the belief, described in the passages cited, that the emperor himself was capable of adducing which child was the true incarnation of a deceased lama. This goes a long way towards explaining why there was as much acceptance as there was of a Qing role in a process that was otherwise the exclusive domain of those who were properly initiated. The fact is, the use of the Golden Urn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not simply an object of systematic disregard, as some have described it; after all, the recognition of the 8<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama took place in mid-century, well after the demise of Qianlong.

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*dpyad-do ngos-'dzin thugs-rje che-ba zhig gsol-ba btab-ste gser-gyi bka' ji-ltar phebs-pa de-bzhin skye-bar ngo-bzung thag-bcad byas-na don thams-cad 'grub yong zhes phebs byung lags-na zhes sogs rje'i skye-srid 'di skor sngar-srol bzang-po dang mthun-par Pañ-chen er-te-ni den-yid-nas bka'-slob phebs-pa bzhin Gong-ma chen-po-nas rnam-mkhyen ye-shes-kyis dpyad-de gser-gyi bka'-bzang thob-pa zhig gus-'bangs tshang-ma'i mos-mthun-gyi re-ba'i gtso-bo lags-shing/ yang gser-bum brtag-dpyad zhu-dgos phebs-na dogs-gnas-kyi khye'u ngo-mtshar che-ba gong-gsal gnyis-las gzhan-ma khye'u ltas-rtags bzang-ba'i rigs mi-gsal 'dug-pa gong-gsal gnyis-kyi mtshan-byang gser-bum rin-po-cher brtag-dpyad [41r] zhu-dgos-kyang 7Gong-ma bdag-po chen-po'i gser-gyi bka'-bzhin zhus chog-pa zhu rgyu lags-na/ am-ban chen-po lhan-rgyas-nas dngos-gnas-kyi zhu-ba rnam Gong-ma bdag-po chen-po'i gser-snyan rin-po-cher zhib-gsal sgron-brgyud 'phral-du thugs-rje-che-ba zhu-rgyur/ de'i ched-du Me-'Brug zla-tshes-la phul/. I would like to acknowledge the generosity of my colleague Mr. Gedun Rabсал who kindly discussed this passage with me and offered suggestions on several points.*

17 Ibid, f. 45v: *Tshe nyer-bzhi'i nyin Rgya-Bod mi-drag ser-skya phal-mo-che 'dzoms-thog Bod-bzhugs blon-chen He Sman am-ban zung-nas zhal-'don tshig-mtshams-thog gser-bum dkrugs-'don skabs byang-bu gcig-las med-pa gtam-gleng-ba byung-zhing/ gser-bum-nas Rnam-rgyal dbang-'dus rgyal-mtshan zhes-pa'i mtshan-byang He am-ban chen-po'i sug-rtser rgyang-thon byung-bas de-'phral der 'khod tshang-mas lha-rgyal 'brog stong ldir-ba ltar 'then-pa byung/. Concerning the two *Amban*, see Josef Kolmaš, "The *Ambans* and Assistant *Ambans* of Tibet (A Chronological Study)," *Archív Orientální-Supplementa* 7 (1994), pp. 53-54.*

The 9<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama was similarly selected via the use of the Golden Urn. The biographical account of his life produced in the series *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus rig-gnas dpyad-gzhi'i rgyu-cha bdams-bsgrigs*, makes this clear, quoting from a letter from the *Bka'-shag* to the Dalai Lama on the matter discussing the schedule of events (including the day for the dispatch of the urn to the Potala for the ceremony) and then describing the ceremony itself on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the Earth-Mouse Year [February 26, 1888], with the *Amban* producing the tally stickbearing the name of the child Lhun-grub rgya-mtsho to joyous shouts of “*Lha rgyal-lo*.”<sup>18</sup>

Turning briefly to the Dalai Lamas, we see the use of the urn over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though not in every instance. The account of the recognition of the 9<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Lung-rtogsrgya-mtsho (1806-1815), by his biographer, De-mo Blo-bzang thub-bstan 'jigs-med rgya-mtsho, does not mention the Golden Urn specifically. Yet while one might try to assume that this should provide a counter argument about the imperial vessel, there is a clear indication that the *Amban* had the final say on the manner in which the recognition proceeded. Thus, the regent wrote that “The *Amban* Yu suddenly said to me ‘Provide the instruments of recognition.’ The manner of it was like that of sentient beings testing a Buddha. Though I was greatly frightened and anxious, I could not disobey the word of the *Amban* and so gradually brought them out...”<sup>19</sup> There follows an account of items brought out for the young Dalai Lama to accept or reject as being previously connected to or owned by him. The procedure was successful and on that basis, we are told, the two *Amban* notified the emperor that this child was indeed the incarnation of the Dalai Lama.

The biography of the 10<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Tshul-khrims rgya-mtsho (1816-1837), attests to the actual use of the Golden Urn, stating that “in accord with the judgement that the Father and Lord Emperor had previously rendered regarding the incarnation of the Dalai Lama, it would be compatible with tradition if the matter were examined through the Golden Urn.”<sup>20</sup> We may see here a harkening back to the shadow cast by the tradition of Qianlong.

18 *Pañ-chen sku-phreng dgu-pa Blo-bzang thub-bstan chos-kyi nyi-ma gang-gi dgung-tshigs dang-bstun-pa'i mdzad-rnams rags-bsgrigs* (Beijing), pp. 15-17. A study of the 9<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama's recognition is being prepared by Dr. Fabienne Jagou.

19 De-mo Blo-bzang thub-bstan 'jigs-med rgya-mtsho, *Rgyal-ba'i dbang-po thams-cad mkhyen-pa Blo-bzang bstan-pa'i 'byung-gnas ngag-dbang lung-rtogs rgya-mtsho dpal-bzang-po'i zhal-snga nas-kyi rnam-par thar-pa mdor mtshon-pa dad-pa'i yid-'phrog* (Dharamsala, 1998), pp. 647-648: “...*Yu'i am-ban nas phran-la glo-bur-du ngos-'dzin-gyi yo-byed-rnams khyod-kyis stob-ces bka'-gnang-bar/ tshul 'di ni sems-can-gyis sangs [648] rgyas la tshod-bgam-pa ltar-du 'dug-pas/ shin-tu bsnyengs-pa che-ba dang ya-nga-ba byung-rung/ am-ban-gyi tshig-las zlog ma-nus-pas rim-bzhin phul...*”.

20 Dar-han Blo-bzang 'phrin-las rnam-rgyal, *Rgyal-ba'i dbang-po thams-cad mkhyen-gzigs bcu-pa chen-po Ngag-dbang blo-bzang 'jam-dpal bstan-'dzin tshul-khrims rgya-mtsho dpal bzang-po'i rnam-par thar-pa ngo-mtshar nor-bu'i 'phreng-ba* (Dharamsala, 1998), p. 34: “*Tā-la'i bla-ma'i sbye-srid skor-la snga-dus Gong-ma yab-rje chen-po'i bka'-bcad-mtshams-kyi dgongs-don-ltar gser-bum-du brtags-dpyad byas-na lugs-srol dang mthun-shing...*”.

Similarly, the 11<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Mkhas-'grub rgya-mtsho (1838-1856), was also recognized through the use of the Golden Urn, though the only comment about it is that the procedure was done inside the Potala.<sup>21</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, 'Phrin-las rgya-mtsho (1856-1875), was recognized through the use of the Golden Urn as well, in this case with the names of three candidates placed in it at the time the lots were drawn.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, in the case of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Thub-bstan rgya-mtsho (1876-1933), the Golden Urn was not used because the indications of his being the incarnation of the previous Dalai Lama were felt to be clear. However, the decision to do this involved securing the agreement of the emperor, who was accordingly petitioned and then gave his consent.<sup>23</sup>

We have seen that, contrary to what is sometimes said, the Golden Urn was indeed used. On the surface it would appear that this was in part because of the demands of the Qing emperor and in part because of the manifestation of religion and politics as a Tibetan system that endowed the Qianlong Emperor with serious religious authority. In those instances in which the Golden Urn was not used, the *Amban* were consulted and were part of the process by which the Qing court was kept informed of what was happening. Still, with the end of the Qing and the disappearance of the *Amban* the Golden Urn ritual would seem to have come to an end as well.

Thus, its reappearance in the most heated of circumstances elicits a good deal of curiosity. Following the fall of the Qing in 1911 there was in China a general denunciation of the Qing rulers as reactionary and divisive. This was the case in the early years of the Republic of China; writers in the early People's Republic of China have also described Qing policies with the term "Great Manchuism" (Ch. 大满族主义); i.e., "Manchu Chauvinism."<sup>24</sup> One cannot but note somewhat wryly that after almost a century of rhetoric on the part of both the Republican and Communist governments of China depicting the policies of the Qing upper strata as backwards and oppressive, the PRC has chosen to resurrect this one particular Qing institution and force it on Tibet, maintaining that it is absolutely necessary in choosing an incarnation. Naturally, this has meant ignoring the crucial basis for the use of the Golden Urn: acceptance of the ruler as an emanation of Mañjuśośa. Surely it is

21 Spyi-khyab He-te-thu-mergan mkhan-po Ngag-dbang bstan-dar, *Lhar-bcas skye rgu'i gtsug-nor 'phags-chen phyag-na padmo rje-btsun Ngag-dbang bskal-bzang bstan-pa'i sgron-me mkhas-grub rgya-mtsho dpal bzang-po'i rnam-par thar-pa ngo-mtshar lha'i rol-mo dbyangs-can rgyud-du snyan-pa'i tambu-ra* (Dharamsala, 1988), p. 307.

22 Mtshan-zhabs bla-ma Blo-bzang ngag-dbang, *Lhar-bcas srid-zhi'i gtsug-rgyan rgyal-mchog ngur-smrig 'chang-ba bcu-gnyis-pa chen-po'i rnam-par thar-pa rgya-mtho lta-bu-las mdo-tsam brjod-pa dwangs-shel me-long* (Dharamsala, 1998), p. 485.

23 Phur-lcog yongs-'dzin Thub-bstan byams-pa thul-khrims bstan-'dzin, *Lhar-bcas srid-zhi'i gtsug-rgyan Gong-ma rgyal-ba'i dbang-po bka'-drin mtshungs-med sku-phreng bcu-gsum-pa chen-po'i rnam-par thar-pa rgya-mtho lta-bu-las mdo-tsam brjod-pa ngo-mtshar rin-po-che'i phreng-ba* (Dharamsala, 1998), pp. 25-26.

24 Huang Fensheng 黄奋生, *Xizang qingkuang 西藏情况* (Shanghai, 1953), p. 111.

unnecessary to point out that this element is absent in the relationship between the highest leaders of the People's Republic of China and Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy.

This brings us back to the list of incarnate lamas described above. As already mentioned, the 14<sup>th</sup> Karma-pa, Theg-mchog rdo-rje (1798-1868), is noted as having been chosen through its use.<sup>25</sup> Given what we know about the use of the Golden Urn, it is interesting to note that while the 14<sup>th</sup> Karma-pa was recognized through the use of the Golden Urn at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all reports of the recognition and enthronement of the 17<sup>th</sup> Karma-pa, O-rgyan phrin-las rdo-rje (1985-), indicate that this was not the case with him. Detailed accounts of his discovery and enthronement make no mention whatsoever about recourse to the Golden Urn.<sup>26</sup> It would appear that its use with regard to the incarnation of the Panchen Lama represents an anachronistic resurrection of the Qing method of recognizing incarnations rather than an element of continuity with earlier traditions.

It is hard not to see something cynical in this: the use of the Golden Urn in recognizing Tibetan incarnations is clearly meant to impart legitimacy to Chinese control over the incarnation of high lamas (with a particular eye to the Dalai Lama's next incarnation) through the establishment of historical continuity. The PRC, in excoriating the Dalai Lama for not accepting its use of this Qing procedure, is consciously manipulating an element in earlier Sino-Tibetan relations. Certainly there has arisen no new vogue in China for Qing institutions elsewhere in the PRC. It is impossible to ignore here China's desire for historical precedent as a simple legitimizing element for its administration of Tibet. The fact is, the use of the Golden Urn is one of the few elements of history that Chinese authorities feel they can call on to reinforce the modern Chinese notion that China's central government enjoyed primacy in Tibetan affairs from the Yuan period (1271-1368) up to the present. The notion that Tibet somehow warrants the restoration of this one element of Qing rule is best viewed as part of a larger struggle to bring history and historical precedent to bear on the legitimacy of PRC policies and rule in Tibet today.

In questions concerning the status of Tibet the "verdict" of history is what is invoked in China to establish the legitimacy of Tibetan status. As such, an historical precedent for Central Government control over the recognition of incarnations is essential for establishing legitimacy through continuity. But in this instance what we have is, as noted, a resurrection rather than a continuation.

25 *Bod dang/ Bar-khams/ Rgya Sog bcas-kyi bla-sprul-rnams-kyi skye-phreng deb-gzhung*, in *Bod-kyi gal-che'i lo-rgyus yig-cha bdams-bsgrigs*, p. 292.

26 See Blo-bzang shes-rab, et al., *Karma-pa sku-phreng bcu-bdun-pa* (Lhasa? 1993?); and Zhou Dunyong, "New Master in the Curpu Monastery," *China's Tibet* 4.1 (1993), p. 7: "After the death of the 16<sup>th</sup> Living Buddha Garmapa, the Curpu Monastery sect adherents, following his testament and religious practices and rituals, found his successor, the reincarnated soul boy Ogyain Chilai, in Qamdo Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region in May 1992." The article gives a detailed account (pp. 8-9) of the installation ceremony with not a word about the Golden Urn.

