

BOOK REVIEWS

Rule by Incarnation: Tibetan Buddhism and its Role in Society and State. By Franz Michael. Boulder: Westview Press, 1982. Pp. XII, 227, maps, illustrations.

“In Tibet Buddhist monks had the same rights as the laymen to be appointed state officials both military and civil”. Thus wrote in 1369 the official chronicler for the Yuan dynasty. The ‘barbarian’ dynasty was overthrown by a Han dynasty in 1368. The official chronicler though a ‘barbarian’ - a Mongol (Yuan in Han diction)-conformed to the Confucian tradition in letter and spirit. The presence of monks in official ranks, both civil and military, was no doubt a barbarian affair and the Han scholars and bureaucrats have through centuries maintained an attitude of contempt, hostility and indifference towards the Tibetan political system. Nothing unusual for a people who called all foreigners barbarians and designated their land as ‘celestial’. It is relevant to recall that even in the most prosperous days of Buddhism in China, that is, the Tang Period, Gautama Buddha was described by the Confucian literati as a barbarian who “wore a barbarian dress and taught a barbarian doctrine”. The Han traditionalists were no doubt relieved when Buddhism ceased to be a dominant religion in China and never again any Han dynasty sought salvation outside ancestor worship and Confucian code.

The confrontation later was outside China, in Tibet and Mongolia. The confrontation was mainly on the material plane involving economic and political interests of the Celestial Empire. On intellectual or academic plane there was not much contact nor much information about Lamaism or Lama polity. The Confucian literati’s indifference about Tibet or Mongolia came to be accepted by Western scholars; Sinologists in particular have evinced the same temper—contempt and hostility—about ‘barbarian peoples’ now designated ‘national minorities’. It is therefore a break with tradition that a leading Sinologist with devotion and loyalty to Confucian culture and Confucian literature would spend several years (? a decade) in a study of Tibetan tradition and Tibetan political system. Professor Franz Michael claims no proficiency in the language and has no direct access to literary sources in Tibetan. It is however evident from the book he has written that in his years of retirement, after teaching Chinese history and culture for three decades, he has put in such hard work which would put to shame many young scholars who claim to break new grounds.

Industry with imagination is a well known feature of German scholarship. It may be mentioned that Franz Michael is a German

who resigned from German diplomatic service when Hitler came to power in 1933 and was in the universities of China teaching Political Science and History till World War II. At the end of the War he settled in U.S.A. teaching Chinese and Far Eastern courses, successively at Johns Hopkins University, University of Washington and George Washington University. The author compensates for his lack of knowledge of Tibetan language with industry and imagination as did Max Weber in study of different religions. The author took his degree in Jurisprudence/Political Science in Weimer Germany and was close to the circle of Max Weber.

The author held prolonged conversations and dialogues with Tibetans in exile, from the Dalai Lama down to the ordinary Khampa farmer. Among his many collaborators and interpreters were Kungo Tsarong, son of Kalon Tsarong and the eminent scholar Lobsang Lhalungpa, the erstwhile monk official. A critical mind like the author's cannot go far wrong with such associates and colleagues and I must confess I have found the book very worthy. It reveals the Lama polity as a viable system and makes many points which the experts with linguistic prowess have not placed before the world so far.

In my knowledge there is only one scholar who has mastery over classical and colloquial Tibetan, who has on-the-spot knowledge of Tibet for years and who was a close onlooker of monastic and governmental institutions of Tibet for years. This rare combination is Mr. Hugh Edward Richardson, who however is more busy with archives, epigraphs and antiquities of Tibet than the Lama polity.

I mention Hugh Richardson as I find the author has not consulted him nor seems to have read Richardsons's *Tibetan Precs* (1945), 'Karmapa Sect, a historical note' (*JRAS*, London 1958-9), or 'The Political Role of the Four Sects in Tibetan History' (*Tibetan Review* 1976). I also wish the author had read writings of Trevor Ling, Bardwell Smith or lesser beings like me about the doctrinal authority of the monks to temporal rule. Such readings would have redressed the balance of the book here and there, and in the event slips could have been avoided.

I admit that the account presented by Franz Michael suffers from a number of errors and omissions; several may be termed major. Yet I would say without hesitation that Franz Michael's study is one to be reckoned with and no reader interested in Tibet and Tibetan political institutions can afford to ignore the book. I would discuss at length my differences with the author on several points later in the pages of this journal or elsewhere. In this introductory notice I highlight the

merits of a book which indeed fills a gap in our knowledge of Society and State in Tibet that is now past.

The most important contribution of the author is that though not well grounded in the language, he has ably exposed the misnomers and misgivings of Western experts on Tibet. A social scientist close to Max Weber, the author rejects the label feudal or feudalism as altogether inapplicable to traditional Tibet. The author finds adequate and authentic data to challenge the English rendering of the Tibetan word 'miser' into "serf" and in my opinion rightly substitutes the term "subject" or "commoner". With the consolidation of Buddhist church, that is, Lamaist Order, the old aristocrats became public servants or servants of the state and eventually the monks became superior to the aristocrats. When the Yellow Sect hierarch, the Dalai Lama, emerged as the temporal as well as spiritual ruler of Tibet, the aristocrats, old or new, would cultivate good relations with the monastic leaders to have their sons admitted into government ranks. The admission tests and training courses, however, would do credit to a bureaucratic system and the author has no hesitation to call the Tibetan polity a bureaucracy. I may add that no amount of cultivating the monks would ensure finds of incarnations in aristocrat families. As is borne out from facts of all sects of Tibet, incarnations have generally been found in ordinary, if not poor, families. Of the 14 Dalai Lamas only three were found in aristocratic households.

"Rule by Incarnation" is the main title of the book. As the author has found, the first bid for temporal rule by a monastic head, the Sakya hierarch, did not go far while the rule by the Karmapa incarnations introduced a spiritual sanction. The first Gyalwa Karmapa was born in 1110 and the first Gyalwa Rimpoche (Dalai Lama) was born in 1391. When the lineage of Dalai Lama was indisputably recognized as the lineage of Avalokitesvara (Chen-re-zi), rule by incarnation was a *fait accompli* and this phenomenon continued undisturbed till the middle of this century.

A book cannot be ignored because it is not written by a specialist or because the author has no proficiency over the language. We know of a big volume on Tibetan polity, prior to Yellow Sect, from an author who reads and speaks Tibetan very ably and we remember what a mess it was. Franz Michael I must say has given a coherent account of Society and State in traditional Tibet; and what a wealth of data he collected by his visits to the Himalayan Buddhist monasteries and to Tibetans in exile in India and elsewhere. I cite the sub-heads under the chapter 'Government Agencies and Procedures'. These are: Management of Economic Affairs; Law and Legal Procedures; The

Military; Foreign Affairs; and The Art of Healing and the Role of Oracles. There are eight chapters and each has sub-heads to interest readers about Tibet.

I conclude with author's reference to the Western scholars' "excessive disregard of the oral tradition in non-Western societies". I congratulate a Western Sinologist who has studied Tibet with sympathy.

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Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson. Edited by Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1980. Pp XX, 348, illustrations.

Tibetan studies, now designated Tibetology, are presumed to be concerned only with Religion and Language. This notion is most prevalent in India despite the fact that the two pioneers, Alexander Csoma de Koros and Sarat Chandra Das, had unveiled the diverse contents of Tibetan literature.

The book under review records the proceedings of a seminar on Tibetan studies held in Oxford 1979. The seminar had the different sections as follows—The Interior: Religion and Philosophy; The Interior: Linguistics and Bibliography; The Interior: Music, Medicine and Arts; The Interior: Further Considerations; The Western Border Lands and Ladakh; The Northern Border Lands and Mongolia; The Eastern Border Lands and China; and The Southern Border Lands and India. I need not enumerate the names of the scholars whose contributions are collected in the volume nor the titles of the papers. I would straightway commend the book for both general readers and specialist students who desire to have a look into the many splendours of the discipline "Tibetology". All interested in Tibetan studies shall remain grateful to the editors for the thought of such well planned and much needed introduction to the subject.

The volume indeed covers such varied and such vast field that only a polymath can review it. I confess my incompetence to properly notice even a third of the contents though I have read with profit almost all the papers. 'Three' is an auspicious figure in Tibet and Tibetan speaking world. I take the liberty of noticing only three from so many learned papers.

Christopher Beckwith in his paper "The Tibetan Empire in the West" describes the Tibetan activities and adventures in the West, beyond the Pamirs, between mid 7th century and mid 10th century and draws on Chinese and Arabic as well as Tibetan sources. Though the Tibetan activities were mostly militarist and imperialist, "there was a very lively trade between Tibet and Arab Caliphate. Not only war material such as chain mail armor but also silk brocades and other products were imported into Tibet, while Tibetan musk, the most highly prized perfume of the Middle Ages, as well as gold and other things went West." "It is only natural that along with the commerce went intellectual trade. For example the first two known court physicians translated, taught and practised Greek medicine". "In peace as in war early Tibet apparently had much more to do with the West than has generally been recognised."

Lokesh Chandra in his paper "Oddiyana: a new interpretation" contends, with reason, that the first or original Uddiyana/Urgyen was in South, India, not far from Kanchipuram. It may be noted that Nagarjuna, who discovered the Prajnaparamita texts, came from the South. "The oldest of the texts of its genre the Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita clearly states that the Paramitayana originated in the South and spread to the east and later flourished in Uttarapatha."

Seyfort Ruegg in his paper "On the reception and early history of Madhyamaka in Tibet" speaks about the Tibetan fidelity to the Indian traditions. Equally well read in Sanskrit and Tibetan, this scholar writes with authority on Tibetan scholarship following Santarakhita, Kamalasila or Bhavaviveka. I quote below from this paper a statement about the links between India and Tibet.

"In order no doubt better to establish the specificity and identity of Tibetan culture and also of Tibetology as an academic discipline, a tendency has recently appeared among some scholars to discount connections between India and Tibet even in the area of Buddhist thought. Now, when we acknowledge the dependence of much of European philosophy on Plato or Aristotle we certainly do not put in question the original contributions made by West European philosophers starting in mediaeval times; or when the Arabist notes the link between mediaeval Islamic and Greek philosophy he does not thereby deny all specificity to Islamic philosophy. It is then suggested here that by the same token, the study of Buddhism in Tibet and indeed of Tibetan civilization as a whole can lose nothing by fully acknowledging their close ties with the Buddhism of India and with Indian civilization.

Tibetan studies can indeed only gain by being pursued in coordination with (but certainly not in subordination to) Indian studies. Obviously this procedure will in no way preclude us from recognising also the existence of other very important ties with Central Asia, China and even West Asia.”

The three papers, I have chosen to notice, bring to light the many languages, the many countries and the many traditions which form the essentials of Tibetology. A few scholars have studied the many aspects or the many issues of Tibet, past and present. Among these few, there is one who has great command over the language, colloquial and classical, and who has adequate on-the-spot knowledge of Tibet and her two neighbours, India and China. It was truly a happy idea that the proceedings of the Seminar should be dedicated as *festschrift* to this scholar, Hugh Edward Richardson, to celebrate his seventy fifth birthday (1980). David Snellgrove writes “An Appreciation of Hugh Richardson”; and ‘a complete bibliography’ of the writings of Hugh Richardson illustrates the diverse contents of Tibetan studies. I would suggest to the enterprising and competent scholars, Michael Aris and Aung Sang Suu Kyi, that the scattered articles, papers and book reviews of Hugh Richardson be collected and published as a homage in his eightieth year (1985). These articles, papers and book reviews would most ably project the polychrome of Tibetology.

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