

The Tulku System in Tibetan Buddhism: Its Reliability, Orthodoxy and Social Impacts

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Abstract

The *Tulku* institution is a unique characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism with a central role in this tradition, to the extent that it is present in almost every aspect of Tibet's culture and tradition. However, despite this central role and the scope and diversity of the socio-religious aspects of the institution, only a few studies have so far been conducted to shed light on it. On the other hand, an aura of sacredness; distorted pictures projected by the media and film industries; political propaganda and misinformation; and tendencies to follow a pattern of cult behavior; have made the *Tulku* institution a highly controversial topic for research; and consequently, an objective study of the institution based on a critical approach is difficult.

The current research is an attempt to comprehensively examine different dimensions of the *Tulku* tradition with an emphasis on the issue of its orthodoxy with respect to the core doctrines of Buddhism and the social implications of the practice. In this research, extreme caution has been practiced to firstly, avoid any kind of bias rooted in faith and belief; and secondly, to follow a scientific methodology in reviewing evidence and scriptures related to the research topic.

Through a comprehensive study of historical accounts, core Buddhist texts and hagiographic literature, this study has found that while the basic Buddhist doctrines allow the possibility for a Buddhist teacher or an advanced practitioner to “return back to accomplish his tasks, the lack of any historical precedence which can be viewed as a typical example of the practice in early Buddhism makes the issue of its orthodoxy equivocal and relative. Moreover, there is a body of evidence suggesting that factors other than mere religious ones have played a role in the emergence and development of the tradition.

On the other hand, the system has the potential to be employed and viewed as an example of Skillful Means (Skt. *upāya*) to enrich Buddhist tradition as a whole. However, due to inherent flaws and loopholes in the system and the cultural nature of it; the risk of misusing the institution for political, social and economic advantages is extremely high.

A unique approach used in this thesis is examining the psychology of the *Tulku* institution which has led to exposing many hidden psychological issues involved in the

development and maintenance of the system. For example, the psychological tactics which have been used over centuries to silence any criticism against the institution in the name of “guru devotion” is against the principle of a healthy mental life, as well as the spirit of criticism encouraged by the Buddha.

In the light of the presence of such important points regarding the *Tulku* institution, therefore, it is up to the authorities in Tibetan Buddhism to weigh the positive aspects of the institution versus its disadvantages and decide whether they should keep and encourage the practice in its current form or reform it.

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Abbreviation

AN	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
Arab.	Arabic
BCE	Before Common Era
Ca.	Circa
CE	Common Era
DBS	<i>Daśabhūmika Sūtra</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
DSM-V	The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition
e.g.	exempli gratia/ for example
etc.	et cetera
H. H.	His Holiness
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
i.e.	id est/ it is
ibid.	Ibidem/ in the same source
LVS	<i>Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra</i>
MMK	<i>Mūlamadhyamakakārikā</i>
MMV	<i>Madhyamakāvātāra</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
MPS	<i>Mahāparinibbāna Sutta</i>
MSA	<i>Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra</i>
p.	Page
pp.	Pages
Pal.	Pali
Pin.	Hanyu Pinyin official phonetic system for transcribing Mandarin
Skt.	Sanskrit

SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Tib.	Tibetan
trans.	Translated
UKS	<i>Upāyakaśālya Sūtra</i>
Wyl.	Wylie system for transliteration of Tibetan

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Tulku (*Sprul sku*) institution

Tibetan Buddhism¹ is a distinct branch of *Vajrayāna*, a school of Buddhism which developed in the late seven to eight century CE.² Until the Chinese take-over of Tibet in 1951, information about Tibetan Buddhism was scarce and through sometimes -inaccurate accounts of adventurous people who dared to travel to unknown lands and managed to reach “the Land of the Snow Lion”.

Syncretism of autochthonous Shamanistic beliefs, and the practice of finding the “reincarnation” of highly-accomplished teachers and practitioners are some of the distinctive features of Tibetan Buddhism, with the latter having no parallel in other Buddhist sects. These reincarnated masters and adepts are called *Tulku* (Wyl. *Sprul sku*).

Although the term “reincarnation” is inaccurate for describing the phenomenon of Rebirth postulated by Buddhism, due to the ease of use and common usage of the words “reincarnation”, “reincarnated” etc. for describing Rebirth in both academic and non-academic situations, in this research, these two terms (reincarnation and rebirth) have been used interchangeably.

The term *Tulku* is composed of two parts: *sprul* (emanation) and *sku* (body). In other words, *Tulku* means the Emanation Body, a term originated in the Mahāyāna doctrine of the Three Bodies (Skt. *trikāya*).

Based on this doctrine, a Buddha or Bodhisattva has the capability to manifest a physical body to help sentient beings. At least in its original sense, thus, the term implies that a *Tulku* is believed to be the emanation of a realized individual who chooses to remain in the cycle of

¹ Although Tibetan Buddhism is widely practiced in places other than Tibet as the national religion, due to the influence of Tibetan culture in its development, in this research the name has been employed, regardless of the geographical boundaries of the religion.

² Bodiford, William M. "Tantra." *Encyclopedia Of Buddhism*. Ed. Robert E. Buswell. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. 820-25. PDF file, p. 820.

existence (Skt. *samsāra*) to assist sentient beings. However, the definition of this term has been extended to cover other meanings.³

1.2 The scope and importance of this research

A few centuries following the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, a new tradition was established in Tibet which soon turned into a unique feature of the Tibetan version of *Vajrayāna*: Tibetans started to find the “rebirth” of their teachers; and founded lineages of “reincarnated” masters⁴.

Given the importance of the teacher-disciple relationship in any esoteric school of thought, this practice automatically brought specific social, political and economic privileges for “the reborn” masters who were (and still are) considered to be superior to ordinary teachers.⁵

For centuries, Tibetan incarnated lamas (Wyl. *Bla ma*) were treated like members of the royal family, they were granted unique privileges; and created the only atheist theocracy in the world run by *Tulkus*.⁶

Power and corruption, however, has proved to be conjoined twins; and the history of Tibet, therefore, is full of stories of power struggle among heads of monasteries and monk-officials.⁷

Based on the theory of “cognitive dissonance,” talking about this ugly face of the truth is not pleasant for Tibetan Buddhists; and a tendency for self-censorship among Buddhist scholars is both predictable and understandable.

On the other hand, China’s take-over of Tibet in 1951 forced an exodus of Tibetans, including high lamas with many of them eventually finding their way to Western countries.

³ Ray, Reginald A. *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet*. Vol. Two. London: Shambala, 2002, p. 399.

⁴ Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p.89.

⁵ Ch'en, Kenneth K. S. *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. New Jersey: Princeton University, 1964. Print, p. 420.

⁶ Goldstein, Melvyn C. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State*. Berkeley: University of California, 1992. Print, n. pag.

⁷ A good account of such stories may be found in Parenti, Michael. *Friendly Feudalism: The Tibet Myth*. January 2007. Web. 5 September 2014.

Some of these newly arrived lamas started teaching Tibetan Buddhism in the West and even contributed to the development of Buddhist studies in academic circles.⁸

Another important development which happened in the 1960s and 70s was the emergence of the so-called spiritual movements in the United States which drew groups of idealist youth to “the mysterious East,” including Nepal and India, where a sizable population of Tibetan refugees reside. The contact between these Westerners and such Tibetan gurus as Lama *Thubten Yeshe* (Wyl.*Thub-stan ye shes*) of Kopan Monastery catalyzed a wave of the so-called “Buddhization” in the West.⁹

Tibetan teachers introduced the *Tulku* system to their Western students and the new converts adapted the entire system. The concept was soon part of pop culture in the West with movies like Bernardo Bertolucci’s “*the Little Buddha*” promoting it.

Considering the growing popularity of Buddhism in the West and the above-mentioned facts, the *Tulku* institution has already emerged as an important spiritual force in the West, as well as the East, and at the same time a sensitive area for research.

Idealization of Tibetan Buddhist elements by some Western converts on one hand; and traditional conservatism of Tibetan society on the other hand, seem to be a hindrance to impartial and objective study of the institution. In the absence of academic debates, those critics whose motivations are questionable remain unrivaled.

The current study is an attempt to fill this vacuum and shed light on the various aspects of the *Tulku* institution in an unbiased and scientific manner. In this way, it will try to examine the institution objectively and avoid the extreme views represented by either avid supporters of Tibetan Buddhism or biased critics.

⁸ Lopez, Donald S.Jr. *Prisoners of Shanngrī La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998. PDF file, pp.156-180.

⁹ The author once heard a first-hand account of such encounters from Australian Buddhist nun Robina Courtin.

Also see Das, Surya. *Awakening the Buddha within : Eight Steps to Enlightenment:Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997. Mobi file.

To serve this end, the research will go through original Buddhist scriptures to examine the doctrinal foundations of the practice. The inherent contradictions and flaws in the system, as well as its positive aspects are other topics to be covered by this research. For this purpose, historical accounts will be extracted and subjected to critical review.

The social implications of the *Tulku* system and the controversies surrounding it are other topics to which parts of the current research are dedicated. To achieve this end, besides a historical review, a journalistic methodology will be employed to re-examine incidents and controversies surrounding the *Tulku* system.

Before going further, it is necessary to clarify that the definition of the term “orthodoxy” is based on the dichotomy of “right’ and ‘wrong” about a belief. However, given the difficulty in refuting or proving religious beliefs in a definite way, the definition of orthodoxy is not absolute and easy. What is orthodox for a sect is heterodox for another and this renders orthodoxy a relative concept.

In this research, two reference points have been used for defining orthodoxy: 1) the earlier doctrines of Buddhism as recorded in the Buddha’s original discourses; and 2) those basic doctrines which are characteristic features of Buddhism. The latter includes such doctrines as no-Self which are the distinctive features of Buddhism.

Since the authenticity of the Buddha’s discourses in the Pali *Tipiaka* is agreed upon by almost all Buddhist sects, they have been used as a reference point. Regarding Mahāyāna texts, however, more caution has been practiced as their development dates back to a later period in which sectarianism was widespread. Also the influence of non-Buddhist traditions in the development of these texts cannot be ignored.¹⁰

It is necessary to clarify that the term orthodoxy in this research has been used in a non-exclusionist non-polemic sense. As Paul William puts it as long as a large group of people

¹⁰. Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism, The Doctrinal Foundations*. Second edition. London: Routledge, 2009. PDF file, pp.47-48.

believe a notion and view themselves as Buddhists such belief system would be a reading of Buddhism.¹¹

1.3 Definition of Tulku

There is no agreement among Buddhist scholars regarding the definition of the term “*Tulku*” and the classification of “*Tulku* types”. The following are some of the definitions provided by various figures:

While authors like Strong simply define *Tulku* as reincarnated teachers,¹² others give different and sometimes more complex definitions of the term.

In the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* Edward Irons writes: “Most Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist teachers (lamas) are also tulku; that is, they are considered to be existing as the emanation body of a deity or an enlightened being, a Buddha or a BODHISATTVA.”¹³

The *Encyclopedia of Karma and Reincarnation* says the term is used for high-ranking monks in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism “who are considered to be incarnated bodhisattvas or celestial Buddhas.”¹⁴

The latter definition suffers from inaccuracies as the *Tulku* institution is specific to Tibetan Buddhism not all types of *Vajrayāna* and not all *Tulkus* are monks.

About the concept of *Tulku*, Stausberg says:

Incarnation known as “tulku” (sprul sku), literally “emanated bodies,” of course refer to the phenomenon in Tibet of religious personages being identified after death in young children believed to be their rebirths, and to whom the previous life’s title, position, and property were transmitted.¹⁵

¹¹. Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism, The Doctrinal Foundations*. Second edition. London: Routledge, 2009. PDF file, p.123.

¹². See Strong, John S. "Lama." Buswell, Robert E. *Encyclopedia Of Buddhism*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. 450. PDF file, p.450.

¹³. Irons, Edward A. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. United States: Infobase Publishing, 2008. PDF file, p.525.

¹⁴. McClelland, Norman. *Encyclopedia of Reincarnation and Karma*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010. PDF file, p.271.

¹⁵. Stausberg, Michael. "Klong Chen Rab 'Byams Pa (Longchenpa)." Lindsay Jones, editor in chief. *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Detroit: McMillan Reference USA, 2005. 5191-95. PDF file, p.5194.

Tulku Thundup Rinpoche (Wyl. *sprul sku don grubrin po che*), in his work on the *Tulku* institution, defines the term literally as the “the manifested-body, created-body, manifestation” or also as “incarnation, reincarnation, or rebirth”.¹⁶

He further introduces three main categories of *Tulkus*: 1) manifestation of Buddhas, 2) manifestation of highly accomplished adepts, and 3) the rebirths of highly virtuous teachers or spiritual friends. He puts the majority of *Tulkus* of Tibet in the third category.¹⁷

.According to him, there also exists secondary types of *Tulkus*:

a) Unrecognized *Tulkus* are the *Tulkus* whose Tulku-hood is not known for anybody. These *Tulkus* include renowned figures such as Je Tsongkhapa (Wyl. *Tsongkhapa*).

b) Blessed *Tulkus*: the criteria for this category are quite ambiguous and Tulku Thundup acknowledges this. This group is subdivided into two accessory types:

b-1) An enlightened lama may bless the rebirth of another lama as his own *Tulku*.

b-2) An enlightened lama may recognize the rebirth of another lama as the *Tulku* of another person and bless him as so. *Tulkus* in this category are not actual rebirth of someone else but “through the power of blessing” they act as someone’s “real rebirth”.

c) Fallen *Tulkus*: In this case, a *Tulku* of the third type will fall from his position due to not observing the codes of virtue and low spiritual realization.¹⁸

Tulku Thundup enumerates a fourth subtype, namely false *Tulkus*. This includes people who have the title of *Tulku* but are not really *Tulkus*. There are people in this group who consider themselves as a *Tulku* because they have been misled by some “signs” like dreams.¹⁹

¹⁶. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

¹⁷. Ibid, n.pag.

¹⁸. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

¹⁹. Ibid n.pag.

Tai Situ Rinpoche, a *Tulku* himself and one of the four highest lamas in the Karma Kagyu (Wyl. *Kar ma bka'brgyud*) lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, describes four levels of rebirth: the first level is the level of ordinary people whose rebirth takes place under the influence of karmic forces without any power by the individual to control it. The second level is the level of the people with considerable compassion and more developed *Bodhicitta* (or the Mind of Enlightenment) who through the power of their good intention can overcome some negative effects of karma and take rebirth in a good condition. This level also includes people with strong faith who wish to have a rebirth in a certain place at the moment of death. These people, however, have not attained the level of a Bodhisattva. The third and last level is that of a Bodhisattva (from the first to tenth level [Skt. *bhūmi*]). This type of rebirth is based on the power of emanation and supernatural capacities of Bodhisattvas.²⁰

The fourth level of rebirth, according to Tai Situ Rinpoche, is the rebirth of a *Tulku*. This level is not *necessarily* the reincarnation of a Bodhisattva and it is usually a rebirth from the second type.²¹ The fourth category, therefore, has some overlap with the second and third ones, based on this definition.

In explaining the term *Tulku*, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama enumerates three types of the Emanation Body (Skt. *Nirmāṇakāya*): 1) the Supreme Emanation Body like that of the historical Buddha; 2) the Artistic Emanation Body (i.e. the body emanated in the form of craftsmen); and 3) the Incarnate Emanation Body, which could be non-human like even medicinal plants.²²

Based on this system of categorization, some *Tulkus* are the reincarnations of high Bodhisattvas; Bodhisattvas on the paths of accumulation; and teachers who have not entered the path of Bodhisattva yet. The Dalai Lama adds that this title is given to teachers based on either

²⁰. Situ, Tai. Reincarnation. 27 January 2011. Web. 25 July 2014
<<http://www.kkdsmelaka.org/teachings/taisitupa/reincarnation.html>>, n.pag.

²¹. Ibid n.pag

²². Office of H H the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. *Reincarnation*. 24 September 2011. Web. 7 August 2014, n.pag.
The traditional classification puts medical plants under the category of Artistic Emanation Body. However, to keep fidelity to the main source, the classification used by the Office of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has been kept as it is. In this source, medical plants have been put under the category of the Incarnated Emanation Body.

their similarities to the qualities of certain enlightened being or because of the connection between the lama and some qualities of the enlightened beings.²³

Also His Holiness describes a different kind of *Tulkus*, namely *Tulkus* by emanation whose predecessors are still alive.²⁴

However, due to the accessibility of this option for only high-ranking Bodhisattvas, for ordinary beings, another case is possible. In this way, *Tulkus* by emanation are subdivided into three categories: 1) emanations belong to the same stream of consciousness of the predecessors; 2) emanations who connect to other person through the power of karma and prayers; and 3) emanations who are connected to others as a result of blessing and appointment.

Since, the purpose of reincarnation is to continue and accomplish unfinished works, this can be done by appointing someone else as a *Tulku*. Also, it is possible that in rare cases, one person has several reincarnations like the emanations of the mind, speech and body. Finally, the Dalai Lama points out to an important fact: the title is primarily used as an honorary title by Tibetan devotees.²⁵

Chogyam Trungpa (Wyl.*Chos rgyam Drung pa*) has his own version of the categorization of *Tulkus*. According to him, there are three types of *Tulkus* (in the sense of a reincarnated lama): 1) *Tulkus* only by name (i.e. those who are selected as a *Tulku* only by tradition); 2) the blessed *Tulkus* who have been previously defined and include people with some spiritual achievements that are chosen by previous reincarnations; and 3) "*direct Tulkus*"; a superior Bodhisattva who choose to have rebirth in the world to help sentient beings.²⁶

It is only the third type of *Tulkus* who are real and the literal reincarnation of another master. However, due to the lack of a self, in another rebirth, direct *Tulkus* might manifest in

²³. Office of H H the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. *Reincarnation*. 24 September 2011. Web. 7 August 2014, n.pag.

²⁴. Ibid n.pag

²⁵. Ibid n.pag

²⁶. Ray, Reginald A. *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet*. Vol. Two. London: Shambala, 2002, pp. 370-77. Also see Thrunpa, Chogyam. *The Collected Works of Chogyam Thrunpa Rinpoche*. Boston: Shambala, 2010. MOBI file. n.pag.

more than one person. While direct *Tulkus* are already gifted practitioners, the blessed *Tulkus* are under the influence of their environment and need training to make use of their potentials.²⁷

Trungpa also extend the concept of “spiritual influence” to include the influence coming from “any of the archetypal sources of wisdom”(i.e.deities).This influence may also refer to the influence of a prominent teacher on his disciples without any nominal or true rebirth taking place as in the case of Milarpa (*Wyl.mi la ras pa*). According to him, sometimes *Tulkus* are people of advanced spiritual qualities who have not achieved liberation and, therefore, return back to finish their unaccomplished tasks.²⁸

The following passage explains some sophisticated doctrines held by Trungpa which open the door for various possibilities and due to its importance has been quoted here (emphases are from the research’s author):

There is the tulku who incarnates before the previous incarnation has died, several months or even years earlier. And then there is what’s called a “blessed tulku,” in which the previous person chooses the person who is closest to him or blesses some passing Bodhisattva who hasn’t quite attained the highest of the bhumis. And he takes certain types of energy, or spiritual energy, which transcends ego anyway, and transfers it to the chosen person. That person then comes back as the incarnation of the previous person. Actually it is a different kind of ego; but at the same time, there is a spiritual continuity which takes place.²⁹

With this explanation, he puts not only ordinary *Tulkus*, but also the highest-ranking Tibetan *Tulkus* like Dalai Lamas and Karmapa Lamas under the category of blessed *Tulkus* rather than a real reincarnation of celestial Bodhisattvas.³⁰

²⁷. Thrunpa, Chogyam. *The Collected Works of Chogyam Thrunpa Rinpoche*. Boston: Shambala, 2010. MOBI file. n.pag.

²⁸. Ibid n.pag

²⁹. Thrunpa, Chogyam. *The Collected Works of Chogyam Thrunpa Rinpoche*. Boston: Shambala, 2010. MOBI file. n.pag.

³⁰. Ibid n.pag

Reginald Ray first divides *Tulkus* into three categories: 1) the body of a fully enlightened Buddha; 2) other human beings which manifest realization; and 3) sacred objects like religious paintings, statues etc.³¹

According to Ray, *Tulkus* are most commonly those individuals who while are not Buddhas, emanate some aspects of realization. A person, therefore, could be a *Tulku* without being the real reincarnation of someone else. Given this fact, the term is employed in Tibet in two senses, namely the general and specific ones. In its general sense, a *Tulku* is any person with realization who is felt to be the reincarnation of a holy person, even when he or she lived centuries ago. Ray also explains, it is possible for a person to be the reincarnation of several “saints”, for example the case Jamgon Kongtrul (Wyl.*jam mgon kongsprul*) who is considered to be the reincarnation of several great translators as well as the Buddha’s beloved disciple Ananda. In the more specific usage, a *Tulku* is a reincarnation of a *recently deceased* lama. This more specific usage is the common usage of *Tulku* in Tibetan Buddhism.³²

These various definitions and categories reflect the absence of consensus among different scholars and figures regarding a clear definition of *Tulku*.

³¹. Ray, Reginald A. *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet*. Vol. Two. London: Shambala, 2002, pp.360-61.

³². Ibid p.362.

Chapter2: Review of Literature

The number of works dedicated to the subject of the *Tulku* institution is small and the existing works suffer from some inadequacies in terms of adopting a comprehensive and a multi-dimensional approach to the topic. This relative shortage is at least partly explainable in the light of the problems mentioned in the previous chapter.

2.1 A Traditional narrative

The most important work on the subject of the *Tulku* institution is perhaps Tulku Thondup Rinpoche's "*Incarnation: the History and Mysticism of the Tulku Tradition of Tibet*". This book is unique in the sense that it is the only work which is fully dedicated to the topic.

The book covers several areas related to the *Tulku* institution, including the definition and classification of *Tulku*; its history; and more importantly the doctrinal foundations of the system from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism.

While the West has a long tradition of a systematic scientific methodology requiring accurate terminology and taxonomy, the traditional Tibetan approach prefers to handle concepts as an element of a practically-oriented system.

This shortcoming may be explained in the context of an oral "pragmatic" tradition which relies on person- to- person transmission of customs and practices. In such contexts, the goal of training is to teach how to practically use concepts and therefore it excludes intellectual details.

The same is true about the definition of *Tulku* itself. Despite the centrality of the *Tulku* tradition in Tibetan religious and social life, Tulku Thondup's work can be viewed as the first and only book which tries to distance itself from an unorganized approach, and systematize the concept as well as its attributed doctrinal foundations based on a methodology similar to the Western one.

The work, in this respect, represents the first step in a transitional stage in Tibetan cultural history during which Tibetan Buddhist institutions are taking steps to document their religious practices, instead of relying on the typical oral transmission.

As its author implies, the book has been written to address the need arising in Western societies, where students insist on receiving clear and accurate definitions.³³

The work is considered as a useful and unique source for learning about the traditional view of the *Tulku* as taught in the Tibetan monastic educational system.

Tulku Thondup, in his preface to the book, explains that he has covered “miracles”, “clairvoyance” and “visions” of *Tulkus* in his book.³⁴ This insistence to include “miracles” which are, in reality, examples of “mythicizing” religious practices has compromised the scientific value of the work, as it implies the author’s bias. This bias has increased the risk of unintentional distortion of historical facts.

Secondly, the book lacks any critical examination of the system and it even leaves social aspects of such important institution unexamined.

In this respect, while the book is a valuable reference, it does not address academic needs.

2.2 The *Tulku* institution as “the game of thrones”

“Reincarnation and Politics in Tibet”, is the name of an article by Karubaki Datta, in which he gives an overview of the political history of the *Tulku* institution.

In his work, Datta explains how what he believes to have originally been a purely religious institution, gradually become politicized and become a system of “the Rule by Reincarnation (sic)”. He believes that Tibetans used the concept of “reincarnation” to solve the problem of succession for lamas and officials who were in most cases, celibate monks.

The institution of the Dalai Lama, the most politicized *Tulku* line, as well as the Sino-Tibetan tension is the focus of the paper. The author, also, refers to the Karmapa controversy which is treated by some observers as a suspicious political issue.³⁵ The author has concluded that

³³. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

³⁴. Ibid n.pag.

³⁵. Datta, Karubaki. "Reincarnation and Politics in Tibet." *Bulletin of Tibetology* (2000): 1-3. PDF file, p. 6.

against the backdrop of the Tibetan crisis, both sides of the conflict (i.e. the Tibetan and Chinese) are using the system for their political advantage.³⁶

The paper, on the other hand, suffers from some problems. Firstly, Datta has some inaccuracies regarding doctrinal issues. He starts his article by stating that according to the “reincarnation” theory of Buddhism, “the great mind or soul, which is reappearing in a new embodiment has already attained Buddhahood or Nirvana and has voluntarily decided to come back for the benefit of the other human beings”.³⁷

The problem with this definition is that it claims the person who undergoes reincarnation “has already attained Buddhahood or Nirvana”. To attain Nirvana means to put an end to Rebirth; “birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled.”³⁸ Moreover, based on the definitions provided in the first chapter, only a minority of *Tulkus* are considered as “*Buddhas*”.

The article only covers political history of the *Tulku* institution, and leaves the social impacts of it unstudied.

Last but not least, Datta’s hypothesis that the *Tulku* system is a way to solve the problem of succession for celibate monks suffers from some flaws, because not all *Tulkus* are celibate monks.

2.3 A not- smiling Buddha; a statement of protest

In 1985, a controversy shook the heart of Tibetan Buddhism and brought a significant schism to Tibetan Buddhist community. For the first time in the history of Karma Kagyu, two candidates were recognized as the successor of a Karmapa. With support of prominent Kagyu masters for different candidates, the Karma Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism was divided into two rival camps.

³⁶. Ibid p.2

³⁷. Ibid p.1

³⁸. *Pañcavaggi Sutta: Five Brethren (SN 22.59)*. Trans Bhikkhu Thanissaro, Vers. Legacy version. 30 November 2013. Web. 1 December 2014, n.pag.

The support of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama for Ogyen Trinley Dorje (Wyl. *O-rgyan 'Phrin las Rdo rje*), one of the candidates only fueled the crisis and marginalized the supporters of Trinley Thaye Dorje (Wyl. *Phrin las Mtha' yas Rdo rje*).³⁹

High social pressure and some violent incidents related to the controversy prompted the marginalized camp to publish evidence in support of their arguments, one of which was the book “*Buddha's not Smiling: Uncovering Corruption at The Heart of Tibetan Buddhism Today*” by journalist Erik D. Curren, himself a supporter of Thaye Dorje.

The book gathered some historical accounts about the *Tulku* institution and particularly the power struggle between Tibetan Buddhist schools and what Curren views as evidence of corruption in them. Of importance is the book’s review of rivalry over religious and secular rule among Tibetan Buddhist traditions which despite the apparent bias of Curren is an objective fact supported by historical evidence.⁴⁰ In this respect, the book shatters the idealized image that portrays pre-occupation Tibet as a Utopia.

Since providing an accurate and objective picture of any historical issue requires a thorough assessment of the arguments offered by conflicting parties involved in it, Curren’s work is a valuable source. However, he has not questioned the tradition of *Tulku* as a whole and this leaves some areas for further research.

Also, the book lacks any review of the socio-cultural impacts of the *Tulku* institution on the life of Tibetans.

3.3 The seminar

In February 2013, the University of San Francisco organized a symposium titled “*the Tulku Institution in Tibetan Buddhism*”. The two-day symposium was supposed to cover the following themes:

- 1) Tulkus in Transnational Buddhism: Authentication and Contestation of Hybridity in the Cross-Cultural Reincarnation System

³⁹. Curren, Erik D. *Buddha's Not Smiling: Uncovering Corruption at the Heart of Tibetan Buddhism Today*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006. Web p.xi.

⁴⁰. Ibid pp.41-57

- 2) Tulkus in Historical Context: Power, Knowledge, and Politics in the Innovation of the Reincarnation Institution
- 3) Tulkus as a Model of Ideal Beings: Embodying the Enlightened Characteristics
- 4) Envisioning and Retelling Birth-Stories: Tulku Lineage Narratives and the Quest for Legitimation.⁴¹

One of the most important aspects of the symposium was a keynote speech delivered by Professor Donald Lopez, Jr. in which he informed the audience about a meeting of high-lamas held in the 20th century, in which Tibetan religious leaders agreed to put “a moratorium on the recognition of *Tulkus*”.⁴²

In any scientific event, the overall message and theme are of significant importance. To have an overview of the dominant theme of the symposium and discover any possible shortcomings, therefore, the author has employed a statistical technique which is inspired by the content analysis method. Table 2-1 provides the title of the articles presented at the symposium. Through studying the articles and finding keywords and criteria inside them, the papers are organized in categories.

⁴¹. Tsadra Foundation. *The Tulku Institution in Tibetan Buddhism: A Symposium at USF, February 15 & 16, 2013*. 20 February 2013. Web. 10 July 2014, n.pag.

⁴². In a contact with Professor Lopez, he confirmed the quote. However, he explained to the author that it was based on oral communication with Tibetans and he had not checked the archived documents in Dharamshala, India, the seat of the Tibetan Government in Exile, to verify the existence of such a meeting.

Table 2-1**List of the papers submitted to the symposium “*the Tulku Institution in Tibetan Buddhism*”**

Title	Author	Keywords
"So what's it like to be a Tulku?" Western Reincarnations and Their Roles within the Tibetan Tulku Institution	Elijah Ary	WT, H, So
Buddhist Politics: Life, Death, and Reincarnation in Transnational Eurasia	Anya Bernstein	H, C, Po
Deity Emanation and the Legitimization of Sonam Peldren	Suzanne Bessenger	H, Po
The Tulku as Prodigy: Reflections on the Childhood of the Tenth Karmapa	Benjamin Bogin	B, H, Ha
How Tulku Lineages are Constructed: The Case of Khöntön Peljor Lhundrub and the Lineage of the Changkya Incarnations	José Cabezón	H, Po
A Transnational Tulku: the Multiple Lives of a Spanish-born Tibetan Buddhist Lama	Jessica Falcone	WT, So
A Post-Incarnate Usurper? Guru Chöwang's Claim to the Patrilineal Inheritance of Nyang	Daniel Hirshberg	Po, H
Birth-Stories of the Fifth Dalai Lama	Nancy Lin	Ha, Po, H, B, DE
The Bodong Trulku: Reincarnation in Exile	Derek Maher	H, Po

The Rise Of Tulkus In The Nyingma Sect: An Innovation of the Large Scholastic Monasteries of The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries	Jann Ronis	H
Contestation over the Succession of the Dalai Lamas in the 17-18th Century	Tsering Shakya	H, Po
Qing Organization of the Incarnation Process: The Broader Use of the Golden Urn	Elliot Sperling	H, Po
Ethics and Education: Gelukpa Narratives on Reforming the Tulku Institution in the Deng Xiaoping Era	Nicole Willock	H

Notes: WT: Western *Tulku*, H: history, So: sociology, Po: politics, Ha: hagiography, B: biography, DE: deity emanation doctrine; C: culture

Table 2-2

Categorization of keywords

Keywords	Category
WT	Western-Tibetan dialogue
Po	Politics of <i>Tulku</i> institution (TI)
Hi, B	Historical study of TI
DE, Ha	Doctrinal foundations of TI
Cu	Cultural aspects of TI
So	Sociology of TI

Notes: WT: Western *Tulku*, H: history, So: sociology, Po: politics, Ha: hagiography, B: biography, DE: deity emanation doctrine; C: culture

Table 2-3

Frequency of categorize for the submitted paper

Category	Relative Frequency* (%)
Western-Tibetan dialogue	14.29%
Politics of TI	57.14%
Historical study of TI	85.71%
Doctrinal foundations of TI	14.29%
Cultural aspects of TI	7.14%
Sociology of TI	14.29%

***Note:Due to overlap of paper topics and covering more than one topic in some articles the sum of frequencies are greater than 100 percent**

As table 2-3 shows, the historical aspects of the *Tulku* institution represents the most important topic covered by the papers, with political subjects standing at the second place. Some papers provide useful data about the history of the *Tulku* institution in Tibetan Buddhism (for example, Jann Ronis' "*The Rise of Tulkus in the Nyingma Sect: An Innovation of the Large Scholastic Monasteries of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*"); however, the symposium still fails to cover some important subjects, including the scriptural review of evidence in support or against the practice. This shortcoming is partly explainable in the light of the time limitations of the symposium.

Chapter 3: Historical Background

Understanding any social, historical or religious phenomenon is not possible without analyzing the factors which shaped it throughout history. On the other hand, such phenomena are related to human life and consequently, like any other human-related experiences, extremely complex.

This chapter will try to explore the historical forces and conditions which shaped the *Tulku* institution with an emphasis on historical trends and evidence.

3.1 The role of shamanistic and mystical beliefs

Bonpo elements absorbed in Tibetan Buddhist rituals like ritualistic instruments (e.g. drums), the so-called lama dance (Tib. Cham, Wyl. '*cham*') and demon pacifying ceremonies indicate the existence of a rich shamanistic culture in pre-Buddhist Tibet. These instruments and rituals are used for inducing a state of trance which is a hallmark of shamanist systems.

Besides the ritualistic aspects of Shamanism, mainly shamanistic concepts such as tutelary spirits continue their presence in Tibetan Buddhism in the form of the originally Indian notion of *Yidam* (Skt. *Iṣṭa-devatā*). Like totem spirits, *Yidams* are inherited through lineage-lines, a virtual substitute of the blood-line, as pupils of one guru are considered to be his “heart sons” (or daughters).

Moreover, the introduction of the doctrine of Rebirth, which might have happened before the advent of Buddhism, equipped shamans with the “skill” to overcome death through living in their *Tulkus*. Lopez views this way of immortality and the ceremonies associated with the *Tulku* institution as a method to practice ancestor worship.⁴³

The shamanistic belief system also, included elements which would be later employed to establish the *Tulku* institution; elements like divination and possession.

⁴³. Lopez, Donald S.Jr. *Prisoners of Shannгри La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998. PDF file, p.184.

3.2 Living a life of visions

Besides native shamanistic beliefs, which paved the ground for the development of the *Tulku* institution, there is another cultural phenomenon which probably contributed to shaping the institution significantly. This cultural phenomenon is the adaptation by Tibetans of a mystical approach to Buddhism.

This development certainly, occurred under the influence of several factors some of which originally belonged to other cultures. One of these elements is undoubtedly the emergence of a view believing in the ineffability of Absolute Truth within Buddhism.

This reading of the doctrine of Emptiness (Skt. *Śūnyatā*) as if it is an ineffable metaphysical entity bears the marks of Upanishad (Skt. Upaniṣad) philosophical schools. Of importance, however, is the possible role of Gnostic schools developed in Mesopotamia in shaping mystical religious life-style in Tibet. In the 3rd century CE, Mani founded a powerful syncretic mystical religion which over centuries, spread to China and Transoxania.

This religion puts considerable emphasis on direct contact with the knowledge of one's own "true Self" which is luminous.⁴⁴ One can draw an analogy between this notion and the purely Tibetan concept of Clear Light Mind or Osel (Wyl. *od gsal*), a fundamental doctrine in Dzogchen (Wyl. *Rdzogs chen*) in both Bonpo and Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the Nyingmapa School.⁴⁵

Another clue to this influence is the mythology of Bonpo which attributes the origin of religion to a legendary figure, Shenrab Miwo (Wyl. *gshen-rabsmi po*) whose original emanation was in Persia.⁴⁶ Such clues may reflect a connection between Manichaeism (or an unknown ancient mystical tradition once common in Persia) and Tibetan folk culture.⁴⁷

⁴⁴. Piras, Andrea. "Manichaeism." Encyclopedia of Religion. Ed. Lindsay Jones. USA: Thomson Gale, 2005. 6650-5652. PDF file, p. 5653.

⁴⁵. Symbolism of light occupies an important place in Manichaeism. Also, the influence of Hellenistic culture with its mystery religions which was once present in *Gandhāra* cannot be ignored.

⁴⁶. Rinpoche, Tenzin Wangyal. Wonders of the Natural Mind: The Essence of Dzogchen in the Native Bon Tradition of Tibet. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publication, 2000. Print, p.43.

⁴⁷. Berzin, Alexander. *Bon and Tibetan Buddhism*. 23 December 2001. Web. 1 December 2014, n.pag.

This element could have played a role in reinforcing the culture of mysticism in whose context a phenomenon the author calls the Delusional or Quasi-delusional Idiosyncratic Mystical Experience is common. This psychological phenomenon will be explained in Chapter 7.

In this mystical culture, grandiose claims of spiritual achievements were common and hagiographies were full of the stories of visions. This enigmatic literature as well as the culture of visions and prophecies contributed a lot to the development of the reincarnation lines and the mythology surrounding it.

3.3 The birth of the *Tulku* tradition

Tradition holds that in 1194 CE, shortly before his death at the age of 84, Dusum Khyenpa (Wyl. *dus gsum mkhyen pa*), the first one in the line of the Karmapa Lamas, gave a letter to his entrusted student Drogon Rechen (Wyl. *'gro mgon ras chen*) in which he predicted the circumstances of his “new rebirth”.⁴⁸

Years after the death of the first Karmapa, Lama Bom Drakpa Sonam Dorje (Wyl. *bla ma spom brag pa bsod nams rdo rje*), one of Drogon Rechen’s pupils recognized his student Chodzin (Wyl. *chos 'dzin*) as Dusum Khyenpa’s reincarnation. Better known as Karma Pakshi (Wyl. *Kar ma pak shi*), Chodzin was born to “a noble family” from the Kham region.⁴⁹

After granting Karma Pakshi an empowerment, Lama Bom Drakpa Sonam Dorje had a *vision* in which he saw Dusum Khyenpa and other lineage teachers surrounding the young Chodzin. This vision was supported by other visions in which the latter was confirmed as the second Karmapa by Dusum Khyenpa.⁵⁰

Other sources narrate the same story more or less, except that in some sources, instead of Dusum Khyenpa, *Yidams*⁵¹ make the confirmation.⁵²

⁴⁸. Thinley, Karma. *The History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet*. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980. Print, p.44.

⁴⁹. White, Meryi and Nik Douglas. *Karmapa: The Blackhat Lama of Tibet*. London: Luzac & Company, 1976. Print, P.41.

⁵⁰. Thinley, Karma. *The History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet*. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980. Print, p.47.

⁵¹. Deities to whom a Tantric practitioner has a personal link, tutelary deity.

⁵². White, Meryi and Nik Douglas. *Karmapa: The Blackhat Lama of Tibet*. London: Luzac & Company, 1976. Print, P.41.

Karma Pakshi is believed to have been born in the 13th century CE (1204-1283 CE) and this point in the history of Tibet is usually viewed as the origin of the official *Tulku* institution.⁵³ The Karma Kagyu innovation did not remain limited to the school or just one person within the lineage.

Despite what the traditional account of “the first reincarnated lama of Tibet” holds, there are alternative views about the true origin of the *Tulku* institution. According to Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, the earliest account of the practice dates back to the time of an 11th century yogi, Chokyi Gyalpo (Wyl. *Chos kyi rgyal po*) who claimed to be the reincarnated Kadampa (Wyl. *bka' gdams pa*) master Naktso Lotsāwa Tsultrim Gyelwa (Wyl. *nag tsho lo tsa ba tshul khrimsrgyal ba*).⁵⁴

However, there are two distinct phenomena related to the *Tulku* institution which should be differentiated. The first one constitutes sporadic claims by Buddhist masters to be the emanation or reincarnation of celestial entities or highly-realized masters. This phenomenon is not specific to Tibetan Buddhism and would not necessarily lead to the establishment of reincarnation lines. Also sometimes when a master died, he was declared to be the emanation of Bodhisattvas etc. without finding any next reincarnation. Such instances could not be considered as examples of *Tulkus*.

The second phenomenon is related to instances in which the claim leads to the establishment of *Tulku* lines. These cases are usually associated with the official ritualistic aspects associated with the *Tulkus* institution (e.g. sending search parties, enthronement, recognition tests etc.). These two phenomena are usually confused with each other and used interchangeably by some scholars.

Returning back to Kuijp’s hypothesis, the case of Chokyi Gyaltsso is certainly a case of the first phenomenon which can be viewed as an example of the Delusional Idiosyncratic Mystical Experience.

⁵³. See Office of H H the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. *Reincarnation*. 24 September 2011. Web. 7 August 2014, n.pag.

⁵⁴. Kuijp, Leonard W.J. van der. "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 335-47. Print, p.346.

There are Tibetan hagiographic sources narrating the story of Buddhist scholars with scholastic capabilities manifested at very young ages. These legends imply that some Indian masters took rebirth in Tibet, in the face of the decline of Buddhism in India. Skill in Sanskrit language at a very young age is among the purported capabilities of these “reincarnated” figures.

An example is the famous Tibetan master, Sakya Paṇḍita(1182-1251 CE) who is said to have repeated incomprehensible words “while crawling”. This sign made his mother worried about the possibility of speech problems in her child and prompted her to consult with the boy’s uncle who after hearing the words informed the mother that the words were in fact in Sanskrit.⁵⁵

Also the biography of the eleventh century Tibetan master Rong Zom Paṇḍita (1012–1088 CE) attributes some extraordinary knowledge of Buddhist doctrines to him at a very young age, suggesting that he was the reincarnation of another Buddhist figure. However, there is no agreement in biographies about who is his supposed predecessor.⁵⁶

Tulku Thondup shares the same views with Kujip in respect of the presence of the *Tulku* tradition in Tibet, before the Karmapa *Tulkus*. However, he believes the history of the *Tulku* tradition is as early as the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. To support his hypothesis, Tulku Thondup cites the example of the eight-century monarch of Tibet, King Trisong Detsen (Wyl. *khri srong lde btsani*) who he claims was “known as the Tulku of Bodhisattva *Masñjuśrī*”.⁵⁷

This hypothesis is debatable. Regardless of the historicity of the example and ambiguity about whether the king was “recognized” as the emanation of a Bodhisattva during his life time or posthumously, this instance falls within the first category. Here, what really happened was the practice of canonizing a worldly ruler.

⁵⁵. Jampal, Lozang. Treasury of Good Sayings of Sa skya Pandita the Eminent Tibetan Lama, 1182 – 1251: Development of Awareness and Conduct. Leh: Ladhakratnashridipika, 2003. PDF File, p. xviii. Like other hagiographic accounts, this story includes unanswered questions. The age of crawling is 7 to 10 months in which a child is supposed to speak only a handful of comprehensible words like “mama” at best. Most of the children speak incomprehensible words at this age without making their parents “worried”. Moreover, the ability of children to produce complex consonants like what is found in Sanskrit is very low in this age and it is not clear how the boy could speak Sanskrit in a way that was distinguishable by his uncle.

⁵⁶. Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyurme Dorje, Mathew Kapstein. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*. USA: Wisdom, 1991. Print, pp. 703-05.

⁵⁷. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

This practice has a long history in Buddhism and not necessarily reflects the specific features of the *Tulku* tradition. One of the earliest examples in the context of Theravāda is the case of Mauryan King Aśoka (ca. 300–232 BCE; or 268–232 BCE) who was canonized by Buddhism as the Universal Monarch (Skt. *cakravartin*, Tib.Wyl.*Chos Gyal*), the prototype of a righteous king described in early Buddhist scripture.⁵⁸

Such instances reflect rather socio-economic relationships between Buddhist institutions and their patrons than true doctrinal viewpoints. The development of the notion of Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna gave impetus to this process of canonization as it provided another doctrinal basis for it.

After the start of Karmapa line, other schools found the idea interesting and started to imitate it. To trace the trend in the development of the *Tulku* system, some 50 important *Tulku* lines from various traditions have been studied in this chapter. These *Tulku* lines and their specifications are summarized in table 3-1.

⁵⁸. Wilson, Liz. "Asoka." Buswell, Robert E. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. New York: McMillan References USA, 2004. 34. PDF file, p.34.

Table 3-1**Some important *Tulku* lines and their specifications.**

<i>Tulku</i> title ^a	Last <i>Tulku</i> in line	Tradition	Beginning of the line (Century CE)
Agya Hotogtu	8th	Gelugpa	16
Bardor Tulku	3rd	Karma Kagyu	19
Chagdud	14th	Nyingma	15 ^b
Changkya Khutukhtu	8 th	Gelugpa	17
Dalai Lama	14th	Gelugpa	14 (16) ^c
Dudjom	2nd	Nyingma	19
Dzigar Kongtrul	3rd	Rime	19
Dzogchen	7th	Nyingma	17
Goshir Gyaltsab	12th	Karma Kagyu	15
Gyalwang Drukpa	12th	Drukpa Kagyu	12
Jamgon Kongtrul	4th	Rime	19
Jamyang Khyentse	Several	Rime	19
Jamyang Shepa	6th	Gelugpa	17
Jetsun Dampa	9th	Gelugpa	17
Kalu	2nd	Karma Kagyu	20
Karma Chagme	7th	Karma Kagyu	17
Karmapa	17	Karma Kagyu	12

Khamtrul	9th	Drukpa Kagyu	16
Khandro	2nd	Karma Kagyu	20
Petsheling	5th	Drukpa Kagyu	18
Panchen Lama	11	Gelugpa	14 (17th) ^d
Nenang Pawo	11th	Karma Kagyu	15
Penor	3rd	Nyingma	17
Reting *	5th	Gelugpa	17
Saming Dorje Phagmo	12th	Gelugpa	15
Shabdrung	10th	Drukpa	17
Shamarpa	14	Karma Kagyu	13
Sogyal	9th [†]	Nyingma	14 ^c
Lama Zopa	2nd	Gelugpa	20
Tai Situpa	12th	Karma Kagyu	14
Thrangu	9th	Karma Kagyu	15
Thubten Yeshe	2nd	Gelugpa	20
Traleq Kyabgon	9th	Karma Kagyu	15
Trungpa	12th	Karma Kagyu	15
Trungram Gyaltrul	4th	Karma Kagyu	n/a ^f
Tulku Urgyen	2nd (or 3rd)	Ka-Nyingma	19 ^g
Yongey Mingyur	7th	Karma Kagyu	18
Gankar Tulku	10th	karma Kagyu	13

Kirti Tulku	11th	Gelugpa	15
Katok Getse Tulku	3rd	Nyingma	18
Katok Situ Tulku	4th	Nyingma	18
Koude Dzogchen Tulku	5 th	Nyingma	19
Kondor Tulku	5th	Gelugpa	16
Garchen Tullku	8th	Drikung Kagyu	13
Drubgyu Tulku	9th	Drikung Kagyu	17
Kyorlung Ngari Tulku	14th	Gelugpa	14
Tatsak Tulku	13th	Gelugpa	15
Dorje Drak Rigzin Tulku	10th	Nyingma	14
Peling Tukse Tulku	10th	Nyingma	15
Pakpa Lha Tulku	11th	Gelugpa	15
Drikung Chungtsang	8th	Drikung Kagyu	16
Drikung Chetsang	7th	Drikung Kagyu	16
Druk Gyeltse	6th	Drukpa	17
Drukpa Chogon	10th	Drukpa	16
Drukpa Zhabdrung	7th	Drukpa	16
Druk Lama Tripa	7th	Drukpa	17
Shechen Rabjam	7th	Nyingma	17

Notes:

^a For the Wylie transliteration of the names see Appendix I

^b The date is provided by *Ati Ling and CGF* an institution affiliated with Chagdud Rinpoche is

12th century CE This time is inaccurate as the story talks about the Mongol Emperor impressed by the first Sherab Gyaltso, the first Chagdud . The Yuan Dynasty was formed in the 13th century. The date provided by Chagdud Gonpa Brazil is 1431 which is correct.(n.pag)

^c The first person to be designated as the Dalai Lama was the third one. So the true beginning of the line is the 16th century.

^d The accurate time is the 17th century, when the Fifth Dalai Lama started the line.(See below)

^e The line includes several people with no continuity.

^f The third *Tulku* in this line was born in the late 19th century. So the beginning of the line must be no earlier than the 17th century

^g The Line is discontinuous.

*** The 6th one is not recognized by Tibetan Government in Exile**

[†]The succession of *Tulkus* in this line has not been continuous.

To make the data analysis easier, the historical periods in which the *Tulku* lines appeared are divided into six categories: from the 12th through 13th century; from the 14th through 15th century; from the 16th through 17th century; from the 18th through 19th century; and from the 20th through 21st century. Data from the samples have been organized based on these categories and analyzed to find out patterns.

While the results cannot be generalized, since the studied lines include almost all well-known *Tulkus*, they are expected to provide significant data regarding the *Tulku* institution.

Data regarding the studied *Tulku* line have been summarized in the following table and graphs.

Table 3-2

The distribution of *Tulku* lines based on historical period and school

School	Ny & Ka-	K.Kag.	Kag.	Gelu.	Rim.
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Century	Ny	(other)			
12-13	0.00%	21.43%	28.57%	0.00%	0.00%
14-15	33.33%	42.86%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%
16-17	25.00%	7.14%	57.14%	53.33%	0.00%
18-19	41.67%	14.29%	14.29%	0.00%	100.00%
20-21	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%	13.34%	0.00%

Notes: Ny: Nyingma; Ka-Ny: Ka-Nyingma; K. Kag: Karma Kagyu, Kag. (other): Other Kagyu schools, Gelu.: Gelugpa; Rim.: Rime movement

Figure 3-1. The graph shows the distribution of the studied Tulku lines based on the historical periods. The numbers in the heading row of the table are centuries CE.

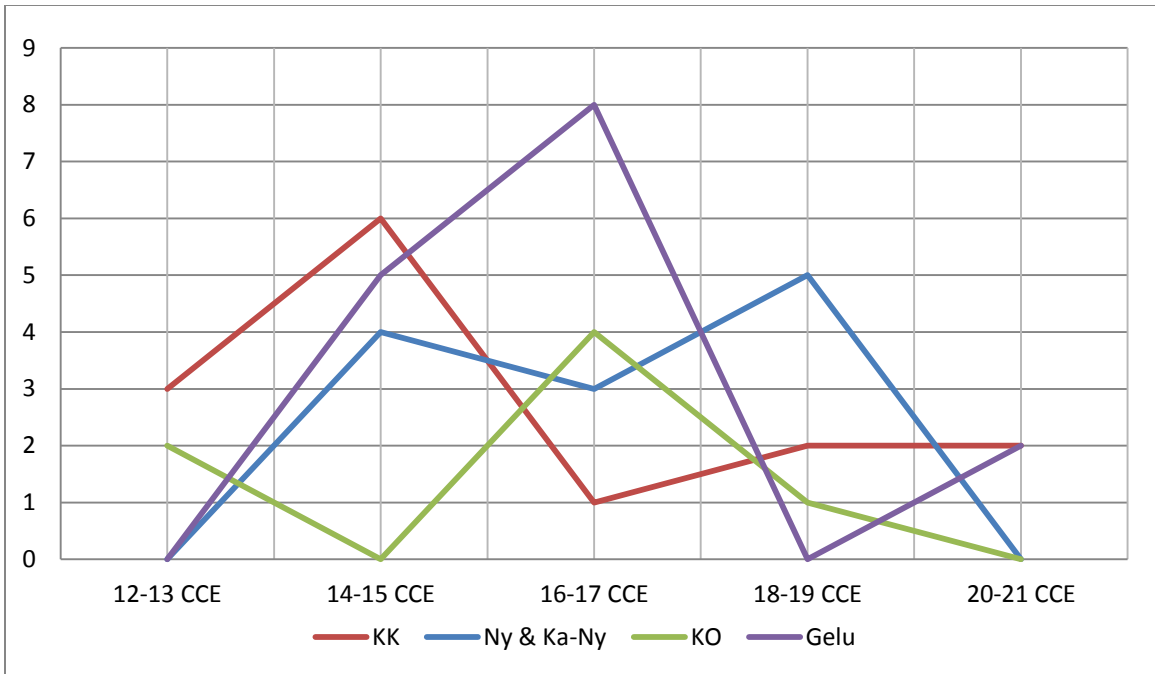


Figure 3-2. Development trend for studied Tulku lines. The Rime movement is only consisted of three 19th-century *Tulkus* and is not included. KK: Karma Kagyu, Ny: Nyingmapa Ka-Ny: Ka-Nyingma, Gelu. Geluk, CCE: Century CE

Although Nyingmapa is the oldest known school of Tibetan Buddhism, the earliest Nyingmapa examples among the famous *Tulku* lines did not begin earlier than the 14-15th century. The Nyingmapa School itself cites the tradition of *Terton* (Wyl. *gter ston*) as an evidence of an old history of the tradition of *Tulkus* in the school. These *Tertons* are considered to be the protectors of the hidden “dharma treasures” whose bringing is attributed to *Padmasambhava* himself, however, again here what is claimed to be the evidence of the presence of the *Tulku* institution is in fact, at best, instances of sporadic claims.

The trend in the formation of *Tulku* lines in the school has a two peak curve. The first peak which is shared by almost all schools coincides with the 14-15th century period. This wave probably represents a time when the Karma Kagyu innovation attracted the interest of other schools.

The second peak is around the 18th and 19th centuries. This figure may reflect several developments among which the support of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (Wyl. *ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho*) (1617–1682 CE) for the sect has been noted.⁵⁹ The 19th century also saw a revitalization of Nyingmapa through the strengthening of monastic tradition within the school.⁶⁰

The trend in the Gelugpa School reflects a historical fact about the establishment and rise of the sect which was founded by Lama Tsongkhapa in the 14th Century. Most of the studied prominent Gelugpa *Tulku* lines began in the 14th through 17th centuries which correlates with a period when the schools were being consolidated and the Dalai Lama institution was formed.

The first person to be assigned the title of the Dalai Lama, the most important *Tulku* in the Gelugpa school, was Sonam Gyaltso (Wyl. *bsod nams rgya mtsho*) (1543–1588 CE). The first two Dalai Lamas were then recognized posthumously. This represents a significant practice within Gelugpa to start a line of *Tulkus* and then bestow the title to the purported predecessors.

⁵⁹. Dreyfus, Georges. *The Shugden Affair: Origins of a Controversy (Part I)* | *The Office of His Holiness The Dalai Lama*. n.d. Web. 12 November 2014, n.pag.

⁶⁰. Dreyfus, George "Where Do Commentarial Schools Come from? Reflections on the History of Tibetan Scholasticism." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (2005): 273-97. PDF file, p.288

The beginning of the line of Panchen Lama, the second most important *Tulku* in the hierarchy of Gelugpa, for example, was at the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁶¹

During the period which began with the Chinese take-over of Tibet and the exile of Tibetan lamas, the world witnessed a new phenomenon, namely the birth of Western *Tulkus*. These *Tulkus* who were first of mixed Tibetan-Western or Mongolian-Western origin, soon were followed by purely Western *Tulkus*. At the early stages of the new development, only a handful of Western children were recognized as *Tulkus* but over time the number grew. (Ary 410) Canadian Dylan Henderson was the first pure Westerner to be recognized as a *Tulku* in 1975.⁶²

The exportation of the *Tulku* phenomenon to the West was not free from adverse consequences. Traditionally, the system requires *Tulkus* to be separated from their families and put in monasteries to receive “proper training”. In some instances like the case of Elijah Ary (aka Tenzin Tulku) the parents followed the tradition, but even in such cases, the experience was mixed for the children themselves.

Citing his own experience, Ary described the experience as not that harsh for a child.⁶³

In 2009, Chogyam Trungpa’s son Gesar Makpo, who along with his brother was recognized as a *Tulku*, made the documentary “*Tulku*” in which he discloses the other side of the story.⁶⁴

3.4 A close look at the case of the Second Karmapa

Based on the official account of the Karma Kagyu tradition, upon his death, Dusum Khyenpa left a letter of prediction in which he described the circumstances of his rebirth. The account, however, adds that the second Karmapa was recognized based on several visions by his teacher.⁶⁵

⁶¹. Kaufman, Asha. *Treasury of Lives: Panchen Lama Incarnation Lines*. 8 January 2013. Web. 17 September 2014, n.pag.

⁶². *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

⁶³. Ary, Elijah. "The Westernization of Tulkus." *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions*. Ed. Vanessa R. Sasson. New York: Oxford University, 2013. 39-428. PDF file, p.424.

⁶⁴. *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

⁶⁵. Thinley, Karma. *The History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet*. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980. Print, pp.45,47.

Due to the importance of the issue, parts of the passage regarding the recognition of the second Karmapa have been quoted:

By the time he [the second Karmapa] was ten years old he had already grasped the essence of Buddhist doctrine Pomdrakpa [the second Karmapa's teacher] had himself received the teachings of the Karma Kagyu lineage from Drogon Rechen, the heir to Dusum Khyenpa's [Italics are from the author] transmission. When he first bestowed an empowerment on Chodzin [the child second Karmapa], he explained that in a vision he had seen Dusum Khyenpa and other teachers of the lineage surrounding his young student's residence, illustrating the latter's importance. In a further vision, Dusum Khyenpa revealed to Pomdrakpa that Chodzin was in fact his incarnation. From this time on, Pomdrakpa recognized Chodzin as the second Karmapa Lama and entitled him dharma master (Tib.: chos.kyi.bla.ma). In addition, he ordained Karma Pakshi as a novice.⁶⁶

Several points in this story require special attention: the first contradiction in the story is related to the issue of the letter of prediction. If the Second Karmapa was recognized based on the visions, what was the role of the letter (or oral prediction)? This contradiction raises the possibility that the story of the letter of prediction is a fabrication dating back to a later period, when leaving a "letter of prediction" became a tradition.

The second point is about the age of Karma Pakshi at his recognition. Based on the story, at least for ten years, there was no search for the *Tulku* of the first Karmapa. Again this supports the hypothesis that Pomdrakpa (Wyl. *spom brag pa*) might have found his student a good candidate for the position and claimed that he was the reincarnation of the First Karmapa.

This time gap has attracted the attention of a few scholars too. According to Geoffrey Samuel, the fifteenth century historian Go Lotsawa "carefully" avoids to describe Karma Pakshi as a rebirth of Dusum Khyenpa. Samuel believes the *Tulku* tradition developed through the 13th and 14th centuries into its current form.⁶⁷

⁶⁶. Ibid, p.47.

⁶⁷. Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993. Print, p.494.

If the hypothesis about the Pomdrakpa's role in bringing Karma Pakshi to power is true, he should be credited as the true founder of the *Tulku* tradition.

The emergence of the Karmapa Lamas coincides with an important development in the Karma Kagyu School. Until Gampopa, like the older Nyingmapa School, the transmission of the teachings was based on the lineage of the yogi masters who ran a life-style far from the traditional monastic, prescribed by Buddhism for a holy man.

The ordination of Gampopa as a monk is a turning point in regard to a shift from a *Ngak pa*⁶⁸-like institution to an official hierarchy which required people to fill positions in monasteries.

The Sakya School had already solved the problem of leadership in monasteries by employing the blood-line method and claiming spiritual superiority of the Khon clan through "authorizing by referent"⁶⁹ (i.e. claiming a figure is the emanation of a celestial entity to give him a super-mundane status).

For Nyingmapa, the school had been centered around sorcerer-shamans who served the religious needs of usually rural communities supporting them⁷⁰. Either monks or families of *Ngak pas* ran monasteries.⁷¹ However, the rise of scholastic monasticism in the tradition necessitated a shift to a more reliable method of succession with a super-mundane authority. For enjoying this authority, being a member of a *Ngak pa* family was not enough so they adopted a mixed method of blood-line and reincarnation.⁷²

The case of the Third Karmapa is different as the next reincarnation is claimed to have introduced himself as the Karmapa at the age of five. Karma Pakshi only told his student Urgyenpa that he would be reborn in Western Tibet.⁷³ Also according to hagiographic literature, Karma Pakshi visited a couple before his death and told them, he would be born as their child.⁷⁴

⁶⁸. Non-monastic Buddhist shaman- healers

⁶⁹. See Havnevik, Hanna and Janet Gyatso. *Women in Tibet*. Inida: C. Hurst & Co., 2005. PDF file, p22 .

⁷⁰. This model of relationship between the holy man and community still exist in Nepal, for example, among Tamang people.

⁷¹. Ronis, Jann. *The Rise of Tulkus in the Nyingma Sect: An innovation of the large scholastic monasteries of the seventeenth and eighteenth*. San Francisco, February 2013. Web, n.pag.

⁷². The hereditary system of running monasteries still is common in Nyingmapa. See Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* . Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993. Print, p.495.

⁷³. Thinley, Karma. *The History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet*. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980. Print, p .54.

⁷⁴. White, Meryi , and Nik Douglas. *Karmapa: The Blackhat Lama oF Tibet*. London: Luzac & Company, 1976. Print, p.44.

However, the authors of these hagiographies do not explain with such an exact prediction why the disciples of the late Karmapa waited for five years before finding and “enthroning” the reincarnation of their teacher.

In White’s work, the practice of sending a search party, which is common for high-lamas today, is first mentioned about the Fourth Karmapa.⁷⁵ This time-gap corresponds with Samuel’s suggestion about the development of the *Tulku* system over two centuries and after its first emergence.

Finally, if Dusum Khyenpa had really intended to establish the institution, it would be more likely that he would invent the ritualistic aspect of the search process too. Also, he probably would have been more specific about the circumstances of his next rebirth. These discrepancies in traditional historical accounts suggest that such so-called historical works are the result of a reverse history-making process (see next chapters).

⁷⁵. Ibid, p.54.

Chapter 4: In the Buddha's Words

Religion should be generally viewed as a dynamic phenomenon which is usually shaped over time and under the influence of social, political, economic and cultural forces. This process consists of several phases among which the stage of “reverse legitimization” is of significance. By this phase, the author refers to a hermeneutic process used by adherents of a faith and scholars to reinterpret the sacred literature to find support for those religious practices that emerge in a later phase of the development of that religion, as a strategy to solve an orthodoxy crisis surrounding them.

Laurence Austin Waddell, one of the first scholars to study Tibetan religion and culture, suggests the idea of *Tulku* has probably no Buddhist basis and views it as a response to the problem of succession for those positions whose occupation through election would be tricky due to “craftiness” of lamas. According to him, for this purpose, Tibetan religious leaders invented this practice based on the idea of the simple reincarnation which is, in fact, not the same as the doctrine of Rebirth.⁷⁶

Not all scholars, however, share this opinion with Waddell. For example, Ary tries to refute Waddell's view through the newly-introduced tradition of recognizing Western *Tulkus* as an indication that political and social reasons have not always been behind the practice.⁷⁷ However, he ignores the fact that this phenomenon could still be explained as a socio-political one, in the light of Tibetan Buddhism's need for finding new patrons among Westerners after China's take-over of Tibet.

Within the traditional context of Tibetan Buddhism, several doctrinal foundations have been referred to as the basis of the *Tulku* institution and its orthodoxy. Tulku Thondup enumerates four doctrines 1) the Three Bodies doctrine; 2) the principle of *Bodhicitta*; 3) the

⁷⁶. Waddell, L. Austine. *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*. London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1895. Print, pp. 229-230.

⁷⁷. Ary, Elijah. "The Westernization of Tulkus." *Little Buddhas: Children and Childhoods in Buddhist Texts and Traditions*. Ed. Vanessa R. Sasson. New York: Oxford University, 2013. 39-428. PDF file, pp. 408-09.

doctrine of Rebirth; and 4) the doctrine of Karma.⁷⁸ To make this list more inclusive, one should add the doctrine of Co-dependent Origination or Emptiness to it.

4.1 The doctrine of the Three Bodies

The doctrine of the Three Bodies (Skt. *trikāya*) is undoubtedly, one of the characteristic aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism, on which many philosophical views of this school are based. The doctrine holds that every Buddha has three bodies or aspects, namely the Truth Body (Skt. *Dharmakāya*), the Body of Bliss (Skt. *Sambhogakāya*) and the Emanation Body (Skt. *Nirmāṇakāya*). These three bodies are the Buddha's true nature, celestial aspect and physical appearance, respectively.⁷⁹

John Makransky says the earliest Buddhist text to use the term *Kāya* in its technical sense was the MSA attributed to the quasi-legendary figure *Maitreyanātha* (ca. 270-350 CE).⁸⁰

Makransky, in fact, refers to the ninth chapter of MSA titled "Enlightenment". The chapter explains how the Truth Body is the ground for the other two (the Beatific Body, and the Emanation Body, as the text name it).⁸¹ Also, the text serves as a source for the development of a classification for *Tulku* types, as it contains verses explaining various manifestations of a Bodhisattva.⁸² From what Makransky writes, one can infer that the doctrine was developed over centuries after the Buddha.

According to MSA, the Truth Body (or reality body) is equal, subtle and integrated with the second body (the Enjoyment or Beatific Body). It is equal due to the lack of differentiation or the lack of duality. This quality of non-duality also makes the body ineffable as any expression and definition ultimately relies on duality of object and subject. It is subtle because it is difficult

⁷⁸. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF file, n.pag.

⁷⁹. Strong, John S. "Buddhahood and Buddha Bodies." Buswell, Robert E. *Encyclopedia Of Buddhism*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. 76-79. PDF file, pp.77-8.

⁸⁰. Makransky, John J. *"Buddhahood Embodied : Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*. United States: State University of New York, 1997. PDF file, p.42.

⁸¹. Maitreyanatha, Aryasanga. *The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literatur (Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra)*. Ed. Robert A.F. Thurman. Trans. Lobsang Jamspal et al. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2004. PDF file, p.95.

⁸². Ibid p. 58.

for non-Buddhas to understand this body and it is integrated (interdependent) with the Enjoyment Body.⁸³

In his seminal work, “the Jewel Ornament of Liberation: the Wish-Fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings⁸⁴”, Gampopa, Milarepa’s heart disciple and the founder of the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism, attributes eight qualities to the Truth Body, namely sameness, profundity, permanence, oneness, perfection, purity, radiance and relationship to enjoyment. Sameness means the absence of any difference between the Truth Body of all Buddhas. Profundity is the difficulty in realizing the body; permanence alludes to its unconditional nature; oneness refers to indivisibility of the body; perfection is the unmistakable nature of the body; purity is the absence of any obscuration; radiance refers to the non-conceptual nature of the body; and relationship to Enjoyment refers to the fact that the Truth Body is the foundation of the Enjoyment Body.⁸⁵

The doctrine grants the concept of the Three Bodies a soteriological significance, because the Truth Body as the source of all good qualities benefits the person himself/herself while the two other bodies benefit other beings based on whether they are advanced enough to view the Enjoyment Body or they can only see the Emanation Body.⁸⁶

The dichotomy of pure and impure is cited as a reason behind postulating two different bodies for the Buddha which later was developed into the Doctrine of the Three Bodies.⁸⁷ Such dichotomy was partly inspired by the Buddha’s early discourses in which he warned his disciples against developing attachment to his physical presence. A good example is a discourse in SN in which the Buddha admonishes his disciple *Vakkali* over his over-enthusiasm for meeting the Buddha.

Enough, Vakkali! Why do you want to see this foul body? One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma. For in seeing the

⁸³ Ibid, p.96.

⁸⁴ Tib.Dagpo Thargyen Wyl. *dwags po thar rgyan*

⁸⁵ Gampopa. *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation the Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publication, 1998. PDF file, p.289.

⁸⁶ Ibid p. 288

⁸⁷ Xing, Guang. *The Concept of the Buddha: Its evolution from early Buddhism to the trikaya Theory*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. PDF file, p.19.

*Dhamma, Vakkali, one sees me; and in seeing me, one sees the Dhamma. (SN 22.87)*⁸⁸

In another occasion, the Buddha declares *Tathāgata* as “the Body of *Dhamma*”. (DN 3:84)⁸⁹

In these instances, the Buddha apparently tries to remind his followers that impermanence applies to even him and in fact, it is the Truth or the *Dhamma* itself which is important. These words seem to have been interpreted later as a sign of the existence of a metaphysical Absolute, a source to which the Buddha is an emanation.⁹⁰

Also the concept of the Truth Body was used for explaining the practice of refuge to the Buddha who was not considered as a god yet he was viewed as a source of salvation⁹¹.

Attempts by the faith-based school of *Mahāsaṃghika* to promote a deified image of the Buddha created philosophical problems to be solved and as a result, they invented an intermediary body between the Buddha’s physical body and his spiritual essence or *Dharmakāya*. This intermediary body became *Sambhogakāya* or the Enjoyment Body.⁹²

According to MSA, the Enjoyment Body has five distinguishing characteristics: gathering of hosts, its Buddha-Lands, its names, its bodies and its spiritual beatitudes.⁹³

Gampopa, however, enumerates eight characteristics for *Sambhogakāya*. They are surroundings (retinue of the body as Bodhisattvas abiding at all stages); fields (Buddha-Lands), form (like the body of Vairocana etc); marks (32 major and 80 minor marks); full enjoyment of Dharma (it refers to Mahāyāna teachings); activities (activities like Bodhisattva’s enlightenment

⁸⁸. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: a New Translation of Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston: Wisdom, 2000. Print, p.939.

⁸⁹. Davids, T.W.Rhys, trans. *Dialogues of the Buddha: Digha-Nikaya*. n.p: Luzac, 1969. Print, p.409.

⁹⁰. See Sotaesan. *The Scriptures of Won-Buddhism(Wonbulgyo Kyojōn)*. Republic of Korea: Wonkwang Publishing, 2006. PDF file, p.2.

⁹¹. Poussin, Louis de La Vallée. *Documents d'Abhidharma: traduits at annotés*. n.p: N.p, 1973. PDF file, pp.68-69.

⁹². Xing, Guang. *The Concept of the Buddha: Its evolution from early Buddhism to the trikaya Theory*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. PDF file, p. 101.

⁹³. Maitreyanatha, Aryasanga. *The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literatur (Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra)*. Ed. Robert A.F. Thurman. Trans. Lobsang Jamspal et al. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2004. PDF file, p.95.

etc.); spontaneity (the lack of effort in activities); and natural non-existence (this body is like color of crystal, free from an essence).⁹⁴

As the definition of “*Tulku*” indicates, the term originally referred to the third body or the Emanation Body of a Buddha which is probably originated in the idea of the mind -made body (Skt.*manomayakāya*).⁹⁵ The earliest reference to this miraculous body can be found in the Pali literature.⁹⁶ This power to make a body using the mind was believed to be a fruit of contemplative absorption:

With his [the person who has reached the contemplative absorption]mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to creating a mind-made body....⁹⁷

Gampopa quotes DBS as saying that a Bodhisattva in the first stage of spiritual development has the power to “manifest in one hundred different worlds, and mature one hundred different sentient beings.”⁹⁸ According to this sutra, the number of possible manifestations increases by progressing on the stages of a Bodhisattva’s spiritual development.

Tulku Thondup says the most important body among the three in terms of understanding the concept of *Tulku* is the Manifestation Body. According to him, it is not the true form of the Buddha but a Buddha manifests such body to help sentient beings. Moreover, like the reflection of the Sun, it can be multiple at the same time.⁹⁹

He then explains while a Buddha can manifest several bodies even during his life time, virtuous lamas can have only one *Tulku* and only after their death. Tulku Thondup enumerates four type of the Emanation Body: 1) the Supreme Manifestation Body: this is the body of a Buddha endowed with the major and minor physical signs of a Buddha; 2) Artisan Manifested

⁹⁴. Gampopa. *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation the Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publication, 1998. PDF file, p 290.

⁹⁵. Xing, Guang. *The Concept of the Buddha: Its evolution from early Buddhism to the trikaya Theory*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. PDF file, p. 136.

⁹⁶. Strong, John S. "Buddhahood and Buddha Bodies." Buswell, Robert E. *Encyclopedia Of Buddhism*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. 76-79. PDF file, p.76.

⁹⁷. "*Samaññaphala Sutta: The Fruits of the Contemplative Life*" (DN 2). Trans. Bhikkhu Thanissaro. 30 November 2013. Web. 04 July 2014, n.pag .

⁹⁸. Gampopa. *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation the Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publication, 1998. PDF file, p 266.

⁹⁹. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF file, n.pag.

Body: a Buddha is manifested in the form of an artisan; 3) the Birth Manifested Body: the body of a Buddha manifested in any birth form; and 4) Diverse Manifested Body: it is the manifestation of a Buddha in various forms including plants, shelter etc.

MSA explains that the emanation of a Buddha is through the manifestation of art, incarnation, great enlightenment and Nirvana. The entire Emanation Body is considered the “great art of deliverance” as it skillfully serves sentient beings’ liberation. For disciples, it always functions as art, incarnations (as human, animals, and useful objects) and the acts of the supreme Emanation Body such as Enlightenment and Nirvana.¹⁰⁰

The Emanation Body has eight characteristics: basis (the Truth Body); cause (the Great Compassion); field (fully pure or fully impure fields); time (unceasing as long as the world exists); nature (the type of emanation); engaging (means proactive engagement of a Buddha with sentient beings); maturing (the Emanation Body’s ability to mature accumulations of people); and liberating (the ability to liberate those who are developed enough). In terms of the nature, there are three forms of the Emanation Body: the artistic emanation which is all forms of art; the birth emanation like animals and human and the supreme emanation like the Emanation Body of the historical Buddha.¹⁰¹

4.2 Bodhicitta, the sacred passion

Tulku Thondup views the concept of Bodhicitta, the aspiration for serving others without selfish motivations, as one of the principles behind the tradition of *Tulku*.

Technically speaking, Bodhicitta is defined as the resolution to attain Buddhahood in order to liberate sentient beings. According to Tulku Thondup, this vow to help others have a power to ignite “the flame of passion and commitment in oneself, lasting not only for this lifetime but for all successive lives until the attainment of buddhahood.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰. Maitreyanatha, Aryasanga. *The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literatur (Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra)*. Ed. Robert A.F. Thurman. Trans. Lobsang Jampal et al. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2004. PDF file, pp.98-99

¹⁰¹. Gamropa. *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation the Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publication, 1998. PDF file, pp. 291-92

¹⁰² Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF file, n.pag.

From a theoretical perspective, the use of “passion” to continue Rebirth is feasible, because craving (Pal. *tanha*) has been cited as the basic driving force behind the cycle of birth and death and since the principle of Co-dependent Origination (Pal. *paṭiccasamuppāda*) is morally blind, there is no difference between “positive” or “negative” craving in terms of its effect as a driving force for Rebirth.

This driving force, according to Tulku Thondup, can be used to keep someone with good motivations within *Samsāra* deliberately as an act of self-sacrifice out of compassion.¹⁰³

4.3 Karma

Form a Buddhist perspective, Karma is a blind natural law like gravity in physics. This philosophically-sophisticated model of Karma doctrine has always been subjected to misinterpretation and confusion.¹⁰⁴

Tulku Thondup describes the relationship between this doctrine and the concept of *Tulku*, in a way different from its role as the foundation of the Rebirth doctrine. According to him, someone who has a store of wholesome Karmas will enjoy peace of mind and act as a source of peace for others. In this way, the owner of wholesome karmas spiritually benefits others and might become a *Tulku*¹⁰⁵.

4.4 Rebirth

In most instances, this doctrine has been cited as a proof to the authenticity of the *Tulku* tradition. However, the doctrine of Rebirth, the most important doctrinal foundation of the *Tulku* institution, should be viewed as an “enabling” prerequisite for the existence of the institution rather than a proof for its orthodoxy.

However, there are three important issues related to the doctrine of Rebirth which requires more explanation in order to understand the doctrinal basis of the *Tulku* institution. These issues are the power to control Rebirth under Mahāyāna; the power to recall previous

¹⁰³ Ibid, n.pag.

¹⁰⁴ Dobbins, James c. "Karma (Action)." *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Ed. Jr. Robert E. Buswell. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. 415-417. PDF file, p.417.

¹⁰⁵ Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF file, n.pag

rebirths; and the exact meaning of Rebirth under Buddhism. These topics will be discussed shortly.

4.5 Co-Dependent Origination

In Buddhism, Co-Dependent Origination (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*) is used in two related senses. In its specific sense, it refers to the 12 links (Skt. *nidāna*) of the chain of cause and effect which keep the continuity of existence for any sentient being.¹⁰⁶ In this sense, it is a detailed description of the mechanism of Rebirth.

However, Co-Dependent Origination refers to another philosophical viewpoint which has been particularly developed within Mahāyāna. In this sense, the term denotes an all-pervading principle of causality governing all phenomena in the universe.

A simplified definition of Co-Dependent Origination in its general or second sense is formulated in the following verses:

When this is, that is.
From the arising of this comes the arising of that.
When this isn't, that isn't.
From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that. (AN 10:92)¹⁰⁷

However, one is more likely to infer a linear model of causality from this over-simplified definition which simply implies that from a cause, an effect arises. The Buddhist view is, after all, not consistent with such a linear model, because it believes in a nexus of causes, conditions and effects in which each effect itself functions as a cause or condition for another effect.¹⁰⁸

When some definitions describe *Tulku* in terms of “the transference of the spiritual energy”(see Chapter 1), the doctrine of Co-Dependent Origination is used to explain the mechanism.

¹⁰⁶. Tsomo, Karma Lekshe. "Pratītyasamutpāda(Dependent Origination)." *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Ed. Robert E. Buswall. New York: McMillan References, 2004. 669-70. PDF file, p.669.

¹⁰⁷. "Vera Sutta: Animosity" (AN 10.92). Trans. Bhikkhu Thanissaro. 30 November 2013. Web. 1 December 2014, n.pag.

¹⁰⁸. Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli. Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010. PDF file, p.560.

4.6 Tulku, possible under Buddhism?

Tibetan Buddhists construct their argument in support of the *Tulku* institution based on the above doctrines. Nonetheless, it is necessary to see whether these doctrines actually support the possibility of the *Tulku* phenomenon and more importantly how “orthodox” the practice is.

The two doctrines of Rebirth and Karma are prerequisites for the *Tulku* phenomenon, and therefore, they have been examined first.

Various Buddhist schools have no difference in terms of their belief in the crucial role of Karma in the determination of the state of the future Rebirth. Based on the Theravada Abhidharmic exegesis, the few moments of the mind before *Cuti Citta* or the mental moment of death play a significant role in determining the quality of the next rebirth. These moments, however, are shaped based on heavy or weak karmic effects; habitual tendencies; recent thoughts; or in the absence of the previous three forces the stored Karma from the past.¹⁰⁹

This role of habituation makes it possible (at least theoretically) for someone with certain mental tendencies; or “connection” to a situation (or certain religious position in the case of a *Tulku*) to be reborn in that situation. Yet, one should not forget the non-linear nature of causality from the Buddhist viewpoint. In Buddhism, certain qualities have been purported for Karma which makes it difficult to exactly predict its fruit. Firstly, the fruits of one single deed are not always the same.

If one says that whatever way a person performs a kammic action, in that very same way he will experience the result – in that case there will be no (possibility for) the holy life, and no opportunity would appear for making a complete end to suffering. But if one says that a person who performs a kammic action (with a result) that is variably experienceable, will reap its result accordingly – in that case there will be (a possibility for) the holy life, and an opportunity would appear for making a complete end to suffering. (AN10:92)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹. Mendis, N.K.G. *The Abhidhamma in Practice*. 30 November 2013. Web. 2 January 2015.
Miracles of HH the XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa. 1989. Web. 1 January 2015, n.pag.

¹¹⁰. “*Vera Sutta: Animosity*” (AN 10.92). Trans. Bhikkhu Thanissaro. 30 November 2013. Web. 1 December 2014, n.pag.

Secondly, the consequence of an act might be apparently inappropriate to the intensity of it (the so-called magnification of Karma).¹¹¹

The model of Rebirth in Buddhism is also philosophically complex. A common mistake about the Buddhist view of Rebirth is taking Consciousness (Skt. *Vijñāna*) as an analog to the Soul transferring from one life to another. This view is based on misunderstanding the 12-link chain of the cycle of Rebirth.

In fact, based on the model proposed by Buddhism, the last moment of death becomes a *cause* for the first moment of another consciousness. To bring the model close to the mind, the example of the row of suspended billiard balls (the so-called Newton's Cradle) is illustrative. In this device, the momentum of the first ball in the row is transferred to the last ball, if the former is lifted up and released. In this case, the first ball stops upon striking the second ball in the row; yet its momentum is transferred to the last balls in the row and causes them to move.

The same is true about Consciousness: at the moment of death, the last moment (Pal. *cuti citta*) acts as a cause for the first moment (Pal. *paṭisandhi*) of another Consciousness-stream. In this respect, the second Consciousness-stream is not the same as the first one, but it is not unrelated to it either, because the second is the result of the first.

The analogy used in Pali literature to demonstrate this not-same, not-different relationship is the example of milk and its products. Curd or other milk products cannot be considered the same as milk, yet they are the product of milk. In this way, Rebirth is possible without transmigration of anything.¹¹²

The source of the misunderstanding about viewing Consciousness (or the mind) as something transferring from life to life is confusion about the description of the 12-link cycle of existence. Based on the description in some stage of the cycle, Consciousness gives rise to Name and Form. (Bodhi n.pag) Therefore, Consciousness might be viewed as something with a function like the Soul whose presence brings about life (of a fetus, for example).

¹¹¹. Tsongkhapa, Rje. *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: Lam Rim Chen Mo*. Ed. Joshua W. C. Cutler. Vol. One. Ithaca: Sonw Lion Publication, 2000. Print, p. 211.

¹¹². Davids, T. W. Rhys, trans. *The Questions of King Milinda*. n.p: Clarendon, 1890. Print, p. 65.

To resolve this misunderstanding, firstly, one should remember that Consciousness itself is dependent on physical basis and it cannot exist independently. For example, the eye consciousness depends on the eye as the physical basis (Pal. *indriya*) and the sense object (Pal. *ālambana*).

Monks, what one intends (*ceteti*), and what one plans, and whatever one has a tendency towards (*anuseti*): this becomes a basis for the maintenance of consciousness. When there is a basis, there is a support (*ārammaṇam*) for the establishing (*ṭhitiyā*) of consciousness. When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form.... (SN II 67)¹¹³

Disintegration of the body at the time of death brings up a philosophical question about the physical basis of the Consciousness which links two lives and the mechanism by which Consciousness acts as the cause for Name and Form.

To explain this problem, William S. Waldron defines two kind of Consciousness: one is the pure sense-related awareness and the second is “the sheer sentience”.¹¹⁴

However, the passage “Wherever consciousness becomes established and comes to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form,” can be interpreted in a different way.

The Buddha in this passage does not necessarily refer to Consciousness as something producing Name and Form, because the reverse might also be the case. Since Consciousness is dependent on the presence of Name and Form, its presence necessitates the presence of them.

The following example clarifies the situation; if there is light inside a room, a source of light must exist somewhere. In this case one can say, from light (meaning the presence of light), the source of light comes (is inferred).

Karma formations necessitate the presence of a moment of Consciousness after death, but there would be no moment of Consciousness without Name and Form. Therefore, due to the inevitability of the existence of that moment of Consciousness based on the principle of causality, the simultaneous presence of the conditions for that moment (Name and Form) becomes inevitable. Scriptural sources support this interpretation:

¹¹³. Waldron, William S. *The Buddhist Unconscious: the Alaya-vijñāna in the Context of Indian Buddhist Thought*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. PDF file, p. 25.

¹¹⁴. *Ibid*, p. 21.

Impossible is it for anyone to explain the passing out of one existence and the entering into a new existence, or the growth, increase and development of consciousness independent of corporeality, feeling, perception and mental formations (SN. XII, 53)¹¹⁵

Buddhaghosa, in *Visuddhimagga* analogizes the relationship between Consciousness and its support to “the sheaves of reeds propped together on all four sides,”¹¹⁶ which indicates this model of co-appearance is more likely to be the correct interpretation.

From what is said, it is possible to postulate two subtly different models for Rebirth and its relation to the Consciousness-stream. The first model proposes the mind stream as a changing but single continuum of mental moments passing through cycles of birth and death. The second model demonstrates the cycles of birth and death as the sequence of causally-related mind streams. The second model has some advantages to allow the existence of several Rebirths for a single person as postulated in Tibetan Buddhism.

However, unlike the other model which envisages a kind of relatively consistent identity (in the form of a single mind-stream passing through various stages of birth and death), it illustrates the relationship between the present and future lives only a little closer than two differently “unrelated” phenomena.

Regardless of what Buddhist scripture says about Emanation, the explanation of the *Tulku* phenomenon based on the interdependence of phenomena as seen in the hypothesis of the energy transference (see Chapter 1) suffers from the above weakness. Due to generalized interdependence of all phenomena, the so-called “energy transference is not specific to only a *Tulku* and its predecessor and happens in all phenomena. In this way, in the absence of any fixed identity, the idea of Emanation in its specific sense *ultimately* makes no sense.

¹¹⁵. Nyanatiloka. *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988, PDF file, p.92.

¹¹⁶. Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli. Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010. PDF file, p.581.

In Mahāyāna, there is another Rebirth-related doctrine which is closely linked to the *Tulku* institution. Based on DBS, at the eighth stage or *Bhūmi*, a Bodhisattva acquires ten masteries (Skt. *vaśitā*). They are as following:

1. Mastery over lifespan (*āyurvaśitā*)
2. Mastery over the mind (Skt. *cetovaśitā*)
3. Mastery over property (Skt. *pariṣkāraśitā*)
4. Mastery over Karma (Skt. *karmavaśitā*)
5. Mastery over Rebirth (Skt. *upapattivaśitā*): the power to control one's manifestations and rebirths.
6. Mastery over Faith (Skt. *adhimuktivaśitā*)
7. Mastery over Aspiration (prayers) (Skt. *prañidhānavaśitā*)
8. Mastery over magic power (Skt. *ṛddhivaśitā*)
9. Mastery over knowledge (Skt. *jñānavaśitā*)
10. Mastery over Dharma (Skt. *dharmavaśitā*)¹¹⁷

This view about the powers of a Bodhisattva in the eighth stage is one of the theoretical cornerstones of the *Tulku* tradition. Through the power of staying in the world for eons, a Bodhisattva can choose to stay in *Saṃsāra* to benefit others and through the power of controlling Rebirth, he/she chooses the rebirth he/she wants to help sentient beings.

However, citing this doctrine as a theoretical basis for the *Tulku* tradition has some limitations, because it only applies to a high level Bodhisattva, and therefore, it cannot explain how a simple “virtuous lama” who is not a highly realized Bodhisattva can choose to stay in the world and control his Rebirth.

¹¹⁷. Candrakīrti. *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakīrti's Madhyamakavatara with commentary by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche*. n.p: Khyentse Foundation, 2003. PDF file, p.352. Also see Maitreyanātha, Aryasāṅga. *The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literature (Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra)*. Ed. Robert A.F. Thurman. Trans. Lobsang Jampal et al. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2004. PDF file, p.58.

Renowned Bhutanese teacher, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche (Wyl.*rdzong gsar mkhyen brtse rin po che*) introduces an extremely complex phenomenon called *Zowe Tulku* (Wyl. *bzo ba'i sprul sku*). According to him, if a high-level Bodhisattva sees the circumstances is suitable to help someone in a certain time, he can temporarily manifest in someone else and after that the person in whom he manifested, will return to his normal life again.¹¹⁸

In addition to the power to control Rebirth, the power to remember one's previous lives which was postulated as one of the fruits of the Buddhist path, must have played a role in the psychology of the tradition. Since a realized person is expected to acquire this power, it is not surprising that after years of meditation, advanced Buddhist practitioners in Tibet began to declare that they were the reincarnation of certain persons, even before the official beginning of the *Tulku* tradition.¹¹⁹

An important source of inspiration, in this respect, is Jataka tales. This genre of literature which dates back to a time as early as the 2nd century BCE was probably inspired by the belief among Buddhists that at the night of his enlightenment, the Buddha, recalled his numberless past lives.¹²⁰

This tradition has acted as a source of inspiration prompting some Buddhists to imitate the Jataka story-telling tradition about themselves or other figures (like the Karmapa Lamas and Dalai Lamas).

Given what is discussed in the previous sections, is the Tulku tradition an "orthodox" practice?

About this question, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche says while in Buddhism there is the concept of reincarnation "the institutionalized *Tulku* system that we have in Tibetan... I don't think something like this exist originally in Buddhism. In the *Sūtras* and *Śāstras* we never hear

¹¹⁸. Candrakirti. *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara with commentary by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche*. n.p: Khyentse Foundation, 2003. PDF file, p.352.

¹¹⁹. See Kuijp, Leonard W.J. van der. "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 335-47. Print.

¹²⁰. Ruppert, Brian O. "Jataka." Buswell, Robert E. *Encyclopedia Of Buddhism*. New York: McMillan References USA, 2004. 400-401. PDF file, p.401.

we never read about you know Mahakassapia, Mongalla Putra or Sariputra died ...and a bunch of monks tried to find their reincarnation.”¹²¹

The orthodoxy of tradition, therefore, depends on the standards one refers to for determining orthodoxy. If we only consider the above doctrinal foundations, with some modifications, they easily provide a doctrinal basis for the *Tulku* phenomenon.

Yet, if orthodoxy is translated into a practical tradition, due to the lack of records of this practice at least for centuries after the Buddha, the tradition may be considered as an unorthodox one.

¹²¹. *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

Chapter 5: Finding a Buddha?

Over time, a collection of rituals, as well as a methodology related to the process of finding a *Tulku* were developed to which the current chapter is dedicated.

According to Tulku Thondup, recognizing a Tulku is based on several methods: 1) prediction of the person himself; 2) lamas who tell people about their past; 3) exhibiting unique qualities during childhood; 4) Tulkus who are recognized by high lamas; 5) Tulkus who are prophesized in the past; and 6) Tulkus who discover the hidden treasures (Tib *terma*, Wyl. *gter ma*) through their past memories.¹²²

This classification of methods is not all-inclusive and there are other methods to be mentioned in next parts of the chapter.

5.1 The prediction of the lama himself

According to Tulku Thondup, some lamas personally predict the circumstances of their next rebirth. This prediction could be written or oral and clear or in an enigmatic language to be solved by others or just as signs.

The most famous case in this category is the lineage of Karmapa Lamas. Tulku Thondup, cites several examples some of which like the case of Katho Dampa Desheg (1122-92) (Wyl. *kañ thog pa dam pa bde gsheg*) is difficult to be considered as a *Tulku* by definition, as he told his disciples that he would be reborn as the Buddha of the infinite light. Desheg lived contemporary to the Second Karmapa and citing his case as an example of a *Tulku* falls within the category of the reverse legitimization and should be viewed as an attempt to prove the old history of the tradition.

There are several instances in which the existence of a letter of prediction or some kind of foretelling by the person himself is evident. The nature of such predictions will be examined in detail in Chapter 7.

¹²². Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag

5.2 The lamas who tell about their previous lives

This category includes people (usually children) who, in some point in their lives, talk about their previous lives and want to return back to their monasteries.¹²³

5.3 Exhibiting unique qualities during childhood

In this group, Tulku Thondup cites examples such as Third Dodrupchen Rinpoche (Wyl. *rdo grub chen*)(1865-1926) in which a child suddenly acquires an “extraordinary” talent for study. He attributes this ability to recalling the past life knowledge by a *Tulku*.¹²⁴

5.4 Tulkus who are recognized by high lamas

According to Tulku Thondup, this group includes the cases in which the disciples of a passed away lama ask a high-lama to help them find their masters. The high-lama finds the *Tulku* through the power of his “clairvoyance, dreams, realization, prayers, rituals or meditation”.¹²⁵

Recognition by high lamas has been a usual part of the process for finding the *Tulku* of other high lamas. Also, the recognition process, sometimes, requires consultation with high lamas, particularly in sensitive cases.¹²⁶

5.5 Prophecies in the past

Tulku Thondup says in many cases the appearance of a *Tulku* is foretold by great masters, even centuries ago. He cites the example of Nyang Nyima Ozer’s (Wyl. *myang nyi ma 'od zer*) prophecy in which he talks about the coming of Jigme Lingpa (Wyl. *'jigs med gling pa*).¹²⁷

Also tradition holds that the appearance of Karmapa Tulkus was predicted in several sutras, including the *LaṅkāvatāraSūtra* and *Samādhirāja Sūtra*.¹²⁸

¹²³ Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

¹²⁴ Ibid, n.pag.

¹²⁵ Ibid, n.pag.

¹²⁶ Rinpoche, Penor. "Statement by HH Penor Rinpoche regarding the recognition of Steven Seagal as a reincarnation of the treasure revealer Chungdrag Dorje." 1999. *Palyul Ling International*. Web. 4 December 2014, n.pag.

¹²⁷ Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

5.6 Power to discover hidden treasures

This method is based on a legend about *Padmasambhava* and his 25 direct disciples. The legend holds that the Indian master, better known as Guru Rinpoche by Tibetans, hid several secret teachings in various places due to the inappropriateness of circumstances for making them public. These hidden treasures or *terma* were supposed to be discovered in later periods by these direct disciples who were later called *Terton* or the Treasure Holders. *Tertons* usually discover these treasures through visions and some of the *termas* is in fact “mental treasures”. The first *terton* appeared in the eleventh century¹²⁹ and Tulku Thondup views the ability to remember and recover these treasures as a sign of a *Tulku*-hood.¹³⁰

5.7 The role of divination

A rich tradition of divination has been one of the elements which contributed to the development of ritualistic aspects of the *Tulku* system to a great extent.

Nati Baratz’s documentary, *the Unmistaken Child*, shows how divination is consulted in order to know where to start the search for a *Tulku* and confirm the recognition.¹³¹

The most important example of the use of divination is the case of the Dalai Lamas. According to a tradition, the lamas in charge of finding the reincarnation go to the sacred lake of *Lhamo Latso* (Wyl.*Lha mo bla mtsho*), the supposed residence of the female protector Palden Lhamo (Wyl.*Dpal ldan Lha mo*), who has vowed to assist the process of finding Dalai Lamas.¹³² In the case of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, it is said that the Fifth Radreng (Wyl. *rwa sgre*n) saw three Tibetan letters of “A”, “Ka” and “Ma” there. He also saw the vision of a monastery with jade green roof and a house with turquoise tile. According to the account, the search party found the house of the next reincarnation with turquoise tiles, near a jade green roof monastery. The

¹²⁸. Martin, Michele. *Music in the Sky: The Life, Art, and Teachings of the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje*. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2003. PDF file, p. 271.

¹²⁹. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: an Explanation of the The Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997. Print, p. 14.

¹³⁰. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag

¹³¹. *Unmistaken Child*. Dir. Nati Baratz. Perf. Tenzin Zopa. Oscilloscope, 2008. DVD.

¹³². Laird, Thomas. *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama*. New York: Grove, 2006. PDF file, p.139.

letter “A” stood for *Amdo*, the birth place of the would-be 14th Dalai Lama, and the letters “Ka” and “Ma” stood for the Karma Shartsong (Wyl. *shar tsong*) Hermitage situated near his home-village.¹³³

A method of divination depicted in the *Unmistaken Child* is looking for signs in the remains of the cremated body of a lama.¹³⁴

5.8 The tradition of the search party

Search parties are composed of several senior lamas and they are usually assigned to find high lamas. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the first recorded *Tulku* whose recognition was performed based on the more official ceremony of sending a search party was the Fourth Karmapa.¹³⁵ Usually, the search party’s members change their appearance to hide their intentions to avoid interference by parents who might fabricate stories to convince the search party that their child is a *Tulku*.

They usually keep objects belonging to the previous lama and show them to a candidate to evaluate his reaction and since the rosary is believed to contain the power of a mantra recited by an adept, usually it is used.¹³⁶

5.9 Tradition of psychometry

A powerful element in the rituals surrounding the *Tulku* tradition is testing the candidates through their power to recognize the belongings of the passed away lama. To perform this test, they put several objects in front of the candidates and ask him to pick the object belonging to him in his previous life. If the candidate picks the correct object, it will be interpreted as a sign of finding the correct candidate.

The practice of finding information about the owner of an object through keeping it in hand has been called psychometry by the 19th century US physician and psychologist Joseph

¹³³. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

¹³⁴. *Unmistaken Child*. Dir. Nati Baratz. Perf. Tenzin Zopa. Oscilloscope, 2008. DVD.

¹³⁵. White, Meryi and Nik Douglas. *Karmapa: The Blackhat Lama of Tibet*. London: Luzac & Company, 1976. Print, p.54.

¹³⁶. *Unmistaken Child*. Dir. Nati Baratz. Perf. Tenzin Zopa. Oscilloscope, 2008. DVD.

Rodes Buchanan.¹³⁷ This “phenomenon” resembles the test used for screening *Tulku* candidates. Baratz depicts the process in his documentary.

5.10 The use of Golden Urn

Throughout history, a controversial tradition was introduced into the process of finding a *Tulku*. According to this tradition, when there is more than one candidate for the position, the decision is made based on lots drawn from a golden urn. The ritual for the process was written by the Eight Dalai Lama in the 18th Century.¹³⁸

The tradition began after “Twenty-Nine Article Imperial Ordinance,” a set of articles imposed to put Tibet under control of China was enforced in the aftermath of the Gurkha war in 1793.¹³⁹ Under this document, the process of picking lots from the Golden Urn (Tib. *Ser Bum Wyl.Gser ‘bum*) was suggested for the recognition of the Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama and high lamas.¹⁴⁰

This method resurfaced as an issue of controversy recently, when the Chinese government insisted the rebirth of the Panchen Lama must be chosen through the Golden Urn process, a request rejected by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, who selected the *Tulku* himself.¹⁴¹

The Tibetan Government in Exile argues that while this method has a historical precedent, the motivation behind its introduction was political and it was not followed for the case of the Ninth, Thirteen and Fourteenth Dalai Lamas and even the Tenth Dalai Lama had already been selected through other methods. However, to please the Manchus it was announced that the Golden Urn was used.¹⁴²

Also about the Panchen Lamas, the procedure was used only for the Eighth and Ninth ones.

¹³⁷. The Parapsychological Association. *Glossary of Psi (Parapsychological) Terms (L-R)*. n.d. Web. 19 January 2015, n.pag.

¹³⁸. Office of H H the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. *Reincarnation*. 24 September 2011. Web. 7 August 2014, n.pag.

¹³⁹. Shakabpa, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden. *One Hundred Thousand Moons: an Advanced Political History of Tibet*. Trans. Derek F. Maher. Vol. one. Leiden: Brill, 2010. PDF file, p. 487.

¹⁴⁰. Office of H H the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. *Reincarnation*. 24 September 2011. Web. 7 August 2014, n.pag.

¹⁴¹. Sperling, Elliot. "Reincarnation and the Golden Urn in the 19th Century: the Recognition of the 8th Panchen Lama." Blezer, Henk et al. *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalaya*. Ed. Roberto Vitali. Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2012. pp. 97-108.

¹⁴². Office of H H the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. *Reincarnation*. 24 September 2011. Web. 7 August 2014, n.pag.

5.11 The enthronement

After finding the *Tulku* of a high lama, a delegation of the followers and authorities of the relevant monastery go to the house of the recognized *Tulku* to officially name the *Tulku*. This ceremony is called name-giving (Tib. *Nab Za Sol Wa Wyl. tshen mtshan gsol rten 'brel* or *nab bza 'gsol ba*).¹⁴³

The candidate is later moved to the monastery or nunnery related to the previous lama for the enthronement ceremony (Wyl. *khri 'don rten 'brel*) which includes a purification ceremony, long-life puja and offerings to the newly-appointed *Tulku* and his family.

¹⁴³. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF File, n.pag.

Chapter 6: In the Hands of Politicians

Buddhism in Tibet has always been intertwined with the state's affairs since its introduction to the land. This association became stronger after a model of “patron-priest”¹⁴⁴ relationship developed in which Buddhism served the spiritual needs of the imperial court and in return, received political and economic patronage from the state.

While the progress and decline of Buddhism in early phases of its advent to Tibet was directly dependent on state support, probably the most powerful alliance between politics and Buddhism occurred during the reign of Mongolian rulers in China. In the historical periods afterward, Tibet witnessed the delegation of the political powers to the clergy. By that time, however, monasteries affiliated to various Tibetan Buddhist schools had already turned into institutions very similar to the medieval fortifications of Europe.¹⁴⁵

As a result of centuries of the rule of clergy, there is no doubt that Tibetan Buddhism is the most politicized school of the religion, a fact reflected in the current Sino-Tibetan conflict. The current chapter tries to depict a picture of politics in Tibetan Buddhism and the *Tulku* institution in particular.

6.1 Sacred blood-line as a way for legitimization of political power

There has been a tendency among Tibetan people to attribute their race to celestial beings. This tendency is reflected in the Tibetan version of the Myth of Creation in which Tibetan people are illustrated as the descendent of a monkey-bodhisattva blessed by *Avalokiteśvara* (Tib *Chenrezig* Wyl. *spyān ras gzigs*) and a rock demon.¹⁴⁶ This myth reflects the importance a feudal society attaches to the blood-connection.

The first ruling family of Tibet is called Tsenpo (Wyl. *btsan po*). “Btsen”, etymologically means the violent spirit (a class of non-human beings according to Tibetans) and “po” means the

¹⁴⁴. Tib.chöyön, Wyl.: mchod-yon

¹⁴⁵. Ch'en, Kenneth K. S. *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. New Jersey: Princeton University, 1964. Print, p.417.

¹⁴⁶. Shakabpa, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden. *One Hundred Thousand Moons: an Advanced Political History of Tibet*. Trans. Derek F. Maher. Vol. one. Leiden: Brill, 2010. PDF file, p.7.

son. This family name, thus, means “the son of the violent spirit”. Sam Van Schaik translates the name as “the Divine Son” which is quite accurate.¹⁴⁷

Michael L. Walter believes such mythological biography for the rulers which is similar to the biographical accounts of the rulers of the Scythians was fabricated to establish the categorical superiority of the ruling family.¹⁴⁸ Such mythologies served as a tool of the legitimization of the state in undemocratic societies.

6.2 The dynamics of power in Tibet: rivalry between Buddhist schools

The historical period between the 11th and 12th century witnessed a gradual shift of political power from noble families to monastic centers, some of which, albeit, were run by members of nobility. A process of religious reforms in Tibet by teachers like *Atiśa*, and other Indian teachers led to the establishment of powerful Buddhist schools. This trend marginalized most noble families.¹⁴⁹

By the 12th century, monastic institutions had been everywhere and a century later they clashed over political power. Combined with rivalry between noble families and a lack of central authority, this power struggle within monasteries, made Tibet vulnerable to the submission to foreign powers.¹⁵⁰

Since Songtsen Gampo (Wyl. *srong btsan sgam po*), the first Tibetan emperor, power had been shifting between Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, Kagyupa and Gelugpa respectively. Each school of Tibetan Buddhism took political power either directly through high-lamas or by proxy of secular rulers under the control of a Buddhist school.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p.2.

¹⁴⁸. Walter, Michael L. *Buddhism and Empire*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. PDF file, p.18

¹⁴⁹. Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, pp.196-97.

¹⁵⁰. Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, p. 200.

¹⁵¹. Curren, Erik D. *Buddha's Not Smiling: Uncovering Corruption at the Heart of Tibetan Buddhism Today*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006. Web, pp. 41-49.

The first school, which directly ruled Tibet, was Sakyapa, the oldest among the “new schools”. Like other noble clans the Khon family claimed to be the descendant of divine ancestors and it established its monastery in Sakya in 1037.¹⁵²

According to Shakabpa, after the death of Genghis Khan, Tibetans stopped paying tribute to the Mongols, as a result of which Godan, Genghis Khan’s grandson, sent thirty thousand troops to Tibet. After killing thousands of civilians, Godan sent a letter to Kunga Gyaltzen (Wyl. *kun dga' rgyal mtsha*), known as Sakya Pandita, inviting him to teach his people the principles of morality.¹⁵³

This story is debatable as it is unlikely that a person, who asks a lama to come and teach his people, had a few weeks or days earlier, massacred five thousand monks and civilians.

Schaik’s version of the story is more believable. According to him, Godan knew that Tibet consisted of several kingdoms which only had Buddhism in common. He decided to use the patronage of Buddhism as a means to control Tibet. In 1204, the Mongol army marched into Tibet and reached the Radreng monastery. The abbot of the monastery surrendered to save the people and it was him who suggested that Sakya Pandita could *represent* Tibet in the Mongol court. The representative of Tibet, namely Sakya Pandita was summoned to the imperial court in 1244. As the representative of Tibet, he was in charge of administrating all local clans and more importantly reminding them that they should submit to the rule of the Mongol Empire.¹⁵⁴

Through his knowledge of Buddhist philosophy, however, Sakya Pandita must have influenced the Khan and his move was certainly the most prudent in terms of spreading Buddhism. Also, it was a wise move from the military perspective, as for the disintegrated Tibetan army, resistance was not an option.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵². Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, p. 200.

¹⁵³. Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. *Tibet: a Political History*. New York: Potaia Publications, 1984. Print, p.62.

¹⁵⁴. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, pp.76-77

¹⁵⁵. Powers, John. *History as Propaganda : Tibetan Exiles Versus the People’s Republic of China*. New York: Oxford University, 2004. PDF file, p. 48.

The rule of Sakyapa over Tibet continued throughout the reign of Kublai Khan, although, another development had already taken place. Before Kublai Khan took power, the then Khan Mongke, started to support Karma Pakshi, as well as Drikung. Unlike Shakabpa, Schaik believes that during the reign of Godan Khan, the influence of Sakya over the administrative units of Tibet or myriarchies was waning and since the Mongol's motivations for supporting Buddhism were mainly political, they started to patronize other lamas.¹⁵⁶ Karma Pakshi was successful in a debate with Daoists in the court of Mongke, whom was converted to Buddhism by the former.¹⁵⁷

At that time, Sakya Pandita's nephew Drogön Chögyal Phagpa (Wyl. *'Gro mgon Chos rgyal 'Phags pa*) was in the court along with another nephew. The then prince, Kublai asked for an empowerment from Phagpa which made him Kublai Khan's guru. In the aftermath of Mongke's death, Karma Pakshi lost his patron, and a power struggle ensued among the Mongols which divided the empire into four regions. Kublai Khan supported Phagpa as the lama with power over all 13 myriarchies of Tibet, while the Il-Khanid in Persia continued to support Drikung and Phagmudra rulers in Western Tibet.¹⁵⁸

Phagpa administrated Tibet through an official called Ponchen (Wyl. *dpon chen*).¹⁵⁹ Phagpa's influence seemingly brought misfortune for him and triggered a "game of thrones" in Tibet. According to a historical account, Phagpa was poisoned out of political motivations at the age of 46. The traditional historical account about Phagpa's death tries to acquit Ponchen from conspiracy charges; and it accuses one of Phagpa's attendants who based on the story, murdered Phagpa and committed suicide later, without any convincing explanation.¹⁶⁰

Turrell Wylie suggests that the emergence of the *Tulku* institution coincided with the decline of Sakyapa in the Mongol court. The Karmapa was the main competitor in the Mongol

¹⁵⁶. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p. 77.

¹⁵⁷. Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, p. 202.

¹⁵⁸. Ibid, p. 78.

¹⁵⁹. Shakabpa, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden. *One Hundred Thousand Moons: an Advanced Political History of Tibet*. Trans. Derek F. Maher. Vol. one. Leiden: Brill, 2010. PDF file, p. 68.

¹⁶⁰. Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. *Tibet: a Political History*. New York: Potala Publications, 1984. Print, p.83. According to the account, the attendant wrote a letter to the Khan in Phagpa's name, accusing him of disloyalty and in response the Khan sent an army to deal with the issue. Scared of the Mongol army, he murdered Phagpa and committed suicide but Ponchen was punished by the Khan. However, a close study of the story suggests that if any positioning took place at all, it would be likely masterminded by the Ponchen himself. He was fired by Phagpa when the latter returned home in 1275 and he was infamous for being behind the assassination through poisoning of the rivals of Sakyapa.

court to take the position of Sakya Lamas and the Kagyu School, consequently, invented the *Tulku* system to ensure the presence of a successor for Karma Pakshi who had already made a good impression.¹⁶¹

Geoffrey Samuel notices the discrepancies in the biographies of the Karmapa Lamas the 10-year gap between the death of Dusum Khyenpa (1193 CE) and Karma Pakshi's birth (1204 CE) which is not common among the lines of *Tulkus*, is of great significance.¹⁶²

The power struggle between the Sakya and Kagyu could have started at the time of Kublai Khan, as according to some Mongol historical accounts, Karma Pakshi tried to convert Kublai Khan.¹⁶³ This sectarian conflict was translated into a military stand-off very soon as the Drikung Myriarchy challenged the Sakya rule and "attacked them" with the help of Il-Khan troops. This led to a massacre of many monks by the chief administrator Ag-len and Mongol troops.¹⁶⁴ The mastermind of the attack, "Drikung Gonpa" was executed in a gruesome way.¹⁶⁵

The power of Sakyapa lasted for three-quarters of a century and another noble family with affiliation to a rival Buddhist school took control of some parts of Tibet. At the same time, after the death of Kublai Khan, the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (Wyl. *rang 'byung rdo rje*) was invited to the Mongol court and venerated in 1331.¹⁶⁶

The Phagmo drupa (Wyl. *phag mo gru pa*) had links to Drikungpa and the Il-Khan Mongols. Later they managed to take power under Jangchub Gyaltsen (Wyl. *byang chub rgyal mtshan*) known as Tai Situ, in southern Tibet and broke away from the rule of Sakya in the 14th century. The Karmapa became the most influential lama in the Mongol court.¹⁶⁷ The Karmapa

¹⁶¹. Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993. Print, p. 495.

¹⁶². Ibid p. 494

¹⁶³. Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, p. 202.

¹⁶⁴. Shakabpa, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden. *One Hundred Thousand Moons: an Advanced Political History of Tibet*. Trans. Derek F. Maher. Vol. one. Leiden: Brill, 2010. PDF file, p. 70.

¹⁶⁵. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p. 81.

¹⁶⁶. Ibid, p. 73

¹⁶⁷. Ibid, p. 84

Lamas were also extremely influential in the Kham region and south-eastern Tibet where a kingdom called Ling was formed.¹⁶⁸

After Phagmo drupa, the Rinpung (Wyl. *Rin-spungs*) took power followed by Tsangpa kings who ruled till the mid-17th century. The three secular kings were affiliated with the Kagyu School and during their reign, this school exerted great political influence in Tibet.¹⁶⁹ In this historical period, the Karmapa Lamas asked for Mongol military support to solve their problems with their feuds.¹⁷⁰

In 1407, the Fifth Karmapa Deshin Shegpa (Wyl. *de bzhin gshegs pa*) arrived in the capital of China. This event marked the restoration of the patron-priest relationship with the Ming emperor.¹⁷¹

In the meantime, a puritan school of Tibetan Buddhism, namely Gelugpa, was emerging which would prove to be doctrinally less tolerant compared to other schools. The true consolidation of the teachings of Tsongkhapa into a distinct school was actually done by his student Khedrup (Wyl. *mkhas grub*). However, since Tsongkhapa combined tantric practices of Nyingma and Kagyu with scholastic philosophy of Sakyapa, Khedrup was faced with the challenge of making the school distinct. To solve this problem, he emphasized Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Indian Buddhist philosophy. Also, in his secret biography of Tsongkhapa, he claimed that his teacher's philosophical stance is in fact *Mañjuśrī's*, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, to give it authority. This identity-making process was accompanied by the suppression of other philosophical interpretations even those held by Tsongkhapa's own students.¹⁷²

The shift in the political balance, divided the ruling Phagmo drupa, with the faction residing in Ü and Lhasa supporting Gelugpa and the group in the Tsang region backing Karma Kagyu. The differences between the patrons, very soon, escalated into a sectarian war. In the 1480s, a group of Gelugpa monks destroyed a Karma Kagyu monastery outside Lhasa. In

¹⁶⁸. Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, p. 203.

¹⁶⁹. Curren, Erik D. *Buddha's Not Smiling: Uncovering Corruption at the Heart of Tibetan Buddhism Today*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006. Web, p.46.

¹⁷⁰. Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, p. 204.

¹⁷¹. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p. 91.

¹⁷². Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p. 107.

response to this act, the ruler of Tsang sent troops to Lhasa and as a result Gelugpa monks were banned from the annual prayer festival.¹⁷³

In the meanwhile, the balance of power was changing again with the Mongols regaining their influence. This resulted in a new alliance between the Mongols and the Gelugpa School. Tsang and Karmapa Lamas posed a threat to the Gelugpa School and during this time, a Gelugpa monk called Sonam Gyaltso, found his way to the court of Altan Khan. By this time, Altan Khan wanted to construct an image similar to Kublai Khan for himself and therefore, needed a figure like Phagpa. Sonam Gyaltso, soon became the tutor of the Khan and was granted the title of the Dalai Lama. The now Dalai Lama started a missionary travel across Mongolia and converted the Mongols into Buddhism.¹⁷⁴

After the death of the Dalai Lama, the situation became fragile as other schools also sent lamas to Mongolia. Schaik believes, at this point, the Gelugpa School took the initiative through a political action to preserve the advantage of the new military support. While at first the candidate for the *Tulku* of the Third Dalai Lama was selected from central Tibet and supported by many lamas, suddenly, Sonam Gyaltso's treasurer announced that the *Tulku* was in Mongolia itself. He was nobody but Altan Khan's grandson.¹⁷⁵

The Fourth Red Hat Lama, Shamarpa wrote a letter in poetry to the Fourth Dalai Lama, apparently to show his support. Unable to interpret it, the attendants of the Fourth Dalai Lama sent a harsh reply to Shamarpa. Later, this misinterpretation was repeated about another Karma Kagyu lama who wrote a prayer in poem on a scarf offered to the Fourth Dalai Lama. In revenge, Mongol troops raided stables and houses of Shamarpa. This triggered retaliation by the Tsang chieftain and Karma Kagyu supporters; and a power struggle ensued between the two schools.¹⁷⁶

The recognition of a Mongol as the Dalai Lama prompted influential Mongol leaders to make their children recognized as *Tulkus* too.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³. Ibid, p. 112.

¹⁷⁴. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p. 115.

¹⁷⁵. Ibid, P. 116.

¹⁷⁶. Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. *Tibet: a Political History*. New York: Potaia Publications, 1984. Print, p.98.

¹⁷⁷. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p. 117.

During the time of Yonten Gyaltso, the Fourth Dalai Lama, the Karmapa Lamas also found allies among Mongol princes, but their power was weakened by a fight between the Amdo Black Hat and Red Hat Kagyupas.¹⁷⁸

In 1537, a plot was allegedly hatched by the Fifth Shamarpa who forged an alliance with Drikung and the Tsang governor against Gelugpa. In 1546, monks from Drepung monastery of Gelugpa attacked people of the camp of Karmapa. The Shamarpa alliance was allegedly aimed at suppressing Gelugpa and depriving them from the support of their main patrons.¹⁷⁹

Shakabpa blamed the attendants of Shamarpa and Dalai Lama for willing to have war and then, they prevented the two leaders from meeting despite overtures made by them.¹⁸⁰

The Tsang King Karma Phuntsog Namgyal (Wyl. *Kar-ma Phun-tshogs Rnam-rgyal*) managed to unite most of Tibet and unlike other times, he did not rely on the military support of foreigners. He visited Lhasa and asked for an audience with the Dalai Lama which was rejected by Sonam Drakpa (Wyl. *Bsod-nams grags-pa*), the Dalai Lama's attendant. Sonam Drakpa cited Tsangpa's hostility toward Gelugpa for his decision. Feeling offended, the king attacked Lhasa in 1618. The attack met with resistance from the Gelugpa monks and their lay supporters. The Tsang established military camps outside Lhasa.¹⁸¹

Schaik says the new Tsang king was affiliated with Karma Kagyu; however, he patronized Sakya, Nyingma and Jonangpa and showed willingness to do so with Gelugpa, despite historical enmity between them. The Gelugpa School realized that without Mongol support it would have to be one of the schools among the others without any superiority and the Dalai Lama would have to remain only another *Tulku* like others.¹⁸²

After the death of the Fourth Dalai Lama, the Tsang King banned the appointment of another Dalai Lama. This led to tension with the Gelugpa monks and the Mongol presence in the streets of Lhasa indicated a looming war. However, the search was performed secretly and the then Panchen Lama petitioned the king to remove the ban.

¹⁷⁸. Stein, R. A. "The Evolution of Monastic Power." *The Tibetan History Reader*. Ed. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer. New York: Columbia University, 2013. 196-207. Print, p. 206.

¹⁷⁹. Ibid, p. 205

¹⁸⁰. Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. *Tibet: a Political History*. New York: Potala Publications, 1984. Print, p.98.

¹⁸¹. Ibid, p. 101.

¹⁸². Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p. 118.

The candidate for the position was from an aristocrat family and Karma Kagyu and Jonang were arguing over claiming him as one of their *Tulkus*. However, the king decided to remove the ban and allow the Gelugpa to claim the boy. The removal of the ban was through a letter in which the king criticized the *Tulku* tradition and said there were no *Tulkus* for neither the Buddha nor Tsongkhapa and the presence of this much *Tulkus* is a source of shame.¹⁸³

The Fifth Dalai Lama visited the Mongol Khan, Gushri Khan in Lhasa, in 1637. The meeting in fact was arranged through the political prowess of the Gelugpa lamas and during the meeting, the Dalai Lama bestowed the title of the Dharma King on the Khan. The Fifth Dalai Lama's attendant Sonam Choephel kept his ties with the Mongol Khan and the Khan's army entered Eastern Tibet under the pretext of defending Buddhism against a local ruler supporting Bon.

This move received approval from the Dalai Lama. However, Sonam Choepel known as Desi sent an oral message to the Khan in which he told the Khan to continue with his army to Central Tibet and into the stronghold of the Tsang king. The Fifth Dalai Lama wrote that he did not know about the message.¹⁸⁴

The Mongols succeeded in suppressing the Tsang King. However, this time despite the Fifth Dalai Lama's claim that he was not comfortable inviting the Mongol army, he decided to use the advantage of their support and sent a threat to the Tenth Karmapa to force him to sign an agreement in which he would promise not to make any trouble for the Gelugpa in future. The Karmapa refused, citing that he had never made any trouble for the Gelugpa. Then this time, upon the Dalai Lama's request, the Mongol army put siege on the camp of the Karmapa. He managed to flee to Bhutan. However, Kagyu monks who resisted were killed.¹⁸⁵

With his typical apologist approach, Shakabpa tries to blame the Tenth Karmapa for hatching a plot against the Gelugpa and exonerate the Fifth Dalai Lama about the crack-down.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ . Ibid, p. 118.

¹⁸⁴ . Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History* . New Haven: Yale University , 2011 . PDF file, pp. 120-22.

¹⁸⁵ . Ibid, p. 122

¹⁸⁶ . Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. *Tibet: a Political History*. New York: Potaia Publications, 1984. Print, p.112.

In 1642, the Fifth Dalai Lama took political power in Tibet and this point, in history, is the start of the Gelugpa rule which continued until the Chinese take-over of the country in the 20th century.

6.3 The big picture

An overview of some historical events mentioned above, gives a picture of the relationship between Tibetan Buddhism, the *Tulku* institution and politics.

The main players in Tibet's political scene have been taking advantage of Tibetan Buddhism; the concept of guru devotion as interpreted by Tibetans; and the influence of high lamas to control Tibet.

The unique position of the head of monasteries, some of them from aristocratic families, allowed them to accumulate money and even military power to rule parts of Tibet. This situation led to the eruption of infightings over political power and competition for gaining patronage. Tibetan lamas manipulated their patrons with either good or mischievous motivations.

Among the instances cited, cases such as Sakya Pandita and Phagpa represented wise moves taken by benevolent people, who tried to save their people and Buddhism.

The picture of Tibet under the rule of lamas was not better than their secular counterparts around the world in the medieval era, with spreading lies, poisoning, conspiracy and deception in vogue.

Even the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama is filled with stories contradicting his claims of innocence. He said that he was reluctant and unaware of the move by Desi to invite the Mongols, yet when he was asked by Desi to do something to stop the blood-shed, he simply replied that he did not start the war, "but now that Desi had started this process, he had better see it through".¹⁸⁷ He preferred to allow the war to continue and took the advantage of the situation to find a final solution for the problem of the rival Karma Kagyu School.

The years following the Fifth Dalai Lama's rule witnessed rebellions which ended in a blood-bath on the hands of the savage supporters of "the Bodhisattva of Compassion". In 1660,

¹⁸⁷. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p.121.

an insurgency erupted in Tsang and the Great Fifth called the Gushri Khan army to suppress it. In the following passage, he encourages the Mongol army to suppress his enemies (emphasis is mine):

[Of those in] the band of enemies who have despoiled the duties entrusted to them;
Make the male lines like trees that have had their roots cut;
Make the *female* lines like brooks that have dried up in winter;
Make the *children* and *grandchildren* like *eggs smashed against rocks*;
Make the servants and followers like heaps of grass consumed by fire;
Make their dominion like a lamp whose oil has been exhausted;
In short, *annihilate* any traces of them, even their names.¹⁸⁸

Even apologist Tibetan historians recorded the accounts of the forced conversion of monks into Gelugpa, the most famous of which was the forced conversion of Jonangpa.¹⁸⁹

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama has tried to justify the works of his predecessor by describing it as a political move to preserve the unity of Tibet. However, the same “political motivation” cannot justify the ban he put on the Sakyapa works which only criticized the philosophical view of Tsongkhapa.¹⁹⁰

Still international powers play with the card of the *Tulku* institution. While there is no doubt about the brutality used in the crack-down on Tibetans, many people are unaware about the fact that the investment of the Capitalist West against their Communist rivals has played an important role in the spread and popularity of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan cause.

The CIA was involved in fueling defiance against China in Tibet¹⁹¹ and authors like Trimondi believe that the West even fabricated myths about the Dalai Lama’s escape to India to give it a miraculous angle.¹⁹² The Dalai Lama Administration admitted that it had been receiving \$1.7 million a year in the 1960s from the CIA to support the Tibetan cause.¹⁹³ The Dalai Lama

¹⁸⁸. Curren, Erik D. *Buddha's Not Smiling: Uncovering Corruption at the Heart of Tibetan Buddhism Today*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006. Web, p.52.

¹⁸⁹. Shakabpa, Tsepon W. D. *Tibet: a Political History*. New York: Potaia Publications, 1984. Print, p.113.

¹⁹⁰. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p.123.

¹⁹¹. Kenneth Conboy, James Morrison. *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet*. n.p: University Press of Kansas, 2011. Web, n.pag.

¹⁹². Trimondi, Victor und Victoria. *The Shadow of the Dalai Lama: Sexuality, Magic and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*. Trans. Mark Penny. N.p.: n.p., 2003. PDF file, n.pag.

¹⁹³. The New York Times. "World News Briefs; Dalai Lama Group Says It Got Money From C.I.A." *The New York Times* 9 October 1998: n.pag. Web, n.pag.

later said that the CIA aid was detrimental to the Tibetans and questioned the motivations of the Americans.¹⁹⁴

If Curren is right, the controversy surrounding the 17th Karmapa is politically motivated and rooted in the old power struggle between the various Tibetan sects.¹⁹⁵

The involvement of Tibetan religious leaders in politics, even reportedly, caused the Indian government to be suspicious about the loyalty and true intentions of Ogyen Trinley Dorje, one of the two claimants of the position of the 17th Karmapa.¹⁹⁶

The supporters of Ogyen Trinley Dorje accuse Shamarpa's allies of trying to keep their grip over the wealth of the Rumtek Monastery, through a political game involving the Indian security service with some rumors being spread by Shamarpa's supporters about the suspicious circumstances of his death.¹⁹⁷

The author was informed by several Bhutanese monks, some of them high lamas, about a ban in Bhutan on the establishment of any Gelugpa monastery. If it is confirmed, it would indicate the bitter memories of the old power struggle are still haunting Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴. Mann, Jim. "CIA Gave Aid to Tibetan Exiles in '60s, Files Show." *The Los Angeles Times* 15 September 1998: n.pag. Web, n.pag.

¹⁹⁵. Curren, Erik D. *Buddha's Not Smiling: Uncovering Corruption at the Heart of Tibetan Buddhism Today*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006. Web, p.45.

¹⁹⁶. The New York Times. "Tibetan Lama Faces Scrutiny and Suspicion in India." *The New York Times* 7 February 2011: n.pag. Web.

¹⁹⁷. Dodin, Thierry. *On Shamar Rinpoche's death and the future of Karmapa*. 23 June 2014. Web. 8 January 2015, n.pag. Even there are rumors about using magic against him.

¹⁹⁸. The ban was in place in the past. See Teltscher, Kate. *The High Road to China*. The Great Britain : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006. PDF file.

Chapter 7: From Certainty to Controversy

As discussed in Chapter 5, among the methods employed in finding a *Tulku*, several are of great significance in terms of providing clues to the psychological and cultural foundations of the process, as well as its reliability. Among these, the role of visions, “extraordinary” experiences of would-be *Tulkus* and prophecies are of importance.

Commenting on the autobiography of the Second Karmapa, Matthew T. Kapstein writes: “like many leading Tibetan Buddhist masters, he was prone throughout much of his life to intense visionary experiences, and these formed a major part of his inspiration as a doctrinal author.”¹⁹⁹

The practice of finding clues about the next reincarnation is also based on visions. Such over-emphasis on extraordinary experiences calls for a close examination of the phenomenon of vision and mystical experience.

7.1 Psychology of the *Tulku* institution

Robert Paul provides a psychoanalytical framework within which he describes the *Tulku* institution as a way to solve the conflict between the father and son in its oedipal sense. What Paul suggests is that the young monk (as the son-figure) identifies himself with his predecessor (the deceased lama)²⁰⁰ which based on psychoanalytical theories is a mechanism for solving the so-called Oedipal Complex.

Besides such seemingly extreme interpretations, there are other psychological elements which have dramatically contributed to the formation of the *Tulku* system. The 5th version of *the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)* defines delusion as:

A false belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly held despite what almost everyone else believes and despite what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary. The belief is not

¹⁹⁹. Kapstein, Matthew T. *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print, p. 100.

²⁰⁰. Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1993. Print, p. 495.

ordinarily accepted by other members of the person's culture or subculture (i.e., *it is not an article of religious faith*) [the italics are by the author].²⁰¹

The manual further defines grandiose delusion as “a delusion of inflated worth, power, knowledge, identity, or special relationship to *a deity or famous person*”.²⁰²

In this respect, to believe that one is emanation of a certain deity or master is considered as a kind of delusion *provided that it is not explainable by the cultural context the person lives in or the religious beliefs he/she holds*.

However, even there are instances indicating that the DSM emphasis to exclude unproven claims consistent with the cultural background of a person from the definition of delusion is at best an example of political correctness.

Let us cite an example: in the majority of Christian denominations, there is a belief in the return of Jesus Christ to the Earth, as part of an apocalyptic scenario. However, what would be the judgment of society towards a person from a Christian cultural background who claims to be Christ who has returned? More importantly, what would be the exact boundaries of sanity and insanity in respect of religious claims?

One answer is the presence and absence of impairment in social, educational or other important areas of functioning could serve as a criteria. Yet, this criterion is not absolute.

Between ten to fifteen percent of schizophrenic patients are described as having religious delusions. This implies that the exclusion criterion of “cultural context” suggested by *DSM-V* is not reliable, as the content of the religious delusions “is closely linked to prevalent religious beliefs in a patient’s particular time and place”.²⁰³

To highlight the fact that this delusional experience is within the range of a normal mental state, it would probably be better to use the term quasi-delusional to neither ignore the

²⁰¹. American Psychiatric Association. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013. Print, p. 819.

²⁰². Ibid, p. 819.

²⁰³. Pilgrim, Anne Rogers and David. *A Sociology of Mental Health and Illness*. New York: Open University, 2005. PDF file, p. 31.

delusion-like nature of the experience nor its normality. Also, this would allow us to avoid attributing insanity to the people who are not.

The second component of the term refers to idiosyncrasy of the experience. This use of the term may invite criticism, because delusion implies idiosyncrasy. In response to this criticism one should note that “idiosyncratic”, here, is an adjective to describe the mystical experience in question and emphasizes the uniqueness and peculiarity of such experiences.

Understanding this phenomenon is crucial to understanding the psychological basis on which the *Tulku* institution and most of similar phenomena in Tibetan Buddhism are based.

7.2 Psychopathology as messengers of the sacred

Besides dreams and visions which are common vehicles of the message of the realm of the sacred in every shamanistic culture, there are other phenomena which are interpreted as miraculous signs in such a context.

A good example is the occurrence of experiences which are viewed as the symptoms and signs of mental or neurological conditions by modern science. Many of the “miraculous signs” described by Tibetans fall within the category of what modern psychology calls parasomnias or sleep disorders.

Sleep terrors and rapid eye movement sleep behavior disorder are associated with arousals at the middle of the night with vocalization and motor behavior and they are among disorders with “mysterious aspects”.

A good example is the case of a Sherpa family whose identity is kept undisclosed to protect them. The author witnessed the case concerning the son of a Sherpa driver suffering from episodes of arousal, screaming and vocalization in the middle of the night. While the boy was a case of parasomnia from the view point of modern medicine, he was diagnosed as being a *Tulku* by an “oracle” nun in Kathmandu.

Epilepsy is another neurological condition whose signs have always been a source of awe and fear in various religious traditions. Among the different types of the disorder, probably the

less-known type of psychomotor epilepsy, which is associated with bizarre behavior is more important.

A group of mental conditions collectively called dissociative disorders has also a close relation to “spirituality”. They include episodes of losing memory, wandering in a place, assuming a different identity and more importantly having more than one identity sometimes involving talking in different languages and with a different voice.

DSM-V says the disorder may be described in some cultures as an experience of possession.”²⁰⁴

In several cases described in the context of Tibetan culture as a sign of a *Tulku* talking about his past, one cannot rule-out the possibility of this disorder.

7.3 Identification and suggestion

Tulku Thondup cites “the extraordinary” stories about the children who talked about their past lives as a way of finding *Tulkus*. He says the Third Karmapa remembered his past lives and said that he was “in Tushita Heaven in the presence of Maitreya Buddha and many enlightened ones”. When the Third Karmapa was only three, he made his playmates make a throne for him and sitting on it, he wore a black hat and claimed that he was the Karmapa.²⁰⁵

Are such phenomena, actually the signs of miracles or *Tulkus*? The answer is that they could be anything ranging from the miraculous powers as Tulku Thondup believes to mere fabrications of the parents.

These experiences are also a part of the psychological correlates of the mythological heritage of a culture which is orally transmitted from one generation to another. The tradition of narrating myths, characters, behavioral patterns and cultural elements are embedded into our subconscious and they exert an everlasting effect on our life.

²⁰⁴. American Psychiatric Association. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013. Print, p. 155.

²⁰⁵. Rinpoche, Tulku Thondup. *Incarnation: the history and mysticism of the tulku tradition of Tibet*. Boston: Shambala, 2011. PDF file, n. pag.

The point is that miracles always required to be proved, while the best explanations for phenomena, usually, are the most feasible and simplest ones.

In a society like Tibet, to be a *Tulku* equals to enjoying a status like princes or imperial court's senior officials. The recognition of someone as a *Tulku* always brings a lot of spiritual and material advantage for him and his family. This makes parents wish their children to be a *Tulku* and as a rule, people usually see what they want to see.

The documentary *Unmistaken Child* has unintentionally disclosed this fact in the scenes where *Zopa*, the monk who searches for the *Tulku* of his teacher meet parents trying to persuade him that their child is a *Tulku*.²⁰⁶

Moreover, the mere fact that a child pretends that he or she is a high tantric master or high lama amounts to nothing extraordinary, as it could be a sign of identification with the heroes within the context of a certain culture.

7.4 Ambiguity and projection: the story of signs and letters

Psychologists have developed a group of tests called projective techniques whose purpose is to evaluate the contents of the subconscious mind. These tests have been in use since the 1920s and the most famous one is probably the Rorschach test.²⁰⁷

The test consists of ten inkblots to be shown to the subject for interpretation. Since the inkblots do not have any specific shape, the interpretation by the subject is a reflection of the content of his or her unconscious mind.

Such techniques which have deep roots in the folk culture of various nations are usually used as tools of divination in different cultures. Divination by the coffee slash, and “reading” cracks and motives on animal bones (Scapulimancy) is another projective technique.

In these projective techniques, ambiguity plays an important role as it allows people to project the content of their mind into meaningless motives or enigmatic statements and poems.

²⁰⁶. *Unmistaken Child*. Dir. Nati Baratz. Perf. Tenzin Zopa. Oscilloscope, 2008. DVD.

²⁰⁷. Urbina, Susana. *Essentials of Psychological Testing*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2004. PDF file, p.20.

The same is true about the so-called letters of prediction left by high lamas. In Chapter 6, it was told how a poet in praise of the Dalai Lama by Shamar Rinpoche was so ambiguous that it was apparently misinterpreted by the Fourth Dalai Lama's attendants as an insult.

The letters of predictions are the same and they are usually riddles to be solved by people who should use them as clues for finding their reincarnations.

Probably the most famous and yet controversial letter of the prediction is the one Tai Situ Rinpoche attributes to the Sixteenth Karmapa. The letter reads:

Emaho.
Self-awareness is always bliss;
The dharmadhatu has no center nor edge.
From here to the north [in] the
east of [the land] of snow
Is a country where divine thunder
spontaneously blazes
[In] a beautiful nomad's place with
the sign of a cow,
The method is Döndrub and the
wisdom is Lolaga.
[Born in] the year of the one
used for the earth
[With] the miraculous, far-reaching sound
of the white one;
[This] is the one known as Karmapa.
His is sustained by Lord Donyö Drupa;
Being nonsectarian, he pervades all directions;
Not staying close to some and distant from others, he is the protector of all beings:
The sun of the Buddha's Dharma that benefits others always blazes.²⁰⁸

The website of the Seventeenth Karmapa explains that the birth place of the candidate of Karmapa selected by Tai Situ Rinpoche is *Lhathok*. "*Lha*" means divine and "*thok*" means thunder. However, it adds in the poem "thunder" is called "gnam lcags" or "sky iron" which "poetically" refers to the thunder.²⁰⁹ Such claim could be both true and wrong.

The eighth line says "[In] a beautiful nomad's place with the sign of a cow." The official web site of the 17th Karmapa claims since the nomadic community where the Karmapa was born

²⁰⁸ The Official Website of the 7th Gyalwang Karmapa . *The Letter of Prediction by His Holiness the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa - Karmapa – The Official Website of the 17th Karmapa*. July 1992. Web. 1 January 2015, n.pag.

²⁰⁹ . Ibid, n.pag

is Bakor and “ba” means “cow,” so this verse refers to the claimant of the Karmapa position whom Tai Situ Rinpoche supports. Again, here the term “*dodjo*” which is synonym to cow has been used to refer to the sign. But it is not possible to prove this claim again. “The cow” is associated with any nomadic community and it can also refer to anything else.

The 12th line is interpreted as referring to the birth sign of Ogyen Trinley Dorje who is supported by the web site. His birth animal and element is Wood Ox. The poem, however, refers to the Earth. To solve this contradiction the web site interprets the verse: “[*Born in*] *the year of the one used for the earth*” like this: because the ox is used to plow the earth, the verse refers to this animal. But with this flexibility in interpretation, why cannot it be interpreted as anything else?²¹⁰ For example, one might claim that the verse refers to the element of the Tibetan year, namely the earth or what is used for the earth could be water.

About the last verse “[With] the miraculous, far-reaching sound of the white one,” the web site’s claim is more difficult to be proved as it is alleged to refer to a miracle²¹¹ whose authenticity is never provable.

In Chapter 3, it was shown that the existence of a letter of prediction by the First Karmapa is questionable. In some references, this oral “letter of prediction” was quoted as a sentence like this: “At a future time, in Ngothong near the Yangtse River, one will come to fulfill my intention.”²¹² Martine believes this sentence clearly refers to Karma Pakshi but she fails to provide any concrete proof.

If the story of the letter was true, still it would be possible that after the recommendations of their teacher, the First Karmapa’s disciples would *expect* to find someone from the mentioned region and they could have found someone accidentally from the region rather than “the true” reincarnation.

Also many scriptures are cited as prophesizing the appearance of Karmapa. Regardless of the fact that prophesizing a reviver of the faith is a shared tradition among religions, throughout

²¹⁰. “His Holiness was born in the Wood Ox year; a tree lives from the earth and an ox is used to plow it.”

²¹¹. “This refers to the sound of the conch shell that miraculously resounded in the air for about an hour after His Holiness’ birth.”

²¹². Martin, Michele. *Music in the Sky: The Life, Art, and Teachings of the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje*. Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2003. PDF file, p.274.

history many people claimed to be the promised reviver of the faith and almost all of them failed to prove their claims.

In Chapter 5, the story of the three letters as the sign of the next reincarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was recounted. The letters “A”, “Kh” and “Ma” in the story could stand for anything other than Amdo or Karma Shartsong Monastery.

The tools and methods for finding *Tulkus*, therefore, work based on ambiguity. The claimed signs can stand for everything and nothing. The signs found in this spiritual Rorschach may easily be reinterpreted over and over to make them fit to one choice.

7.5 The show of psychometry

The picture illustrated by movies and hagiographic literature about *Tulkus* is that they are able to find correctly the belongings of their predecessors. How much is this test reliable and how much is this picture consistent with reality?

The documentary *Unmistaken Child* provides us with a unique opportunity to closely examine the process. In the documentary, the candidate, a three year boy, has to choose from several objects some of which belong to his supposed predecessor. He succeeds in choosing the right objects one by one. However, from the viewpoint of a professional who is familiar with the methodology of psychological testing and observations, the circumstances of the test are problematic.

For such a test to be valid, the role of interfering variables must be eliminated. The shape, color and size of every object must be the same. The fact that the objects are put “among new fancier ones” does not necessarily change anything as selection depends on the taste of the person and is peculiar to him or her. It is even more difficult to determine what would be more fascinating for a child.

In the case of the *Unmistaken Child*, he chose the first vajra and bell in the row which is explainable by the issue of their accessibility as the first objects in the row. He had to choose between three rosaries, two of which were wooden and only one was a crystal one. He chose the crystal one. He had to choose a box from two boxes, one with floral design on it and one simple

red one. He chose the floral one.²¹³ All of the selections could be attributed to the flawed circumstances of the test which should have included mechanisms to make the objects equally selectable. For example all rosaries should have been like each other and the boxes should have been of the same size, color and design. Interestingly, the Fifth Dalai Lama failed the test. In his autobiography he writes:

The Master of Ten showed me the statues and rosaries, but I wasn't able to identify any... Then he went to the door and said, "I have great confidence in his recognition." In the end he became my tutor. When I wasn't attentive, he used to say, "Oh why didn't I confess at the time that you couldn't recognise the objects!"²¹⁴

7.6 Finding an unmistakable reincarnation?

As showed in the previous parts of the chapter, none of the methods used to recognize a *Tulku* is valid and reliable. A high lama has been recognized as a *Tulku* without passing an important test. This implies that he was selected and the test was a formality. The inconsistency in "signs" of *Tulkus* and the instances like the Fifth Dalai Lama proves the methodology related to the tradition is seriously flawed.

The so-called Letters of Prediction and prophecies are the same and they can be re-interpreted in a different way, over and over again. The people who believe on them never tell why their language is so enigmatic if they are written by Bodhisattvas, willing to make things easier for people.

In Chapter 6, it was shown how politics played a role in selecting *Tulkus*. This uncertainty surrounding the methodology of search for a *Tulku* has been a source of significant controversies some of which like the case of the Seventeenth Karmapa has shaken the foundations of Tibetan Buddhism.

With such incidents finding an "Unmistaken *Tulku*" is a great myth if not a big lie propagated by the official institution of Tibetan Buddhism and their supporters.

²¹³. *Unmistaken Child*. Dir. Nati Baratz. Perf. Tenzin Zopa. Oscilloscope, 2008. DVD.

²¹⁴. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p.119.

Chapter 8: the Birth of a Hierarchy

A close aide to Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, one of the highest lamas in the Karma Kagyu School, once quoted him as saying that in the past, it was not that easy for people to meet a high lama and if they saw a Rinpoche (*Tulku*) from a very far distance they would become very happy.²¹⁵

Such reports reflect a bitter fact that in “the Golden Age” of Buddhism in Tibet, a full-blown hierarchy was in place.

Our information about the structure of Tibetan society before the advent of Buddhism is scarce; however, from the mythology surrounding the ruling family and noble clans in Tibet, one can infer that a kind of what Bruce Lincoln calls regigony (i.e. a story about the origin of kingship).²¹⁶

Like many other non-Buddhist elements which have mixed into early Buddhist doctrines throughout history, the hierarchical structure of Tibetan society has been absorbed into Tibetan Buddhism. As Walter puts it, even the Tibetan word for monastery (i.e. *dgon*) originally had a military use and the function of *dgon* and fortifications was the same. In pre-occupation Tibet, monasteries were centers of administration, tax collection and places for monks to do confidential tasks for the state.²¹⁷

Waddell’s work is among the first scholarly attempts to provide a picture of the organized hierarchical structure of Tibetan monasteries. He classifies the official positions inside a monastery into 8 main categories along with several secondary ones, including the tax collector.²¹⁸

²¹⁵. It was part of a personal conversation between the author and Gloria Jones, the Rinpoche’s aide.

²¹⁶. Walter, Michael L. *Buddhism and Empire*. Leiden: Brill, 2009. PDF file, p.18.

²¹⁷. Ibid pp. 4-5.

²¹⁸. Waddell, L. Austine. *The Buddhism of Tibet Or Lamaism*. London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1895. Print, p.188.

These monasteries were centers of power and wealth and like any organization dealing with money and power, they suffered from corruption.²¹⁹ In such big institutions, unrestrained behavior of monks and violating the monastic code of conduct was not uncommon.²²⁰

8.1 Tulku and the issue of child monks

A *Tulku* in most cases is considered as some person with high potentials of realization who needs training based on the monastic curriculum. Recognizing a child as a *Tulku* thus is usually accompanied by separating a child from his family and putting him in a monastery. This practice has dramatic effects on the life of the children.

From the modern perspective, not only is such an experience psychologically traumatic, it also puts the children at risk of abuse. Beating, insult and bullying are reported by children who lived in such monasteries. Ruben Derksen, a Western *Tulku* from the Netherlands, explicitly talks about the dark side of the monastery life.²²¹

Official reports regarding sexual abuse of children in monasteries are not as frequent as the cases in the Catholic Church, yet like any instance of sexual abuse, under-reporting of such incidences is a high possibility. As a result, what we witness is the tip of an iceberg.

Van Schaik talks about a kind of homosexual symbiotic relationship in which a senior monk protects his *drombo* (a passive sexual partner) in return for sex.²²² The so-called “punk monks” used to be notorious for using young boys as *drompo*.²²³

The most high-profile case of child abuse in Buddhist monasteries is probably the case of the Second Kalu Rinpoche. In 2012, the Second Kalu Rinpoche, a young monk, posted a video

²¹⁹. *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

²²⁰. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p.110.

²²¹. *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

²²². Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, p.110.

Such relationship usually involves non-penetrating sex as the latter is punishable by expulsion from monastery.

²²³. Goldstein, Melvyn C. *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet : Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Berkeley: University of California, 1998. PDF file, p.19.

on Youtube, in which he disclosed the details of his sexual abuse by senior monks while he was in a monastery. He tells how his own tutor attacked him with a knife.²²⁴

Exposure to abuse is not the only adverse effect of sending children to monasteries. It is a kind of deciding the fate of the child who is put in a monastery. Thanks to contact between Tibetans and Westerners, today, secular education such as mathematics is included in the curriculum of most schools affiliated to major monasteries. However, the observations by the author revealed that this education, usually, neither match the one provided to children outside monasteries, nor is it sufficient to allow the child monks run a secular life if they decide to leave the monastic life someday.

Higher education is a luxury, and while some progressive monasteries started to fund talented monks (and nuns) to receive university degrees, the consequence was “disastrous” from the view point of the monastery officials. In one instance, the Thrangu monastery sent a dozens of monks to receive higher education in various fields, including Tibetan medicine. However, only a few monks (one or two) stayed in the monastery after they graduated.

Such observations indicate a sizeable number of the monks who are sent to monasteries during their childhood, probably would leave the monastic life, if they find the opportunity, despite the stigma associated with disrobing in Tibetan society.

Based on a raw estimation, the selection of monks for more advanced education seems to be based on their relationship with families of *Tulkus* or senior lamas, although statistical analysis is required to confirm this observation.

The practice of recruiting child monks is not always condoned by progressive lamas. However, according to the author’s informants, the number of monks in a monastery is a matter of prestige and therefore high lamas are put under pressure by their attendants and aides to recruit more and more children.

From the educational viewpoint, however, the practice of recruiting child monks has two sides. While in a modern society, it would definitely be an example of neglect on the parents’

²²⁴. Rinpoche, Kalu. *Confessions of Kalu Rinpoche*. n.p: You Tube, 28 November 2011. Web. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5Ka3bEN1rs>>.

side, in countries like Nepal or among Tibetan diaspora residing there, the moral dimensions of the issue is not as clear as this. Many children who are brought to monasteries would not receive proper minimal education due to the poverty of their families and in this context the disadvantages should be weighed against the positive aspects.

Anyway, the experience of separation from parents is traumatic in most cases even for high *Tulkus* like the Karmapa.²²⁵

Gesar Makpo, a *Tulku* and the son of Chogyam Trungpa, says how his British mother finally gave him up and sent him to the Shechen Monastery for training. Despite the presence of his “kind teacher” Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, he could not tolerate the separation and returned back home.²²⁶

8.2 Sitar in a symphony: Westernizing *Tulku*

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, one of the few critics of the *Tulku* institution within Tibetan Buddhism, hails the practice of finding *Tulkus* in the West as a positive development indicating that a Bodhisattva manifests everywhere and in any form.²²⁷

The issue, however, proved to be more complicated than what Khyentse Rinpoche believes. Such recognitions of Western *Tulkus* were usually welcomed and a source of pride for the idealist people living during the era of a prevailing spiritualist fever in the 1960s and 70s. Many of these recognitions were made based on the “extraordinary” experiences of the selected children.

While the idealist approach of Western Buddhists was a source of conflict for living a modern life, equally, the expectations of Tibetan teachers in exile about the role of these Western *Tulkus* contradicted the realities of life in modern societies. This out of the context assimilation gave rise to a lot of controversies.

Few cases like Elijah Ary and Wyatt Arnold tried to identify themselves with their new role in an inconsistent culture, however, in most cases like the case of Gesar Makpo, Western

²²⁵. See Karmapa’s interview in Gesar Makpo’s documentary “*Tulku*”

²²⁶. *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

²²⁷. Ibid

Tulkus decided to be only a good person and live a normal life without accepting their traditional role.

Ösel Hita Torres, the Spanish *Tulku* of Lama Thubten Yeshe, told *El Mundo* in 2009 that "When I was 14 month, I had already been recognized and taken to India. I was dressed in a yellow hat, and put on a throne, people worshiped me ... they took me from my family and put me in a medieval situation in which I suffered a lot. It was like living a lie."²²⁸

He dashed the hopes of Lama Thubten Yeshe's followers who predicted that he would have great teachings on the Six Yogas of Naropa and complete his work in the lama's next life.²²⁹

Beginning from the early years of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, a series of controversies mostly involving sex scandals hit the institution.

Probably, Chogyam Trungpa is one of the most successful Tibetan teachers in the West. When he arrived in the West he disrobed, received modern Western education and tried to modernize the language of Tibetan Buddhism; although he was not always successful to avoid ambiguity and confusion, when mixing these two cultures. He was credited with introducing the concept of "Crazy Wisdom" into the West.

To put it technically, Crazy Wisdom is another name for the antinomianism which has always been associated with Buddhism as a reaction to "Indian legalism" since the emergence of Mahāyāna.²³⁰

Probably, Chogyam Trungpa found this unorthodox way of Buddhist life more suitable to a materialistic society like the Western one; and it would also address his concerns about the development of what he correctly called "spiritual materialism".

However, his method cost him his life²³¹ and led to reckless behavior of some of his followers. A mixture of extremes of flaws and talents, Trungpa was right about many things,

²²⁸. "El niño lama se hace agnóstico." *El Mundo* 31 June 2009: n.pag. Web, n.pag. Translation form Spanish by the author.

²²⁹. Yeshe, Lama Thubten. *The Bliss of Inner Fire*. Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1998. Print, p. xxiv.

²³⁰. Faure, Bernard. *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998. Print, pp. 39, 98.

including the trend in Western Buddhism and its eventual metamorphosis into spiritual materialism. As American Zen priest and author Brad Warner puts it, it is extremely difficult to definitely know whether he was an example of Crazy Wisdom or just a Tibetan monk facing a cultural shock which made him behave recklessly.²³²

The situation for other Tibetan teachers was quite different. News of sex scandals involving high lamas including the first Kalu and Sogyal Rinpoche were surfaced by the media, bringing up questions about the nature of such antinomianism.²³³

Moreover, the recognition of *Tulkus* in the West was not without controversy. For example, when Penor Rinpoche declared Hollywood actor Steven Seagal a *Tulku*, the move was received with skepticism. There were rumors that the action movie actor received the title after donating a huge sum of money to the Rinpoche, who was establishing centers in the United States. Commenting on the issue, renowned Buddhist scholar and author Stephen Batchelor said: "My suspicion and I must admit it's a cynical one, is that this is a political-financial move."²³⁴

Penor Rinpoche's "misjudgment" did not remain limited to Seagal. Catherine Burroughs aka *Jetsunma Akhon Lhamo* attracted the attention of Penor Rinpoche due to her obsessive ritualistic behavior. In 1993, Martha Sherrill developed a relationship with Burroughs and made five years of her observations into a book about the first female Western *Tulku*. The scandals, she discloses include the accounts of reckless sexual behavior (which is still in conformity with a past history of delusional thought)²³⁵ and mind control tactics.²³⁶

In all of these examples, we face disharmony. In a shamanistic culture like Tibetan society, pathological mental signs might be viewed as a sign of spiritual power. In Chapter 6, examples of buying *Tulku*-hood in return for patronage were cited and it was seemingly viewed as normal political behavior in Tibet.

²³¹. At the time of his death, Chogyam Trungpa suffered from Alcohol- induced liver disease.

²³². Warner, Brad. *Crazy Wisdom? Or Just Plain Nuts?* 5 December 2011. Web. 6 January 2015, n.pag.s

²³³. *In the Name of Enlightenment*. Dir. Debi Goodwin. 2011. DVD.

²³⁴. Griffin, Nancy. " The Buddha from Another Planet ." *Esquire Magazine* 2 October 1997: n.pag. Web, n.pag.

²³⁵. Before being recognized as a *Tulku*, Catherine claimed to be a channel for Jeremiah, the prophet. This claim in the context of American society is considered as an example of pathologic delusion. Although difficult to make a diagnosis without visiting a person, combined by dis-inhibited behavioral pattern described by Sherrill, such grandeur delusions are characteristic of bipolar disorder.

²³⁶. Sherrill, Martha. *The Buddha from Brooklyn*. New York: Random House, 2009. Web, n.pag.

Having various “consorts” might be a norm in Tibet and those lamas who first encountered Western culture expected to be treated as usual. They might view this as an honor but reality in a humanistic egalitarian society is completely different.

In many instances of improper behavior by *Tulkus* and high lamas in the West, one usually faces an enabling environment created by a group of students who compete for closeness to a teacher.

The Dalai Lama tells Noriyuki Ueda that as a high lama, he is in a position to exploit other people.²³⁷ What he refers to is in fact the structure of Tibetan Buddhism and more importantly, an enabling environment created by people who over-cherish their teachers. The author once saw a picture of the 16th Karmapa in which his body is translucent. While this phenomenon is a normal physical one happening when the photograph is taken in low light with a moving subject, Tenzin Namgyal, an aide to the 16th Karmapa, describes it as a miracle:

I have seen the picture. If one has faith and devotion in the Karmapa, then seeing this picture will really increase one’s conviction in him. The photograph was taken while he was in meditative *shunyata* – then his body became translucent and you can see through it.²³⁸

Such claims which are rooted in a lack of knowledge about scientific facts are surprisingly circulated by well-educated Western devotees too.

²³⁷. Lama, the 14th Dalai. *The (Justifiably) Angry Marxist* Noriyuki Ueda. April 2006. Web, n.pag.

²³⁸. *Miracles of HH the XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa*. 1989. Web. 1 January 2015, n.pag.

Chapter 9: *Tulku* Institution as *Upāya*

9.1 *Upāya* as the middle way of ethics

In his opus magnum, *the Spiritual Couplet*, renowned Persian poet Rumi says: “Those who deal with children should use a childish language.”²³⁹

This verse beautifully illustrates the philosophy behind the notion of *Upāya* (skill in means or skillful means). While the concept of *Upāya* has been developed within the context of Mahāyāna, it is not an innovation by the school and even in Theravāda texts, the Buddha is believed to have adapted his teachings to the capacity of the audience. Yet, there is an important difference between *Upāya* from the viewpoint of Mahāyāna and Theravāda in that while the latter defines *Upāya* as a concept related to using language and teachings suitable for the audience, the former recognizes the use of apparently unorthodox practices providing that they are aimed at assisting sentient beings to achieve enlightenment.²⁴⁰

One of the most important Mahāyāna text dedicated to the concept of *Upāya* is the Lotus Sutra (Skt. *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*) where the entire life of the Buddha and what he taught are described as an *Upāya* to prepare people for accepting “the Great Vehicle” of Bodhisattva.²⁴¹

The *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*, an early Mahāyāna text endorses the behavior of a Bodhisattva who involves in what appears to be by definition “womanizing” providing that his aim would be pure.

Ananda, do not conceive of a holy person, someone practicing the Greater Vehicle correctly, as being faulty. Ananda, this is how you should understand it: ... the Bodhisattva great hero who is skilled in means, who is endowed with the thought of omniscience, will seek uninterruptedly for omniscience, even to the point of abiding among a holy retinue of women and enjoying, playing with, and taking pleasure in it.

²³⁹. Rumi, Mowlavi Jalauddin. *the Spiritual Couplet*. Tehran: Hermes Publications, 2011. Print, p.662.

²⁴⁰. Mroziak, Susanne. "Upaya." Buswell, Robert E. *Encyclopedia Of Buddhism*. New York: McMillan References USA, 2004. 871-72. PDF file, p.871.

²⁴¹. Yuyama, Tsugunari Kubo and Akira, trans. *Lotus Sutra*. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007, Web, n.pag.

Why so? Ananda, the Bodhisattva great hero who is skilled in means takes a retinue only to introduce it to the three jewels.²⁴²

If we accept the authenticity of the sutra, while this passage justifies some degrees of antinomianism, at the same time, it demarks the limits of transgression and *Upāya*. Any apparently immoral act might be considered as an *Upāya*: 1) if it attracts people to the Dharma and help them realize the Truth; and 2) if it is in line with compassion. To fulfill the requirement of being a Bodhisattva, one should cultivate compassion. This compassion should be translatable into caring for other beings' suffering; practically and pro-actively move to decrease their suffering and do it in a wise way.

The wisdom is an important component of any compassionate act which meets the standards of Bodhisattva way of life. Without wisdom, any act of compassion can turn into its opposite.

The principle of *Upāya* is a pragmatic approach to the legalism of Buddhism and sets the limits between a person of ethical principle and someone obsessed with the codes of conduct to the point of forgetting the philosophy of ethics (i.e. setting a standard for harmony and respect for others).

At the same time, *Upāya* provides a flexible framework to transcend non-spiritual items of life and make them into a useful means to serve the goals of spirituality and in this respect, it is itself a method to integrate spirituality into everyday life on one hand; and on the other hand, to avoid "spiritual materialism".

The Buddha once used the simile of tuning strings of a musical instrument to show his over-enthusiastic disciple *Sona* the value of moderation.²⁴³

In this way the concept can be viewed as the ethical counterpart of the Middle Way, which was preached by the Buddha.

²⁴². Tatz, Mark. *The Skill in Means (Upāyakauśalya)*Sūtra. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997. Print, p.31.

²⁴³. "Sona Sutta: About Sona" (AN 6:55).trans. Bhikkhu, Thanissaro, 30 November 2013. Web. 3 January 2015, n.pag

9.2 Celestial Bodhisattvas as a role model

In several occasions, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama reiterated that he is neither divine nor does he possess any miraculous power. He says he is a simple monk.²⁴⁴ Despite the fact that most people might view such statements as humble comments, given the Dalai Lama's adherence to the monastic code of conduct - banning lie, he cannot but utter the truth. Therefore, by such statements, he implies that at least about himself, he is not a deity.

If one refutes the notion that the *Tulkus* are emanations of celestial beings, will it mean that the activities of such high lamas are useless? The answer is that those people who developed the idea of celestial Bodhisattvas were probably just offering an alternative to the ordinary people who were being attracted to the faith elements of rival religions of their times.

However, regardless of the true motivation behind creating the idea, it served as a prototype or a symbolic embodiment of the positive qualities attributed to someone who trained his or her mind in accordance with the Dharma. For example, Bodhisattva *Chenrezig* is the crystallization of the highest level of compassion and acts as a kind of mental refuge for people who experience trouble. The mere belief that this Bodhisattva might help them could relieve their mental distress.

On other hand, the doctrine of Emptiness teaches that there is no inherent existence (i.e. any essence with fixed and inherent characteristic in the world)²⁴⁵. This doctrine implies that a Bodhisattva like other beings is devoid of any immutable essence which functions as the origin of his great compassion. In this way, as long as someone reflects the quality of compassion at a level far more than the average human-being, there will be no problem in considering him or her as an emanation of *Avalokiteśvara*.

²⁴⁴. The Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. *Brief Biography | The Office of His Holiness The Dalai Lama*. n.d. Web. 3 January 2015, n.pag.

²⁴⁵. See MMK

9.3 The double-blade sword of *Upāya*

For centuries, *Tulkus* has been serving as a source of inspiration for ordinary masses in Tibet and Bhutan. No matter how much flawed, ordinary people in these countries idealized their image and viewed the reflection of a Bodhisattva in them.

In the light of the same idealized picture, Tibetan people managed to change the not suitable social situation of Tibet into an opportunity to cultivate compassion and turn a nation of formidable warriors into a relatively pacifist one.

The system produced a wealth of philosophical literature as well as a treasure of unique meditation schools. Through bringing people from a low socioeconomic background to monasteries and providing them with proper education by standards of its time, the system contributed to training talented children and making them great scholars.

The growth of Buddhism in the West was given an impetus through the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism. Along with Zen, Tibetan Buddhism is currently the most popular school in the West. Such growth and popularity likely owe a lot to the sense of mystery surrounding the notion of finding the reincarnation of some passed-away person. Although no accurate figures are available and no independent study is conducted, from the stories of Western Buddhist converts, one can make a raw estimation that there has been a sense of *Tulku*-hood among some people who choose Tibetan Buddhism as their religion in the West. Such hypothesis is supported by the notion of “feeling a connection” with Tibetan Buddhism or certain lamas in the first encounter with them.

The story of the Western *Tulkus* suggest that many of them are people whose parents (or themselves) believed that they were a lama or lived in Tibet in their previous lives.

If such incidents help people to be a better human (not even a good Buddhist) it will meet the true goals of almost all religions.

The Second Kalu Rinpoche says that when he complained about the corruption in the heart of Buddhism today, he was told that a *Tulku* has the power to change Buddhism. He

apparently decided to take advantage of this relative authority to fight the corruption he witnessed.²⁴⁶

This power to reform is not absolute, however, as the system puts limitations to the authority of a *Tulku*; but, if used wisely and with correct strategy, a *Tulku* can overcome the conservative framework of the system and make reforms. This is what is used by figures like the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinly Dorje who decided to use their charisma and position to propagate modern values for creating a better world.

However, this unique status of *Tulkus* brings a great responsibility for them. Doing misconduct in the name of “Crazy Wisdom” or “*Upāya*”; committing crimes with impunity as once was common in Tibet for *Tulkus*; and worse than that, covering-up the wrongdoings of teachers to project an image of infallibility for *Tulkus*, will only destroy the future of Buddhism, in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular.

²⁴⁶. Finnigan, Mary. "The Lamas Who Give Tibetan Buddhism a Bad Name." *The Guardian* 8 October 2012: n.pag. Web, n.pag.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The idealized picture of Tibetan Buddhism portrays *Tulkus* as the living examples of Bodhisattvas in human societies. As a result, *Tulkus* are expected to be the crystallization of wisdom and compassion.

However, in reality, what historical evidence suggests contradicts this picture, in most instances. Like other human capabilities, wisdom requires training. It is dependent on various causes and conditions among which proper education and knowledge of scientific facts are crucial.

The current curriculum in monasteries excludes sufficient education in modern science and even in religious training, there are a lot of flaws in the current system.

Following an old tradition remnant of an age without any print technology, young monks who are lucky enough to be accepted at higher Buddhist education (or *Shedra* program) are currently forced to memorize a large volume of religious materials. Yet, the philosophical knowledge of *Shedra* students is usually limited to parroting the statements by old sages. In this respect, the knowledge of the majority of monks about Buddhist philosophy is not necessarily more than people who studied Buddhism outside monastic situations.

Sam Van Schaik writes that during the golden age of Buddhism in Tibet, Tibetan society witnessed a growth in monastic population. However, this mass monasticism caused a decline in standards in Tibetan monastic life. In most situations, Vinaya was only a set of rules on paper with monks hardly abiding by its details. In this situation, the center of monastic life has turned into rituals whose attendance is obligatory for almost all monks and nuns.²⁴⁷

Currently, the beautiful image portrayed by Western devotees of debating monks with high skills in logic is at best a fantasy. The debate follows a “choreographic” sequence of questions and answers and a few talented young monks who make innovation in debate risk punishment by strict tutors.

²⁴⁷. Schaik, Sam Van. *Tibet: a History*. New Haven: Yale University, 2011. PDF file, pp. 110-111.

The tragedy about ritualism of Tibetan Buddhism is not something new. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama says according to the ex-abbot of Loseling, some five thousand monks were in the monastery alone. The same historical source says only a thousand of these monks were studying and the remaining four thousand were probably “wandering about, wasting time not studying” as the Dalai Lama puts it.²⁴⁸ In such counter-productive environment, wisdom is a luxury.

Bitter rivalry, power struggle, violence and conspiracy among various factions affiliated to *Tulkus* indicate that the system has failed to produce compassion in its pragmatic sense too. Even if one accepts the traditional definition of wisdom as viewing the true nature or emptiness of phenomena, such instances of the politics of power in Tibetan Buddhism is enough to assess the level of wisdom produced by the system.

While the *Tulku* system could be viewed as another skillful means which has attracted many people to Tibetan Buddhism around the world, the disadvantage of the system should be weighed against its positive aspects.

One of the biggest deceptions propagated by apologists about Tibetan Buddhism is statements such as “Our wisdom is not enough to judge the misbehavior of gurus;” “We should not see fault in the guru;” or “Guru is a perfect Buddha.”²⁴⁹

The Buddha himself called on people to carefully evaluate his teachings and avoid blind faith and as Stephen Batchelor puts it, he never used the term guru.²⁵⁰ Still, many people try to justify the misconduct of teachers like the First Kalu Rinpoche and Sogyal Rinpoche through scriptures like *Upāyakusalaya Sūtra*. These apologists ignore an important fact: any *Upāya* is aimed at attracting people to the Dharma and help them reach Enlightenment. The bitter experience of the victims of the flawed gurus, however, traumatized them and negatively conditioned some of them into hating Buddhism forever.²⁵¹

In Tibetan society, the *Tulku* institution is a natural spontaneous and integrated institution; however, in the context of communities of idealist people in a modern society, some

²⁴⁸. Ibid, p.279

²⁴⁹. Such statements might be true in the proper context, but the problem is that they are used out of the context.

²⁵⁰. *In the Name of Enlightenment*. Dir. Debi Goodwin. 2011. DVD.

²⁵¹. Ibid

aspects of Tibetan Buddhism renders the risk of pushing people into creating cults centered around personality of gurus.

We should accept the fact that Kalu Rinpoche, Sogyal Rinpoche, etc., at least were ignorant about human rights in modern societies. They tried to act in the way that lamas behaved in old Tibet or probably had no idea about the criminal nature of their acts in the West.

Even the master of “Crazy Wisdom” Chogyam Trungpa who may be considered as a skillful teacher was not without significant flaws. For example, Trungpa’s successor Osel Tendzin suffered from HIV infection, yet out of his sheer ignorance about modern science, Chogyam advised Osel that he would not transmit HIV to anybody, if he did a purification ritual. Combined with reckless sexual behavior, in contradiction to the Bodhisattva ideal of relieving suffering of sentient beings both Osel and indirectly Chogyam Trungpa caused a lot of suffering for people through transmitting HIV to them.²⁵²

The *Tulku* institution puts children at risk of physical and sexual abuse and contributes to training monks who are at best, ritual masters and escape from monasteries whenever they can. Such a system feeds on mechanisms such as peer pressure, group censor, conformity with group and more importantly, mind control.

The Tulku institution might have once been useful and functional in Tibetan society, yet its exportation to other cultures might have a disastrous effect. Facing the true face of life in monasteries and an environment of deception and immorality, Tulku Ruben says he no more considers himself even as a Buddhist.²⁵³ Sending a child from the United States to a monastery in Bhutan, India or Nepal, only amounts to depriving him or her of modern practical education the child needs for survival in a modern society.

The hierarchical system of Tibetan society is duplicated in monasteries. Currently, the administration of monasteries is based on other factors than meritocracy. The late Shamar Rinpoche once wrote a book in which he suggested a model of democracy for governing the

²⁵². Falk, Geoffrey D. *Stripping the Gurus: Sex, Violence, Abuse and Enlightenment*. Toronto: Million Monkeys Press, 2009. PDF file, p.126.

²⁵³. *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

world. He, however, fails to answer the question - if the wisdom of Tibetan lamas is enough to offer a solution for executive problems of the world, why do they not start a democratic reform for governing monasteries in the first place?

With a system suppressing the voice of young brilliant monks, innovations and reforms, a system which deprives nuns of any say; the high rate of monks leaving monasteries is not surprising.

Keeping the flawed system of the *Tulku* institution in its current form through fabricating myths and miracles might help the Tibetan Buddhist institutions gain support and patronage in the short-term through attracting idealist people. However, in the long-term, it will pose an existential threat to the entire Tibetan Buddhism via the disillusioning of its followers.

From the doctrinal viewpoint, the *Tulku* tradition is justified and to some extent in conformity with Buddhist doctrines, although it suffers from the lack of historical precedence in other Buddhist cultures. However, the main question is whether it will serve the best interests of Buddhism in general.

Probably that is why Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche warns that the culture of *Tulku* tradition “is dying; it's not going to work anymore. And even if it... And if it doesn't work, I think it's almost for the better because this *Tulku*, it's going to... If the Tibetans are not careful, this *Tulku* system is going to ruin Buddhism. At the end of the day Buddhism is more important than *Tulku* system, who cares about *Tulku*... and what happens to them.”²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴. *Tulku*. Dir. Gesar Makpo. Perf. Asoka Makpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Dylan Henderson. 2009. DVD.

Appendices

Appendix I

Wylie Transliteration of Persons' Names

Name	Wylie
Agya Hotogtu	<i>a rgya ho thog thu</i>
Bardor Tulku	<i>bar-rdor sprul-sku</i>
Chagdud	<i>lcags mdud</i>
Changkya Khutukhtu	<i>lcang-skya ho-thog-thu</i>
Chodzin	<i>chos 'dzin</i>
Chodzin	<i>chos 'dzin</i>
Chogyam Trungpa	<i>chos rgyam drung pa</i>
Chogyam Trungpa	<i>chos rgyam drung pa</i>
Chokyi Gyalpo	<i>chos kyi rgyal po</i>
Chokyi Gyalpo	<i>chos kyi rgyal po</i>
Deshin Shegpa	<i>de bzhin gshegs pa</i>
Dodrupchen	<i>rdo grub chen</i>
Dorje Drak Rigzin Tulku	<i>rdo rje brag rig 'dzin</i>
Drikung Chetsang	<i>brug rgyal sras</i>
Drikung Chungtsang	<i>bri gung che tshang</i>
Drogön Chögyal Phagpa	<i>'gro mgon chos rgyal 'phags pa</i>
Drogon Rechen	<i>'gro mgon ras chen</i>
Drubgyu Tulku	<i>sgrub brgyud</i>
Druk Lama Tripa	<i>'brug bla ma khri pa</i>
Drukpa Chogon	<i>brug pa chos mgon</i>
Drukpa Zhabdrung	<i>'brug pa zhabs drung</i>

Dudjom	<i>bdud 'joms</i>
Dusum Khyenpa	<i>dus gsum mkhyen pa</i>
Dzigar Kongtrul	<i>dzi sgar kong sprul</i>
Dzogchen	<i>rdzogs chen</i>
Gankar Tulku	<i>gangs dkar bla ma</i>
Garchen Tullku	<i>mgar chen</i>
Goshir Gyaltsab	<i>go sherrygal-tshab</i>
Gyalwang Drukpa	<i>rgyal dbang 'brug pa</i>
Jamgon Kongtrul	<i>jam mgon kong sprul</i>
Jamyang Khyentse	<i>jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse</i>
Jamyang Shepa	<i>jam-dbyan-bshad-pa</i>
Jangchub Gyaltzen	<i>byang chub rgyal mtshan</i>
Jangchub Gyaltzen	<i>byang chub rgyal mtshan</i>
Je Tsongkhapa	<i>rje tsong kha pa</i>
Jetsun Dampa	<i>rje btsun dam pa</i>
Jigme Lingpa	<i>'jigs med gling pa</i>
Karma Chagme	<i>karma chags med</i>
Karma Pakshi	<i>kar ma pak shi</i>
Karma Phuntsog Namgyal	<i>kar-ma phun-tshogs rnam-rgyal</i>
Katho Dampa Desheg	<i>kaḥ thog pa dam pa bde gsheg</i>
Katok Getse Tulku	<i>kah thog dge rtse</i>
Katok Situ Tulku	<i>kah thog si tu</i>
Khamtrul	<i>khams sprul</i>
Khedrup	<i>mkhas grub</i>
Koude Dzogchen Tulku	<i>ko'u sde rdzogs chen</i>
Kunga Gyaltzen	<i>kun dga' rgyal mtsha</i>
Kyorlung Ngari Tulku	<i>skyor lung mnga' ris</i>

Lama Bom Drakpa Sonam Dorje	<i>bla ma spom brag pa bsod nams rdo rje</i>
Milarpa	<i>mi la ras pa</i>
Mingyur	<i>mi-'gyur</i>
Naktso Lotsāwa Tsultrim Gyelwa	<i>nag tsho lo tsa ba tshul khrims rgyal ba</i>
Nenang Pawo	<i>gnas nang dpa' bo</i>
Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso	<i>ngag-dbang blo-bzang rgya-mtsho</i>
Nyang Nyima Ozer	<i>myang nyi ma 'od zer</i>
Ogyen Trinley Dorje	<i>o-rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje</i>
Pakpa Lha Tulku	<i>phags pa lha</i>
Panchen Lama	<i>pan-chen bla-ma</i>
Peling Tukse Tulku	<i>pad gling thugs sras</i>
Phagmo drupa	<i>phag mo gru pa</i>
Pomdrakpa	<i>spom brag pa</i>
Ponchen	<i>dpon chen</i>
Rangjung Dorje	<i>rang 'byung rdo rje</i>
Reting	<i>rwa-sgreng</i>
Samding Dorje Phagmo	<i>bsam sding rdo rje phag mo</i>
Shabdrung	<i>zhabs-drung</i>
Shamarpa	<i>zhwa dmar pa</i>
Shechen Rabjam	<i>zhe chen rab 'byams</i>
Shenrab Miwo	<i>gshen-rabs mi po</i>
Sogyal	<i>bsod-rgyal</i>
Sonam Drakpa	<i>bsod-nams grags-pa</i>
Sonam Gyaltso	<i>bsod nams rgya mtsho</i>
Tatsak Tulku	<i>rta tshag</i>
Thrangu	<i>sgra legs skyabs mgon</i>
Trinley Thaye Dorje	<i>phrin las mtha' yas rdo rje</i>

Trisong Detsen

khri srong lde btsani

Tulku Thundup Rinpoche

sprul sku don grub rin po che

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