

Entangled Objects: Gift, Reciprocity and the Making of the Imperial Subject in 18th Century Tibet¹

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“The power of things inheres in the memories they gather up inside them, and also in the vicissitudes of our imagination, and our memory--of this there is no doubt.”
– Orhan Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence*

A Lord’s gift is more valuable than a horse!
(dpon po’i gsol ras rta las dga’)
– Tibetan proverb

Introduction

This paper takes up three examples of material encounter in 18th century Tibet to explore the relationship between empire, objects and people. During the Ganden Podrang period the exchange of gifts between the Qing Emperor and Tibetan lay and religious elites became routine and highly formalized, while also increasingly enmeshed in the global circulation of commodities.² Edicts presented to the Dalai Lama other Tibetan lay and religious elites were

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² See examples of regulations for feasting, and gift-giving protocol in the chapters on Banquets (yanhui) Customs (liyi) in Song Yun, ed., *Weizang tongzhi*, (Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe 1982). And more recently in archival documents from the TAR Historical Archives published recently in China such as the: *Gzhung dga’ ldan pho brang pa’i las tshan phyi nang tog gnas kyi go rim deb ther rin chen phreng ba*, (Lhasa: Bod rang skyong ljongs yig tshags khang, 2016). *Qing dai Xizang di fang dang an wen xian xuan bian*, vol. 1-8, (Beijing: Zhongguo Zang xue chu ban she, 2017).

often accompanied with ceremonial gifts. Lama's who travelled to Beijing often returned home in caravans laden with luxurious presents.³ While the products of the imperial ateliers in Beijing such as intricate brocade thangkhas; luxurious gilt statues; and fine porcelain came to furnish the home monasteries and aristocratic manors of these Tibetan elites, these objects were doubly enshrined in text. Multilingual Qing archives, such as the records of the Imperial Household Division (Chinese: *neiwufu*) contains detailed registers of gifts given and received, authors of Tibetan literary sources such as autobiographies (*rnam thar*) and monastic histories (*chos byung*) devote pages to elaborate descriptions of these objects.⁴

If relations between the Qing court and the Ganden Podrang can be seen as a constant negotiation between the centre and periphery, the role of gift giving in the Qing imperial project has lacked significant attention in scholarly treatments of the period. Employing Johan Elverskog's notion of 'Qing Ornamentalism' - the idea that Qing rule of Inner Asia was founded on a discourse of class whereby imperial patronage of existing social hierarchies disguised the reorientation of local political traditions on the terms of the imperial court - in this paper I will demonstrate that gift giving was central to configuring the relationship between the imperial centre and the Tibetan elites who served as the brokers of empire in the periphery.⁵ Close attention to the materiality and literary representation of Qing-Ganden Podrang gift giving reveals how objects became discursive nodal points where individual imaginations congealed into an imperial imaginaire and social structures were maintained, albeit superscribed with the logic of empire. Admittedly I am unable to present a comprehensive survey of Qing-Ganden Podrang gift giving practices from the 17th to the 20th centuries, this paper is a close reading of three imperial gifts presented by the Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799) to three important Tibetan historical actors over the period the period 1780-1793. To do so, I comb the fraught and at times incomplete archival landscape of court records, Tibetan historical sources, and a range of visual materials, and bring

³ Peter Schwieger, "Some Remarks on the Nature and Terminology of Gift Exchange between Tibetan Hierarchs and the Qing Emperor" in Jeannine Bischoff and Alice Travers eds., *Commerce and Communities: Social and Political Status and the Exchange of Goods in Tibetan Societies*, Bonn: Bonner Asienstudien, Vol 16, 25-42, 2018.

⁴ See recently published multilingual (primary Manchu and Mongolian) archival sources from the TAR Archives in: Bod rang skyong ljongs yig tshags khang du nyar ba'i bod sog man ju yig rigs sogs kyi lo rgyus yig tshags phyogs sgrig, vol. 1-12, Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2018.

⁵ Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China*, (Honolulu: Univerisity of Hawai'i Press), 65.

them into conversation with anthropological literature on gift exchange and the social lives of objects.⁶

1. A Qing Imperial workshop produced cuckoo clock, one of the Qianlong Emperor's gifts to the 6th Panchen Lama, Lobsang Palden Yeshe (*bLo bzang dpal ldan ye shes*), during his stay in Beijing from August 1780 to his untimely death in November of the same year.
2. An inscribed jade pebble 'Kabala box', the Qianlong Emperor's 25th birthday present to the 8th Dalai Lama, Jamphel Gyatso (*'Jam dpal rgya mtsho'*), in 1783.
3. An edict that restored Doring Tenzin Paljor's (*Rdo ring Bstan 'dzin dpal 'byor*) hereditary title of taiji, bestowed by the Qianlong Emperor in 1795, two years after his visit to Beijing in 1793.

To borrow from Bernard Cohn's notion of the historiographic modality as a fundamental aspect of the British Raj, Qing rule in Tibet, like other imperial projects, was a cultural and intellectual enterprise that provided for Qing rule a "place and significance in the ontological process of history, while producing an ideological construction" of the Tibetan past.⁷ This essay attempts to make a twofold intervention in broader discussions in the study of early modern empires: the politics of multi-ethnic governance and the role of the gift exchange in diplomatic and courtly gift giving. In addition to developments in anthropological literature on materialization and meaning, my approach to these material encounters between the Qianlong emperor and his Tibetan interlocutors has been informed by the affective turn in cultural theory and the notion of sentimental imperialism,⁸ I contend that the associative power of Qing "baubles" stemmed from their entanglement within webs of other objects, people and texts, and that they came to serve as productive sites of meaning making that shaped notions of subjectivity and empire for both the Qianlong Emperor and elites.

⁶ Scholarship that has emerged out of Marcel Mauss' classic study and Arjun Appadurai's later gesture for a revaluation of value with his ground breaking work in the 1980's. See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (New York: Norton, 1990).

⁷ Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1996, 5-6.

⁸ Appadurai treats objects biographically and the symbolic value of their exchange politically and socially. Appadurai, Arjun, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Gifting Empire

Dissatisfied with previous models like John King Fairbank's tribute system, as well as more recent attempts by New Qing Historians to explain the role of Tibetan Buddhism in multiethnic rule, this section lays out the framework of gift exchange as a fundamental part of Qing empire building in Tibet and Inner Asia by bringing reading the Qing literature against developments in gift theory. To borrow from John Darwin, I see the reciprocal nature of the gift as central to "settling the terms on which the indigenous peoples and their leaders would become the allies, the clients or the subjects of empire"⁹ as well the fraught self-fashioning of the Emperor and the Tibetan historical actors that he engaged with. In doing so I also want to establish a sharper notion of 'legitimation', or rather 'self-legitimation' that draws on contemporary scholarship in political theory, and on studies of the role of Sanskrit at the Mughal Court; a productive parallel imperial formation that has been seldom brought into conversation with its Inner Asian neighbor.

That Qing administration in the frontier regions was marked by a high degree of flexibility has been stressed by a number of scholars. By adapting to local conditions, the Qing allowed a variety of administrative systems to coexist in Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet (Elliot 2011, Di Cosmo 2006, Perdue 2005). However, the New Qing historian's take on Qing borderland relations inadvertently reproduces state-centric demarcations of difference and cultural homogeneity. The relationship between the Qing court and their multi-ethnic borderland territories during the 18th century cannot be understood as we do the relationship between a modern day politician and their constituency. Scholars such as James Hevia and Johan Elverskog have remarked that Qing rule was an ongoing project that hinged not only on the careful management of relations between indigenous elites and Qing agents but also the subsequent historiographical representations of these encounters.¹⁰ In recent years, scholars working with multilingual sources have sought to restore agency to local actors in order to illustrate this mutual exchange between empire and its frontiers. Drawing on Richard White's call for historians to interrogate the shifting power dynamics that characterised spaces between states which functioned as a "middle ground" for different cultures, these scholars have emphasized the processes of

⁹ John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*, (London: Allen Lane, 2012), xii.

¹⁰ James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2003. Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, 2006.

accommodation to challenge Sinocentric views of strong centres and passive borders.¹¹

Partha Chatterjee writes ‘the imperial prerogative lies in the claim to declare the colonial exception’.¹² By this he means that the power of European imperial formations lay in their capacity to name other political entities as in need of intervention. While some scholars have argued Qing rule in Tibet was colonial in nature, court patronage of Tibetan Buddhism complicates the conventional notion of empire as civilising mission. Rather than imposing a foreign ideology upon their subject populations, Qing rule in Tibet was facilitated by working within Buddhist cultural paradigms and with Tibetan lay and religious elites. While previous scholarship has acknowledged Qing support of Tibetan Buddhism was a source legitimation for its Inner Asian expansion, most scholarship on the Qing court patronage of Tibet Buddhism has been grounded in a Weberian model of legitimation whereby culture establishes and reinforces power.¹³ Only in the field of visual culture have scholars begun to explore Qing modes of representation for their wider historical implications.¹⁴ In dealing with the relationship between the Qing Emperor’s we reach an impasse when it comes to the question of legitimation; were Emperors true believers or was patronage of Tibetan Buddhism solely instrumental?

Scholarship on the gift has also been stymied by structuralist readings of power as purely sovereign and coercive. In his classic study, the French socio-anthropologist Marcel Mauss argues that all human societies are governed by the logic of gift-exchange. For Mauss, gifts

¹¹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Pattererson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China’s Yunnan Frontier*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Jack Patrick Hayes, *A Change in Worlds on the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands: Politics, Economics, and Environments in Northern Sichuan*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014). Yudru Tsomu, *The Rise of Gönpö Namgyel in Kham: The Blind Warrior of Nyarong*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

¹² Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹³ David M. Farquhar, “The Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch’ing Empire”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 38.1 (June, 1978): 5-34. Samuel M. Grupper, “Manchu Patronage and Tibetan Buddhism During the First Half of the Ch’ing Dynasty”, *The Journal of the Tibet Society* 4 (1984): 47-75.

¹⁴ Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003). Wen-shing, Chou, *Mount Wutai: Visions of a Sacred Buddhist Mountain*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

are never actually free, but objects of reciprocal exchange “never completely separated from the men who exchange them”.¹⁵ In a gift economy then, objects cannot be fully transferred from one owner to another as they can in a commodity economy. Gift giving necessarily obliges participants to give, receive, and reciprocate. Mauss’s account of the triple obligations involved in gift-giving is clearest in his statement of the following two seminal questions: “What rule of legality and self-interest, in societies of a backward or archaic type, compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that it causes its recipient to pay it back?”¹⁶ Based on a suggestion in a Maori text, appealing to the indigenous concept of *Hau*, Mauss states that there is a spiritual force inherent in the things given that pushes for reciprocation. More recently scholars like Bourdieu have used the social and ethical complexities of gift-giving to challenge the market rhetoric and exchange theory that dominate the social sciences. Bourdieu introduces the concept of domination to conceptualize the production of power relations. He accounts for the tacit modes of domination in everyday social relations by identifying the interval of time between gifting and reciprocation as establishing indemnity. Gifts are then simultaneously an act of generosity and of violence.¹⁷ The asymmetry of power relations involved in gift giving leads to Jacques Derrida to remark that a true gift is ‘an impossibility’.¹⁸

In order to the break free of dichotomized framework of genuine gift/genuine belief, I borrow from Audrey Truschke’s approach in contextualizing the patronage of Sanskrit literary production at the Mughal court (1526-1857). In *Culture of Encounters*, Truschke draws on the Rodney Barker’s notion of self-legitimation to argue that Mughal patronage of Sanskrit literati was a mode of royal self-fashioning motivated by their self-identification as kings in an indigenous Indian tradition that preceded them. Therefore, I understand Qing engagement with Tibetan Buddhism to be a discursive form of self-representation rather than a quest for an external source of legitimation.¹⁹

¹⁵ Mauss, *The Gift*, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Audrey, Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

The Gift of Time

In *Empire of Emptiness*, Patricia Berger's analysis of the gift exchange between the Emperor and the 6th Panchen Lama, draws on the anthropological work of Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff, who have both argued that the lives of objects should be understood biographically and the symbolic value of their exchange politically and socially.²⁰ Berger is attentive to both the vocabulary of gift giving arguing their gifts "project a complex bilingual meaning that simultaneously suggests correct obsequiousness toward the emperor while appropriating for the giver a special ability to confer the blessings of long life", and as their multi-vocal historiographic symbolism.²¹ According to Berger, the power of the gift of a white conch shell made by the Panchen Lama, at the time the single most influential religious personage in Inner Asia, to the Qianlong emperor, lay in that it was an item that "simultaneously assume(d) several different registers of meaning, signifying different things to different viewers, all of them redolent with historic significance, requiring historical awareness on the part of giver and receiver to be perceived in the same key."²²

The following section follows Berger's framework, and the approach of Emma Martin who foregrounds the intersection of material culture and knowledge production in her treatment of the shifting meanings of the ceremonial greeting scarf (*kha btags*) in early 20th century Anglo-Tibetan relations,²³ to read the Qianlong's gift of a cuckoo-

²⁰ Appadurai argues that intercultural exchanges, even those where a vast universe of shared understandings exist (in this case, the premises of Tibetan Buddhism as practiced by the Gelukpa), can be based on deeply divergent perceptions of value or meaning. In his article in the same volume, "*The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process*", Igor Kopytoff argues that, while commodities are often thought of in Marxian terms as things which are produced and then exist, in fact, "commoditization is best looked upon as a process of becoming rather than as an all-or-none state of being". He conceptualizes commoditization as a process which is both cultural and cognitive: "...commodities must be not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing. Out of the total range of things available in a society, only some of them are considered appropriate for marking as commodities. Moreover, the same thing may be treated as a commodity at one time and not at another. And finally, the same thing may, at the same time, be seen as a commodity by one person and something else by another. Such shifts and differences in whether and when a thing is a commodity reveal a moral economy that stands behind the objective economy of visible transactions. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 1986.

²¹ Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 183.

²² *Ibid*, 184.

²³ Emma Martin, "Gift, Greeting or Gesture: The Khatak and the Negotiating of its Meaning on the Anglo-Tibetan Borderlands", *Himalaya: the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*. Vol. 35: No 2, Article 10, 56-72, 2016.

clock (Chinese: *ziming zhong*, Tibetan: *chu tshod khor lo*) as a break in the conceptual grammar of the exchange between Emperors and Buddhist hierarchs. I argue the clock, a cosmopolitan object that inspired wonderment from the Panchen Lama, can be seen as a rupture both semantically – as a new mechanical device that escaped easy articulation in the Tibetan language; and temporally – as a modern technology that had no precedent in the long history of material encounter between the court and Tibetan Lama's. This double rupture reinforces the expansive temporality of Qianlong as a universal, wheel-turning Bodhisattva ruler (*cakravartin*, *'khor lo 'gyur ba'i rgyal po*) whose gifts were as much the material instrumentalization of imperial power, as they were commodified visions of universal rulership and empire.

While the 6th Panchen Lama's time in Beijing from August to October, 1780, has been well studied, the peculiar gift of a cuckoo clock produced by the Qing imperial workshops has escaped the attentions of historians.²⁴ From their first meeting in the Hall of Rectitude and Sincerity, Qianlong showered the Gelugpa master with numerous gifts. The Panchen Lama himself made return gifts of rosaries and Buddhist statues to Qianlong and members of the imperial family. A day after being treated to a sumptuous viewing of Peking Opera at the Imperial Palace, the Panchen Lama and monks from many of Beijing's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and temples performed elaborate prayers (*zhabs rtan*) for the longevity of the Qianlong Emperor, protector of the Dharma and in return received a strange and worldly gift.

On the 4th day, at the invitation of the Great Emperor, the most excellent rJe Lama (the Panchen Rinpoche) accompanied by the First Prince, the rJe lCang skya rin po che and an Amban serving as liaison and their respective attendants (*gsol gzims* refers to *gsol dpon*, *gzims dpon* and *mchod dpon*) and retainers attended Chinese opera performance at the Imperial Palace. Expressions of respect were exchanged just as the day before.

On the 5th day, monks from Zhe hor T'a phu zi, the Potala²⁵, The Temple of Eternal Virtue, Shar su mi, Khu khu su mi²⁶, Yi li su mi, Shu shan zi, dGon gsar, rJen thas, Lu wang thas (Lu Wang Tai) were invited to Tashilhunpo²⁷ to construct a Five Treasured

²⁴ A summary Tibetan-English translation by Elizabeth Bernard of his residence in the capital can be found in James A. Millward and Mark C. Elliott et al., *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004). However, the sections that detail the gifting of the clock, along with some other accounts are omitted.

²⁵ This does not refer to the Potala Palace, but rather the Putuozechongmiao at Chengde.

²⁶ Su me refers to monastery to the Tibetan dgon pa or monastery. I am grateful to Gray Tuttle for pointing this out.

²⁷ Tashilhunpo here refers to the Xumifushoumiao also at Chengde.

Mandala, the three supports, the necessary bronze, silver and brocade necessary for the statues were raised and expansive supplications made for the flourishing of the Dharma and the longevity of the Manjusri Emperor.

That same day, the Manjusri Emperor sent the Amban Bachung to greet the Panchen Lama and present him with a khatag and gifts. *Among them, a large mechanical cuckoo clock that was most wondrous in its shape and sound. As each hour came to a close, the clock would produce the sweet melody of a bird and a wooden figure would spring out* (emphasis my own). Great quantities of gold, turquoise, a victory banner made of jade, a *spyad pa* carved in the shape of a fish, were further presented.²⁸

On the fifth day of an elaborate series of material exchange, the Panchen Lama is struck by the novelty of a wondrous “wheel of time”, that chimed with melodious birdsong as it struck each hour. In the long list of gifts provided in the accounts of each of the Panchen Lama’s days spent in the Imperial capital, the clock is only item to draw any personal comment that interrupts the monotonous structure of the gift register. Lacking the terminology to describe a mechanical time keeping device, the cuckoo clock is described as a wheel or ‘khor lo, and is further qualified by the mechanics of its function, the emission of birdsong each hour and the sudden popping out of what I assume is a wooden or carved figure from a chamber above the clockface. Could it be argued that Qianlong was a wheel turning king in the sense that he was literally the master of the wheel of time (rather than wheel of samsaric existence)? Or that his universal rule encapsulated time as well as space?

The Tibetan term *chu tshod* originally referred to the measurement of time by a water clock. While there have been no studies into practical conceptions of Tibetan time, we know of at least one other indigenous form of time-keeping device, a time stick, or upright sundial. The Tibetan time stick was a column sundial with eight sides, each of which shows a time scale which has been calculated according to the amount of daylight during the different months of the year. To find the time a metal style, or gnomon, is inserted into a hole at the top of the stick in line with the correct month. The stick is then turned to face the sun until the shadow of the gnomon falls straight down on the scale. The time is indicated by the bottom edge of the shadow on the scale. Tibetan time was then far from an abstract universal concept, it was heavily dependent on astronomical calculation and depended

²⁸ See line 1-3, folio 374 in the block print version of *blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes dpal bzang po'i zhal snga nas kyi rnam par thar pa nyi ma'i 'od zer zhes bya ba'i smad cha*.

heavily on the notion of seasonal hours.²⁹ As the Panchen Rinpoche notes, the birdsong sounds as each hour passes, was he aware of the epistemic challenge that cuckoo clock presented to Tibetan conceptions of temporality?

The cuckoo clock, was a technological break in that it measured time in an absolute, mechanical way rather than a time rooted in the changing of the seasons. Mechanical time is often associated with industrial development, with time consciousness and punctuality inextricably linked with the history of capitalist wage labour. Yulia Frumer, in her provocative book *Making Time: Astronomical Time Measurement in Tokugawa Japan*, examines the complex history of the transition between a similar seasonal hour system to a Western equal hour system in the context of Meiji Japan.³⁰ Due to the lack of materials on Tibetan timekeeping and the fact that the Panchen's cuckoo clock did not herald a technological revolution in Tibet, instead remaining buried (literally) in history, I am unable to pursue broader questions of a temporal shift in the context of this paper. The clock will instead be read in the context of the history of gift Jesuit origins of clockmaking at the Qing court.

Mechanical clocks were first introduced to China by Matteo Ricci when he met the Wanli Emperor and presented him a European design in 1600. The Kangxi Emperor was notably interested in the design of European clocks, and established a division especially devoted to the production of European style mechanical clocks under the Palace Board of Works (*Zaobanchu*) called the *Zimingzhong* workshop.³¹ By the

²⁹ This is why for instance Sarat Chandra Das' entry for *dus tshod* (time, hour) reads "1. a division of time equal to two English hours: *nyin re la dus tshod bcu gnyis* / in each day are twelve *dus tshod*". In Tibetan folk tradition, the twelve hours of the day take the animals names of the *rab byung*, or sexagenary cycles of Tibetan astronomical calculation. They are the rabbit (*yos*) which corresponds to daybreak (*nam langs*), the dragon ('*drug*) equivalent to the sunrise (*nyi shar*), the snake (*sbrul*) referring to the morning (*nyi dos*), the horse (*rta*) referring to noon (*nyi phyed*), the sheep (*lug*) corresponding to the (*zhed yol*), the monkey (*sprel*) corresponding to the evening, the bird (*bya*) equivalent to sunset (*nyi nub*), the dog (*khyi*) referring to dusk (*sa srom*), the pig (*phag*) referring to the forenoon (*srod 'khor*), the mouse (*byi ba*) corresponding to midnight (*nam phyed*), the ox (*glang*) referring to the afternight (*phyed yol*) and the tiger (*rtag*) referring to dawn (*tho rangs*). See Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Sanskrit Synonyms*, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1902).

³⁰ Yulia Frumer, *Making Time: Astronomical Time Measurement in Tokugawa Japan*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 2018.

³¹ The other departments were the *falangchu* (enamels department), the *huazuo* (the painting workshop), the *biaozuo* (the mounting/framing shop), the *jishilu* (the archival office), *kuzhu* (storehouse). For more on the *neiwufu* see Marco Musillo, *The Shining Inheritance: Italian Painters at the Qing Court 1699–1812*, (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Publications, 2016).

reign of the Qianlong Emperor, opulently decorative clocks were routinely presented as part of the culture of ceremonial gift exchange at the Qing court. Lots recently sold at auction, and an instruction manual on the production of Qing clocks written by a technician in Shanghai in 1805, reveal that several variations of large mechanical cuckoo clock, grand wooden chiming clocks, and smaller decorative clocks made of gold and silver, were made to the specification of the Emperor.³² As with his management of court painters, Qianlong gave very precise commissions and was the initiator and arbiter of the entire production process.³³

The Panchen Lama was greatly impressed by the abundant gifts he received in Beijing, remarking that it was due to the ‘great compassion of the Great Manjusri Emperor that all the kingdoms of the world had been brought into a peaceful state, and the teachings of the Buddha, especially those of Tsongkhapa have prospered... That in your 70th year, I but a lowly Lama, have the opportunity to gaze upon your golden countenance and meet noble officials, see distant lands and meet the local populace is surely down to your incomparable benevolence’.³⁴ While we have no further description of the cuckoo clock, we can only assume that the item -very much an outlier in the context of the register of Buddhist gifts that included brocade, precious jewels, embroidered thangkas and conch horns- was specifically chosen and designed to elicit awe, delight and wonderment from the recipient, while at the same time reminding them of the imbalance between the largesse of gifts given and received.

As Lobsang Yongdan has showed Tsanpo Nominhan, a contemporary figure to the Panchen Lama, had interacted with Jesuits at the court, contributing to challenging new astronomic and geographic knowledge. Scholars, like Matthew Kaptsein and Johan Elverskog have invoked the term Qing cosmopolitanism, to capture how Tibetan Buddhist figures at the court, through their liminal positions, began to see the larger world stereoscopically inside the small.³⁵ As a slight ca-

³² Kaijian Tang, *Setting Off from Macau: Essays on Jesuit History during the Ming and Qing*, (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 278.

³³ Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence & European Ingenuity: Clocks of Late Imperial China*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

³⁴ *Paṅ chen sku phreng drug pa dpal ldan ye shes kyi rnam thar, Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang*, 2014), 959.

³⁵ Sheldon Pollock and Homi K. Bhabha et al., “Cosmopolitanisms”, in *Cosmopolitanism*, edited by Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Matthew Kapstein, “Just where on Jambudvīpa are we? New Geographical Knowledge and Old Cosmological Schemes in Eighteenth-century Tibet”, in Sheldon Pollock ed., *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations*

veat, it is possible that the Panchen Lama could have potentially already been aware of European clockmaking, having met with George Bogle, representative of Warren Hastings, in 1775, half a decade before his trip to the Qing capital.³⁶ The flow of commodities from Tibet's southern border with India, most notable in Jigme Lingpa's description of a Kaleidoscope he obtained from a Nepalese informant in his employ,³⁷ suggests that the Beijing was not necessarily the cosmopolis, and that Tibetan and Qing historical actors were imbricated in the global circulation of commodities.

Nonetheless, I argue that the clock here represents an embodied Qing cosmopolitanism, that here speaks more to Qianlong's self-fashioning as a universal ruler with the ability to seamlessly work between and transcend the registers of meaning in a given exchange, than it does the liminality of the Tibetan Buddhist figure. That is to say that Qianlong's selection of the cuckoo clock, a technology that he must have been expected the Panchen Lama to be unfamiliar with, broke the conceptual grammar of the previous four days of gift giving, that was punctuated with the presentation of objects that as Berger has noted were meaningful because of their familiarity or resemblance to gifts that had previously been exchanged between Chinese Emperors and Tibetan Lamas. The Panchen Lama's cuckoo also speaks to how imperial gift-giving practices were imbricated in overlapping concentric circles of global capital flow, with Indian to the south, as well as the flow of Jesuit informed technologies that permeated the Qing court.

What is most interesting then, is that Panchen Lama's cuckoo clock was in many ways an important precedent to horological diplomacy practiced in the future. Matteo Ricci's gift to the Wanli Emperor was an example of successful clock diplomacy and emblematic of the Jesuit rise to the position of court technocrats in late imperial China. However, almost two centuries later, and only 13 years after his cuckoo clock left such an impression on the Panchen Lama, George McCartney would present an opulent François-Justin Vulliamy clock to the Qianlong Emperor. For the British, François-Justin Vulliamy's (1712–98) clocks represented the apex of eighteenth-century technology, yet Qianlong, as consummate connoisseur and ruler of all under heaven, remained defiantly nonplussed. The clock then was a gift that implied Qianlong's mastery of a new technological vernacular, it was the court

in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 336-364. Johan Elverskog, "Wutai Shan, Qing Cosmopolitanism, and the Mongols." *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 6 (December 2011): 243- 274.

³⁶ I could not find a timepiece among the gifts exchanged.

³⁷ See Jigme Lingpa's pilgrimage guide to India *lho phyogs rgya gar gyi gtam brtag pa brgyad kyi me long* written in 1789.

reproduction of a European gift that had been repurposed to impress the relationship of the center and periphery on his most important Tibetan Buddhist interlocutor of the time. The records of the Imperial Household Division (*neiwufu*), show that after 1780, the Qianlong Emperor would continue to gift clocks to borderland elites, and to another Tibetan Buddhist Lama on at least one other occasions.³⁸ During the 13th Dalai Lama's stay in Mongolia (1904-1906), the Jestundamba Hutuktu attempted to impress his more popular counterpart with the extent of his collections of European clocks. The 14th Dalai Lama is himself well known for his collection of luxury watches, gifts from the world leaders he has met with over the years.³⁹

By February of 1781, Qianlong was writing to the 8th Dalai Lama, informing him of his former teacher's death. What became of the Panchen Rinpoche's cuckoo clock? The clock, along with the rest of the Qianlong Emperor's luxurious gifts, travelled with a golden reliquary escorted by a military convoy that left Beijing in March of that year. While the Panchen Lama had scant time to enjoy the novelty of his gift, close reading of the table of contents (*dkar chag*) of the Panchen Lama's reliquary stupa (*sku gdung*) written by the 8th Dalai Lama himself, reveals that the cuckoo clock along with the Emperor's other gifts: various statues, precious jewels, an ivory rosary and rolls of brocade, were interred inside the as relics at Tashilunpo monastery inside a great stupa called the Essence of the Precious Wish Fulfilling Jewel (*sku gdung rin po che yid bzhin nor bu snying por bzhugs pa'i mchod sdong chen po*).⁴⁰ The clock must have had caused some confusion for the Panchen Lama's attendants, for it had been equalized with the other supports

³⁸ Neiwufu records show that a mechanical clock (*zimingzhong*) was given to a Lama in the 50th reign year of the Qianlong Emperor, on the 21st of February 1785. At current, I am unable to accurately identify who this figure was. There had been at least one precedent to gifting Lama's clocks during the rule of the Yongzheng Emperor, on the 4th of April 1732 who he gifted a *zimingzhong* to one Ji'er Lama, possibly a Kyrgyz Lama. *Qing gong nei wu fu huoji dang an*, Qianlong 50 nian, 2 yue, 1 ri, Qianlong 60 nian, 02 yue, 06 ri, see the earlier precedent at Yongzheng 10 nian, 4 yue, 4 ri.

³⁹ Most notably a gold Patek Phillipe pocket watch, a gift from Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1943 presented by two Office of Strategic Services agents, Ilya Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan, when he was only 7 years old. Current value estimated to be over \$253,605. The return gift: two silk scarves (*kha btags'*)! Thomas Laird. *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama*, (Grove Press, 2016).

⁴⁰ *Pan chen thams cad mkhyen gzigs blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes kyi sku gdung yid bzhin nor bu snying por bzhugs pa'i mchod sdong chen po rten dang brten par bcas pa'i dkar chag ngo mtshar 'dab stong 'byed pa'i nyin byed* (ja) in reproduction of the Zhol par khang blockprints of the Collected Works of the 8th Dalai Lama (*rgyal ba sku 'phreng brgyad pa 'jam dpal rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*) produced by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamshala.

(*rten*) bestowed by the Qianlong Emperor as markers of grace and favour (*gong ma'i bk'a drin*).

The Gift of Future's Past

As President Xi Jinping evinces his own vision of Chinese empire in the 21st century, relics of the Qing empire have acquired great currency in the contemporary antique market with paintings, porcelain and especially Tibetan Buddhist artefacts becoming hotly sought after by institutions and private collectors. In 2017, a jade pebble kabala box, was sold at auction at Sotheby's Hong Kong for over a quarter of a million dollars.⁴¹ This object was one of Qianlong's many birthday gifts to Jamphel Gyatso, the 8th Dalai Lama in 1753, not long after the 6th Panchen Lama succumbed to smallpox in Beijing. This gilt jade river pebble has been skilfully hollowed into an ornate box with a caved soapstone base. The interior of the pebble bears an extensive Tibetan inscription that records the bestowal of the Edict of Jade (*gyang ti'i 'ja' sa*) to the 8th Dalai Lama. The text of the inscription is an almost word for word transcription of the Edict of Jade that the Qianlong Emperor bestowed to the Dalai Lama, along with a jade seal of office (*tham ka*), on the same occasion. This section examines how the jade pebble, edict and seal, much like the clock given to Panchen Lama, is enmeshed in a web of object, individual and text.

The birthday celebrations of the Dalai Lama's were lavish affairs that brought together the lay and religious officials of the Ganden Podrang, the monastic communities of the three great seats and the increasingly cosmopolitan urban population of Lhasa. The festivities of the 8th Dalai Lama's birthdays are attested to by numerous biographies but I draw on the 8th Demo Hutuktu's biography of the 8th Dalai Lama himself to show how Qianlong's jade pebble was recorded in a register of gifts bestowed by a representative of the Qing court.

In the 8th month [of the Water-Tiger Year], the lamas and officials of Sera Monastery prepared incense offerings along the main streets to pay their respect. All the monks and lay functionaries of the government, the [monks from] Namgyal Monastic College, myself the [8th] Demo from Tengye Ling, the Surkhang Chamberlain, and the religious dignitaries of Drepung monastery were in charge of the fivefold offering celebration. The Muslim community of Lhasa presented a great variety of food and

⁴¹ See Appendix B, Water, Pine and Stone Collection – Treasure, catalogue prepared Sotheby's Hong Kong, 2017. See: www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2017/water-pine-and-stone-retreat-collection-treasures.

fruits towards the summer audience. Thereupon, an innumerable amount of lay and monastic onlookers spread along the road to reap the benefits of liberation by sight, while travelling to the Potala Palace. The ritual ceremonies for His Holiness were bestowed as usual. About five thousand two hundred lamas, officials, and members of the monastic congregation of Palden Drepung, and four thousand eight hundred lamas, officials, and monks from Sera Thekchen Ling carried out the rituals and prayers. The Great Emperor Mañjuśrī bestowed a golden edict and a seal which auspiciously presented through his attendant Bayer Khenpo. A pleasant proclamation and a golden decree having the outward appearance of a precious gem, silk garments, and other extensive gifts were received.⁴²

Contextualizing the imperial-artistic practice behind the production of the “Ten Thousand Dharmas Return as One”, a painting commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor to mark the joint birthdays of Qianlong and his Empress Dowager Xiaosheng, Patricia Berger writes that the collage style of the European style imperial portraits against a Tibetan-style background demonstrates the confluence and resonance of past and present events and his ability to propel this understanding of them into the future.⁴³ Through the Qianlong period court artistic practices, we see the persistence of doubling or replication, be it in the establishment of parallel architectural structures like the Potala and Tashilunpo lites or reproductions of gifts previously exchanged between the Yuan and Ming Emperor’s and the Buddhist interlocutors of their times. In *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis*, Whitney Davis advances the idea that the meaning of an object “is constructed cumulatively and recursively—a pro- and retrospective ‘activation’—in and through the structure and history of its replication”.⁴⁴ Close attention to the inscription shows that the jade edict serves to evoke the past encounter between the Shunzhi Emperor and the 5th Dalai Lama. Jade seals had been also exchanged between previous Ming and Yuan Emperors and their contemporary Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs.

In the past, when the ancestral sovereign a *baraja sag che*, the Fifth Dalai Lama met the Emperor in the distant capital he was bestowed great awards. From then on, during four successive existences, *all the gifts of state* (chab srid kyi gsol ras) were obtained.

⁴² *Rgyal dbang sku phreng bryad pa'i rnam thar 'dzam gling tha gru yangs pa'i rgyan*, (Pecin: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2010), 202.

⁴³ Berger, 10.

⁴⁴ Whitney Davis, *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 4.

Where can I find peace of mind? By pursuing great compassion and affection, the teaching of the yellow hats expanded and spread. You, the Dalai Lama, are the great holder of the yellow hat tradition. Over many lives, you have committed to aiding all creatures of the earth attain higher rebirths and ultimate liberation, acting in a perfect manner on many amazing occasions and receiving the numerous merits of the state and spiritual deeds. Lama, your virtuous achievements have been brought to perfection, spreading and accomplishing the supreme and precious doctrine of the Buddha. I rejoice greatly and thus present you this most excellent Edict of Jade and a seal. Honour them in the Potala at all times. I would be delighted when there is practical cause for you to use this seal in your official statements (*zhu yig*). Otherwise, use the old seal for less important matters and correspondence (*bskur yig*). Having earnestly accepted the gifts, there is favourable ground for governance. You have laboured for the dissemination of the teaching of the yellow hats and for the glory of all beings' felicity, and so forth, in accordance with the tradition of the Dalai Lama's previous incarnations.⁴⁵

Here the Qianlong Emperor directly addresses the 8th Dalai Lama, recalling the great authority of his predecessor the 5th Dalai Lama, who established the centralized rule of the Ganden Podrang. This was an authority that in Qianlong's mind at least stemmed from the patronage of the Qing court (see *chab srid kyi gsol ras*, which I have rendered the gifts of state) and the close relationship he built with Shunzhi, the first Qing emperor to rule over China. The 8th Dalai Lama, who was enthroned in an era when Ganden Podrang governance was mainly presided over by a cabinet ministry under the supervision of a series of regents appointed by Beijing, was to invoke the authority of his prestigious predecessor when he needed to issue important declarations or edicts.

Chinese historians of the period have typically read the text of the Edict of Jade as affirmation of Qing authority over the government of the Dalai Lamas, and more specifically the conferral of the jade pebble on the 8th Dalai Lama as Qianlong's confirmation of a subject Buddhist ruler.⁴⁶ Historical readings of the jade pebble, and the respective roles of Qianlong as giver and the 8th Dalai Lama as recipient have therefore

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Wang Ying, Sotheby's Beijing who brought this item to my attention, and also to Yannick Laurent who provided both the Tibetan transcription of the jade pebble and a working translation in a brief introduction to the object for the Sotheby's Hong Kong catalogue. Here, I work with his transcription and my amended translation.

⁴⁶ Most notably Wang Furen and Suo Wenqing. *Highlights of Tibetan History*, (Beijing: New World Press, 1984). Wang Jiawei, and Nyima Gyaincain, *The Historical Status of China's Tibet*, (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2003).

coalesced into a modern Chinese nationalist historiography where Tibet has been an inseparable part of a multi-dynastic but continuous Chinese political formation. However, in his reading of the 5th Dalai Lama's famous visit to the imperial court in 1652, Gray Tuttle decentres Beijing by framing the Dalai Lama's motivations as resting in the broader "missionary nature of the expansion of Tibetan Buddhist into Inner and East Asia". For the 5th Dalai Lama, the end destination, Beijing, was not the sole measure of the motivations behind his 1642-43 excursion.⁴⁷ The proselytization of Gelug teachings and the donations he received from Mongolian, Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist suggest that read holistically, the trip served to galvanise support from among politically marginal communities in Amdo and modern day Inner Mongolia, multi-ethnic regions, that would rise in political significance and produce Tibetan Buddhist mediator figures as the Qing expanded their empire into Inner Asia.

While I have not been able to consult any examples of the 8th Dalai's proclamations made after 1783, there is a historical precedent to 'anxious' Dalai Lamas invoking the authority of the 5th Dalai Lama. One such example can be found in the holdings of Starr Library,⁴⁸ where the 7th Dalai Lama, settling a high-profile land dispute between two noble families, declines to use his own seal of office, and instead opts for the recognisable seal of the 5th Dalai Lama. Given that we have no autobiographical writing by the 8th Dalai Lama himself, and that his life narrative was authored by the court appointed Demo Hutuktu, it is difficult to surmise the extent to which the jade edict, pebble and seal played into his own self-conception of his spiritual and temporal authority. Further exploration of the 8th Dalai Lama's edicts, specifically instances where he used the jade seal over his personal seal may tell us more about the role of imperial objects in the articulation of the Dalai Lama's authority. For the time being, I would argue that this example of gift exchange tells us more about the Qianlong Emperor's self-fashioning process as a universal Buddhist ruler, and the way in which he drew on an historical imagination to shape his own notions of Buddhist governance. For Qianlong the past was a malleable resource for shaping the future; objects like the jade pebble were subtly potent for

⁴⁷ Gray Tuttle, "A Tibetan Buddhist Mission to the East: The Fifth Dalai Lama's Journey to Beijing, 1652-1653", in Bryan J. Cuevas and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, eds, *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 65-87.

⁴⁸ Official decree by the Seventh Dalai Lama written in 1723, ordering respective parties to observe the boundaries of the Upper and Lower Gangpoche (Gang po che) canyons. The decree is encased in saffron silk, and bears the imprint of the 5th Dalai Lama's seal. Bskal bzang rgya mtsho, *Dalai Lama VII. Decree [1723]*, C.V. Starr East Asian Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

they evoked historical memory while reaffirming the relationship between giver and receiver.

I would at this point, like to draw attention to the Qianlong emperor's dual characterisation of Qing patronage, and material culture as gifts (*gsol ras*). Peter Schwieger, in his article on gift exchange as being both an obligation and privilege for Tibetan Buddhist elites, is particularly attentive to the terminology and phrasing of archival documents that record Qing-Ganden Podrang gift exchange as *legs 'bul* (a good natured gift), *'bul rten* (an offering of support) and *sba gyer* (Chinese: *Baiye*, a respectful gift). Schwieger is adamant that this form of gift exchange cannot be readily described as constitutive of tribute (Chinese: *Chaogong* or *gong*), in the sense of being a tributary framework for understanding the Qing court relationship with the Ganden Podrang.⁴⁹ I note that in life writing, gifts exchanged between the Qianlong Emperor and Buddhist hierarchs like the 6th Panchen Lama and the 8th Dalai Lama are frequently termed as *gsol ral*. The Tibetan word *Gsol ras* is an honorific noun for gift, the meaning of which is difficult to convey in English. *Gsol* means to offer, supplicate or to beg, and *ras* literally a piece of cotton or cloth that corresponds to the Sanskrit *vas-tra*, which means cloth or a garment. The term may have been originally used to describe the granting of the scrap of a Buddhist master's robe to a follower. This ambiguity, aside it describes the bestowal of a gift, from a superior to a subordinate, hence forming part of the Tibetan honorific register (*zhe sa*). The implication is therefore that exchange takes place between two individuals in an asymmetrical power relationship between each other, and that such an exchange emerges from the benevolence or grace (*bka' drin*) of the superior.

This dynamic of benevolent authority has been explored by Trine Brox in her examination of Tibetan democracy in exile where she interrogates the discourse of the democratic process in the Tibetan government-in-exile as a gift of the Dalai Lama (*mang gtso'i gsol ras gnang ba*). For Brox this narrative results in democracy becoming imbued with the divinity of its donor, an enchanted gift.⁵⁰ In the 18th century context, I contend that the use of *gsol ras* is interesting, not because it implies an asymmetry between giver and recipient, but because it is first and foremost an interpersonal personal term, in an inherently affective and familiar register, as opposed to the more mundane administrative terminology analysed by Schwieger. The brokering of empire therefore was heavily reliant on the maintenance of close, personal relationships between the Emperor and the Tibetan Buddhist elites he

⁴⁹ Schwieger, "Some Remarks on the Nature and Terminology of Gift Exchange", 37.

⁵⁰ Trine Brox, *Tibetan Democracy: Governance, Leadership and Conflict in Exile*, (I.B Tauris 2016).

interacted with. The language in which gift exchanges are described, as personal gifts made out of benevolence, speaks to the subtly curated but familiar way in which Qianlong wanted to be seen by his interlocutors. The reproduction of the terminology in the narratives of Tibetan elites, that imbue Qianlong with the resplendent physical and compassionate mental attributes of Manjusri, reveal the potency of language in the construction of a bond of loyalty.

The Gift of Redemption

Traversing U-Tsang, Kham and Kongpo, and the eight provinces
of China
atop the rolling wheels of a horse-pulled carriage,
I arrived at the *great golden capital*,
The *ever-victorious palace was the (jewel) that adorns the world*.
Rows of great ministers spoke of the causes and conditions (of
my visit),
To them I explained the virtuous state of the dharma, and all the
beings residing in the the land of snows,
Not long after, I had the *good fortune of gazing upon the golden
countenance of the Manjusri Emperor - a god among men*.⁵¹

In 1793, the Tibetan Cabinet minister Doring Tenzin Paljor arrived in Beijing to plead his innocence before the Qianlong Emperor. Having suffered an ignominious defeat at the hands of the Gurkhas, Tenzin Paljor, who had been the Tibetan commander in chief, had a few months beforehand been a prisoner of Rana Bahadur Shah at the royal court in Kathmandu. The Gurkha War had in many ways been precipitated by the Shamarpa Lama's designs on the immense wealth bestowed upon his brother, the 6th Panchen Lama and Tashilunpo monastery by the Qianlong Emperor just over a decade prior. Only the swift intervention of Qing troops led to the expulsion of the Gurkha army by a combined Qing-Ganden Podrang force and the signing of a peace treaty at Betravati on the 2nd of October 1792. The disgraced Tenzin Paljor was freed but immediately summoned to Beijing to atone for his poor display of leadership. As a disgraced general however, Tenzin Paljor does not receive the warm audience that the Panchen Lama received. As he waited for his audience with the Qianlong emperor, he bemoaned the fact he not prepared an adequate gift offering. 'My lowly self has not even a single silk offering scarf to offer Manjusri Emperor' he remarked to two Manchu companions.⁵² Tenzin Paljor

⁵¹ Rdo ring bstan 'dzin dpal 'byor. *Rdo ring paṅḍi ta'i rnam thar*, vol 1-2, (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1987), 960-961.

⁵² *Ibid*, 938.

emerged from the meeting escaping any serious punishment and received a generous stipend from the Qianlong Emperor. He was however, summarily dismissed from his post of cabinet minister (*bk'a blon*) and stripped him of the hereditary title of *taiji* that he had inherited from his father.

His narrative account of his stay in Beijing, remains the only description of the imperial capital written by a Tibetan government official. Doring's account has been studied most notably by Elliot Sperling and Li Ruohong, who draw parallels to the detailed accounts of Choson Korean dignitaries visiting the Qing court.⁵³ In many ways, Doring's account of Beijing, read along with his long form account of his time in captivity could be termed as imperial ethnography. Doring, one of the most accomplished literary stylists of his day, is attentive to both cultural differences and similarities between Lhasa and the imperial capital, and the text is unique for presenting novel accounts of court banquets, performances of Peking Opera and fireworks displays and even an ice-skating show.

Scholars working with Mongolian and Islamic sources have emphasized how Manchu rhetorical tropes and literary formulations found in administrative documents slipped into the vernacular usage of their Inner Asian imperium to form what they term a "language of loyalty".⁵⁴ The Tibetan lay elites of the 18th century were highly skilled Kavic poets, and their autobiographies have yet to be subjected to a thorough literary analysis. Tibetan autobiographies of this period were often written in a mixed prose-verse style, with a versified Kavic narrative describing the events related in a preceding long prose form. Historians often ignored the Kavic verses and made do with mining the prose for dates and figures, failing to realize the affective and emotional resonances in the verse, that actually serves to supplement rather than summarize the preceding prose section. In the two short verses provided above, I have stressed certain poetic features (snyan ngag) synonyms, figures of speech and allusions that highlight the role of Tenzin Paljor's Kavic literary representation of the Qianlong Emperor as a benevolent gift giver and his own self-representation as a recipient of imperial grace in the context of a construction of a Tibetan language of loyalty. Qianlong is Manjusri personified, with a golden

⁵³ Elliot Sperling, "Awe and Submission: A Tibetan Aristocrat at the Court of Qianlong", *The International History Review*, 20.2, 1998, 325-335. Li Ruohong, *A Tibetan Aristocratic Family in 18th Century Tibet: A Study of Qing-Tibetan Contact*, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, 2002.

⁵⁴ Chris Atwood, "Worshiping Grace: The Language of Loyalty in Qing Mongolia", *Late Imperial China*, 21, 2, 86-139. See also David J. Brophy, "The Junghar Mongol Legacy and the Language of Loyalty in Qing Xinjiang", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 2013, Volume 73, Issue 2, p. 231-258.

countenance and with a mellifluous voice, who resides in a radiant palace.

Although Qianlong does not bestow the same largesse he did upon the 6th Panchen Lama unto our Pandita, there are still numerous gifts at play here. Tenzin Paljor's release from the clutches of the Gurkhas was secured by the Qing general Fukangan, his freedom therefore a gift from Qianlong. A generous stipend provided to him along with lodging in Beijing, yet another gift from the Emperor. At the same time, Qianlong rescinded the title of *taiji*, a gift he had bestowed decades early upon Tenzin Paljor's father mGon po dngos grub rab brtan, otherwise known as Noyon Pandita, in 1740.⁵⁵ We see that in these examples of gift exchange, the rDo ring familiar emerges indemnified, with successive sons of the family only able to reciprocate with their records of service in governance. The asymmetrical nature of this exchange is plain to see, the awe and submission that Sperling describes in his article is exemplified by Tenzin Paljor's inability to receive another audience with the Emperor, having to instead dress in monk's robes and join the crowd of monks lining the road as Qianlong's procession travelled from the imperial palace to Yonghegong temple to gaze upon his visage from a distance (*gyang mjal*).⁵⁶

A few years after his return from Beijing, Tenzin Paljor's heir, Mingyur Sonam Paljor is married and not long after the family receive an edict from the Qianlong Emperor through the Lhasa Ambans that restores the hereditary title of *taiji* and confirmed the ascendancy of the junior Doring to the position of cabinet minister. Tenzin Paljor commits the transcript of the edict into his autobiography and is effusive in his praise of the Emperor's benevolence that allows his heir to follow his father's footsteps (*pha bu go brjes or pha sul bu jags*) in service of the Ganden Podrang and the Qing empire.

Imperial Afterlives

It is important to note that these three examples of gift giving also betray the fact that this imperial logic did not represent an all-pervasive imperial centre that dictated the course of history for the periphery. While my examination of the afterlives of the luxurious gifts made to the Panchen Lama and Dalai Lama by the Qianlong Emperor, speak more to the Emperor as connoisseur of material culture, and do not necessarily move us beyond the aporia of the gift, Doring Tenzin Paljor's encounter with Qianlong, and his autobiographical inscription

⁵⁵ Tshe ring dbang rgyal. *Mi dbang rtogs brjod*. Lha sa: Bod ljong mi mangs dpe skrun khang, 2003, 48.

⁵⁶ Rdo ring bstan 'dzin dpal 'byor. *Rdo ring pañḍi ta'i rnam thar*, 1987, 947.

of Qianlong's edict follows the script of what Johan Elverskog terms Qing ornamentalism, whereby existing social hierarchies of class and hereditary title are upheld albeit superscribed with an imperial logic. Therefore, it seems it was for the aristocratic lay elites, for whom imperial baubles became the most potent sources of self-fashioning. In the words of Ann Stoler, sentiment became the 'substance of governing projects'.⁵⁷ The imperial logic that would undergird Qianlong's support for Tibetan traditional hierarchies and class organization, to a large extent depended on the literary representations of the aspirations, anxieties and emotions of both the Emperor, and Tibetan elites.

We see that in these contingent material encounters, that for a select group of elites - who had close familial or personal relationships with each other - texts and objects become intertwined to produce new conceptions of empire and of personal subjectivities. Gift exchange is therefore a site of possibility for the both giver, receiver and the object itself, where both the anxieties and aspirations of the Qianlong Emperor and his Tibetan interlocutors become writ large into the historiography of Sino-Tibetan relations in the 18th century and beyond.

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⁵⁷ Ann L. Stoler, "Affective States", in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, ed. David Nugent and Joan Vincent, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 4-29.

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