

A tantric rewriting of the history of China by mGon-po-skyabs in the *rGya-nag chos-'byung*

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For specific reasons linked to the political circumstances of his time, the 18th-century Mongol scholar mGon-po-skyabs, who was probably one of the best polyglots and polymaths of his time, was asked to write, in Tibetan, a History of Buddhism in China. He completed it in 1736 under the title *rGya-nag chos-'byung*, 'The Chronicle of Buddhism in China'. This chronicle is unique in historical literature written in Tibetan, not only because it is the only work entirely devoted to the religious and worldly history of China, but also because it seems to be the first to present a historical 'montage', which goes back in time as far as to the period of the mythical kings and which, being carefully Buddhicised *ab initio*, adapts perfectly to the Manchu Emperors.

The *rGya-nag chos-'byung* illustrates the Mongol supreme achievement in mastering Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, so much so that its author clearly intended to be the spokesman for all the upholders of the dGe-lugs-pa tradition.

The present paper addresses the following:

1. It briefly describes the content of the three main parts of the Chronicle of Buddhism in China and emphasizes its differences with the earlier Chapters on China written in Tibetan.
2. It explains what literary techniques mGon-po-skyabs uses to build up his setting, and which Tantras and Mahayana Sutras allow him to encompass all tenets whatsoever within his Buddhist view.
3. It examines the finality of mGon-po-skyabs' elaborate construction and raises the question of the intricate relationships between the Mongol and Tibetan Buddhists at the Manchu Court.