

The Fifth Dalai Lama's "Secret Visionary Autobiography" and Manchu Prince Yunli (1697–1738)

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The "Secret Visionary Autobiography" (Tib. rNam thar rgya can; henceforth *SVA*) is a collection of about sixty-five texts which contain descriptions of the mystical experiences of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) and instructions on ritual practices based on these experiences. In order to facilitate the correct performance of these rituals it is accompanied with a volume of illustrations. It is only in recent years that the *SVA* has become a subject of scholarly studies.

An ardent propagator of the *SVA* was Prince Yunli (1697–1738), the seventeenth son of the Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1662–1722) of the Manchu Qing dynasty. He received many Tibetan Buddhist tantric initiations and had several Tibetan religious names, of which he preferred Buddha-guru-rtsal. He possessed a big personal library of Tibetan and Mongolian books, parts of which are found today not only in China but also in European collections.

In the Library of the St. Petersburg State University there is kept a complete Mongolian translation of the first twenty-five chapters of the *SVA* (i.e., the "Autobiography" proper). Also in this library is found an instructional text in Mongolian on a longevity ritual. It was composed by Yunli himself on the basis of the sixteenth chapter of the *SVA*. Some Mongolian texts from the collection of Yunli relating to the *SVA* are found in the Cambridge University Library.

It became known only quite recently that forty Tibetan texts on the *SVA* from the collection of Prince Yunli are presently kept in the Copenhagen Royal Library. These are ritual instructions based on the *SVA*. These texts relating to the *SVA* which were collected by Prince Yunli are of utmost importance for the further study of this extraordinary collection.