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LONG LIVE THE EMPEROR!
*Uses of the Ming Founder across Six
Centuries of East Asian History*

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USING ZHU YUANZHANG'S COMMUNICATIONS WITH TIBETANS TO JUSTIFY PRC RULE IN TIBET

GRAY TUTTLE

Writing about Tibetan history in the People's Republic of China (PRC) is intimately tied up with the state's interests in legitimizing its rule of Tibetan regions. The Tibetan cultural area—including the autonomous Tibetan political units of government recognized by the Chinese Communist government—makes up some 25% of PRC territory. Strategically important, the Tibetan Plateau is also rich in natural resources, from forests in the East to oil in the North and minerals and hydroelectric potential throughout. Given the *de facto* independence of the state of central Tibet, based in Lhasa, in the first half of the twentieth century, the Chinese government remains sensitive to the argument that its sovereignty over Tibet is illegitimate. Thus, most of the state-sponsored work on Tibetan history is devoted to making the claim that Tibet is and historically has been an inalienable part of China. In the litany of Chinese assertions of authority over Tibet, Zhu Yuanzhang, also known as Ming Taizu and the Hongwu emperor, plays an especially important role for modern historians in China. Although these scholars do not raise this point explicitly, Zhu Yuanzhang is central to official Chinese arguments legitimizing Chinese rule of Tibet because he was the first ethnically Chinese emperor to confer titles of authority on Central Tibetan leaders.

I will draw most of the primary material for this essay from *The Historical Status of China's Tibet*, the most recent historical account of Tibet to be published in English in the People's Republic of China. It seems that the (fictional) names of the authors to whom this work is attributed were created from the names of the contributors to the text, as underlined in the following list of authors: Wang Gui, Tang Jiawei, Wu Wei, Xirab (Sherab) Nyima, Yang Gyaincain, which when combined yields the names: Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain.¹ As these latter pseudonyms are listed as the authors, I will refer throughout this article to Wang and Nyima as the authors of the work. The joint Chinese and Tibetan authorship of this text is a rarity in the world of Chinese publications about Tibet but was probably an attempt to lend some legitimacy to an obvious propaganda effort. As noted by Wang and Nyima in their introduction, this text was explicitly written to counter what the authors call the theory of "Tibetan independence" put forward in two popular English language assessments of the status of Tibet, *Tibet: A Political History* by W. D. Shakabpa and *The Status of Tibet*, by Michael C. van Walt van Praag.² To be fair, these accounts, like those produced in the PRC, are largely propaganda: they too set out to convince the reader of a particular political perspective, often ignoring pertinent evidence that runs counter to their argument, in this case for Tibet's historic independence. In fact, the historiography associated with the "Tibet is a part of China" argument and with the "Tibetan independence" argument both project anachronistic ideas of nation-states and even Western international law back into the past. For Tibetans, the idea of complete independence—so critical to nation-state status—is the primary element projected dubiously into a past often marked by outside influence, intervention and military control. For the Chinese, the insistence on inalienable bounded territory—another critical element of modern nation-states—belies a history of (frequently loose) control of only certain key centers of power in Tibet, such as Sakya and Lhasa, as well as the routes to those centers, while vast parts of Tibet resisted any outside authority until the mid-twentieth century.

A number of books and articles were produced in the PRC in response to the influential work of Shakabpa and van Praag, and all deal with Zhu Yuanzhang's role in "maintaining" rule of Tibet after the fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty. The delay between the publica-

tion of these influential Tibetan nationalist versions of history and of the Chinese nationalist critique probably indicates that these American publications only became accessible in China in the late 1970s. The English language version of Shakabpa's history was translated into Chinese by 1980 and was in circulation (probably for internal government research consumption only) at that time.³ Once these controversial histories were available in China and to Tibetans there, the government was forced to enter into a dialogue with Shakabpa and van Praag and address their historical claims.⁴ The visits of fact-finding delegations from the Tibetan government-in-exile in 1979 and 1980 may also have contributed to this re-engagement with the claims of Tibetans in exile.⁵

The title of the first response, published in Chinese, translates as *Shakabpa's "Tibet: A Political History" and the True Face of Tibetan History*.⁶ This short book was compiled by a team of critics based in Tibet and published by the state-run Nationalities Publishing House in Beijing. The next year, a more thorough response to both Shakabpa and van Praag's work was published, again in Chinese, with the English cover title: *Comments on the Historical Status of Tibet*.⁷ The full translation of the Chinese title is: *Debating Tibet's Historical Status: Critically Commenting on Shakabpa's "Tibet: A Political History" and van Praag's "The Status of Tibet."* This text, like the one explored in detail in this essay, was written jointly by Chinese and Tibetan scholars, although in both cases the lead author was Chinese. Sherab Nyima, the Tibetan historian listed as an author, teaches in Beijing, where the book was published, again by the state run Nationalities Publishing House there. Despite these Beijing connections, the title page lists this book as the product of the Sichuan Tibetology Institute's Major Research Assignment. This text was also translated into Tibetan and published in a two-volume edition by the same press in 2001.⁸ Thus, the Chinese government, through the various research institutes and publishing houses it has established and financed, has entered into a centrally directed debate with these foreign-published assessments of Tibet's history.

Despite the plethora of such works, I have chosen to focus only on the most recent account because it was deemed valuable enough to be translated into English and made available on the World Wide Web. *The Historical Status of China's Tibet* grew directly out of the

Chinese domestic publications responding to the foreign-published perspectives on China's "Tibet problem." In the postscript to Wang and Nyima's work, the authors note that they compiled this edition "to reflect foreign reading habit[s]" by removing the "sections focused on academic theories" while maintaining the basic contents of the *Debating Tibet's Historical Status: Critically Commenting on Shakabpa's "Tibet: A Political History" and van Praag's "The Status of Tibet."*⁹ Because writing about Tibet, especially Tibetan history, is strictly controlled in the People's Republic of China, I take the fact that this account was made freely and easily accessible to an international public as a sign that it has official acceptance and support.¹⁰ Accounts of Tibetan history that have not been approved by state authorities are not allowed to circulate.¹¹ Thus, I will refer to this account as "official" even though it was not published as a white paper or other government issued document from a particular bureaucratic institution.

Before turning to an examination of the way Zhu Yuanzhang is used by modern historians to justify Chinese rule of Tibet, I must first draw attention to the role of ethnicity in East and Inner Asian power relations that preceded the Ming dynasty. Modern historians, in China and in the West, tend to emphasize the continuity of "Chinese" dynasties, but the varying ethnicity of the families that ruled China was very significant to the peoples who lived on the frontiers of the empire. The non-Chinese or ethnically mixed dynasties from the Northern Wei to the Tang, Jin, and Liao were, like the Yuan, more successful than most ethnically Chinese dynasties in working with the non-Chinese and often tribal or nomadic populations on the northern and western borders of China proper, at least partly because they had a shared cultural heritage with some of them. The Tang dynasty, one of mixed ethnic (Turkic and Chinese) origins, was the first of the families that ruled China to have relations with the Tibetans, but this was a period of rival empires. Far from being a submissive tributary, the Tibetan empire more than once challenged the declining Tang empire in its dominance of Central Asia, closer to home in the Ordos bend of the Yellow River, and even at the capital, Chang'an (present-day Xi'an).¹² The later, ethnically Chinese, Song dynasty attempted to extend its power only into the northeastern fringes of former Tibetan territory ruled by the Western Xia dynasty. Only when the Mongols rose to power in Asia did Tibet again be-

come a target of conquest from a rival power, being invaded in the 1240s by Mongol forces.

Thus Chinese official historiography can, at best, date rule of Tibet from Beijing to 1271 when the Mongol Khubilai Khan founded the Yuan dynasty.¹³ Yet this claim is problematic for several reasons. When the Mongols entered the region we now call China, there had been no unified single empire for over three centuries. The Mongols cobbled together the former empires of the Qara-Khitai (Western Liao), the Western Xia, the Jin, and the Southern Song, as well as the Uighurs of Turfan, Koryo Korea, and the formerly decentralized polities in the regions we now call Mongolia and Tibet, to rule an empire that included much more than just “China.” Moreover, when the Mongols finally conquered the Southern Song—effectively extinguishing the one ethnically Chinese polity remaining in East Asia—they had already dominated Tibet through military might and appointed officials there for several decades. The one contemporary hold-out of Chinese cultural continuity that was the Song dynasty had nothing to do with the Mongol empire’s subjugation of Tibet. It is only through the distorted lens of contemporary nationalism that one can view these events as some kind of “reunification” of a prior state that shared a continuous history with the massive empires of the Han and Tang (which had not ruled Tibetan or Mongolian regions in any case) before it or with the Qing and contemporary Chinese state after it.

Wang and Nyima’s portrayal of the Yuan dynasty sets it up as an almost utopian model for multi-ethnic unity that reflects a projection into the past of the contemporary view that the Chinese espouse about their own modern state. For instance, in the introduction to *The Historic Status of China’s Tibet*, Wang and Nyima portray this time of humiliating defeat and economically ruinous rule by foreigners in glowing terms: “The Mongolian, Han [Chinese], Tibetan and various other nationalities joined hands to form a political entity featuring economic and cultural prosperity.” Zhu Yuanzhang certainly did not view the Mongol dynasty in this light. However, for the current Chinese government, now in the position of unrivaled dominance, this idealized view of Mongol rule is more useful than the anti-Mongol feelings that Zhu encouraged to bring the Ming dynasty into being. Wang and Nyima, writing for the Chinese state, mirror this new ver-

sion of the Yuan in the opening lines of their text: “China is a unified country with 56 nationalities. As a major member of this big family, the Tibetans are found in large numbers....” This opening suggests that though the number of nationalities has changed over time, they are all united “as a single entity” or “one big family,” and that the Tibetans have been part of this union for over seven hundred years.

The legitimating link between the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and Zhu Yuanzhang’s Ming dynasty is explicitly made by Wang and Nyima in their introduction: “The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) basically followed various systems introduced during the Yuan Dynasty for rule over Tibet.” In this way, these historians try to connect their claims of Ming dominance of Tibet with the idea that Tibet was a part of the Mongol empire.¹⁴ On the face of it, this is a logical argument. If the Mongol empire ruled over both Chinese and Tibetan regions from Beijing, then it stands to reason that a regime that replaced the Mongol empire might command the same authority and control the same territory, including Tibet. The remainder of this essay will consider this proposition, as well as how official Chinese government historians make their case to support this proposition.

First, if Zhu Yuanzhang was to “continue” the Mongols’ rule of Tibet, then it must be established that the Mongols did indeed rule Tibet. Wang and Nyima’s second chapter, “Relations Between the Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty and the Prince of Dharma of the Sagya [Sakya] Sect of Tibetan Buddhism,” focuses almost entirely on the relations between a Mongol prince named Godan (Khubilai’s elder cousin) and the eminent Tibetan monk Sakya Pandita (abbreviated as Sapan). Ironically, this entire exchange took place in the 1240s and ’50s, *before* the Yuan dynasty was even founded. Wang and Nyima, responding to Shakabpa and van Praag’s assessment that Mongol-Tibetan relations were those of patron and priest, assert that the more important relationship between these two men was one of “sovereign and subject.” They cite only a single Tibetan source (and no corroborating Chinese documents) to describe the letter issued by the Tibetan lama—supposedly to all Tibetans—advising submission to the Mongols. Wang and Nyima assert that this advice led to the subordination of the Tibetans to the Mongol Empire. Yet, their source seems to date from the seventeenth century at the earliest.¹⁵ Given their reliance on this late source, it is not surprising that the

authors were unconcerned about examining the original documents upon which their source was based. I refer specifically to the famous letter supposedly written by Sapan to the Tibetans, recommending that they “submit to the Mongols . . . pledge allegiance to them and pay them tributes in the capacity of a loyal vassal.” The Tibetologist David Jackson demonstrated some time ago that this letter appears to be a later forgery, because it is not found in early editions of Sapan’s collected works.¹⁶ Wang and Nyima’s historical evidence does not convincingly demonstrate the precedent of Mongol rule of Tibet as a justification for China’s present rule. First, they consider an event that predates the founding of the Yuan dynasty and thus has nothing to do with China proper. Second, they focus on a single late and dubious historical source.

Nevertheless, this text was written for a general audience, so the content of Wang and Nyima’s argument will be considered, even if the logic and source material provide weak support for it. In summary, they describe four elements of political subordination, albeit without providing any evidence to support their claim, including (1) the appointment of a Sakya official by the Mongol empire, (2) the submission of other Tibetans to this appointed official, (3) the issuance of official documents to Tibetans, and (4) the presence of Mongol officials to assist in deciding tax matters. If these very real elements of political subordination took place, then there would indeed have been a system in place that Zhu Yuanzhang could have embraced. Which elements of the system are historically demonstrable? First, the Mongols did indeed appoint members of the leading family of the Sakya religious lineage (or “sect” as Wang and Nyima prefer) as their administrators in Tibet and gave them, as signs of their authority, gold and silver tallies.¹⁷ Second, especially under Khubilai Khan and his descendants, the Mongols did expect other Tibetans to submit to the Sakya administrator and “refrain from acting independently,” as noted by Wang and Nyima. Yet this expectation was not always met in Mongol “rule” of Tibet. Leaders of rival polities in Tibet challenged the Sakya administrators throughout their tenure.¹⁸ The *Yuan History* (*Yuanshi*) calls these “rebellions,” but the Sakya’s Tibetan rivals simply refused ever to acquiesce to these externally-appointed leaders and the Mongol troops that backed them, a point to which we will return. Third, the Mongols did issue writs of authority

and documents that protected various localities (especially monasteries) from taxation. Fourth, Mongol officials did come to Tibet to conduct Tibet's first census as the basis for deciding the tax burden to be levied on Tibet.¹⁹ These were the elements of Yuan control, so to demonstrate that the Ming continued the system, Wang and Nyima should be able to show that Zhu Yuanzhang exercised the powers of (1) appointing Tibet's leader, (2) expecting other Tibetans to submit to this authority (and enforcing compliance when necessary), (3) issuing documents that determined the legal status of property, and (4) deciding tax matters in Tibet.

Despite the assertion in Wang and Nyima's introduction that the Ming followed the system established by the Yuan, in chapter 3 ("Ming Dynasty's Policy of Enfeoffment and Tribute-Related Trade") they fail to demonstrate that Zhu exercised these four powers in his "rule" of Tibet. In fact, the first official Ming communication with Tibet, in the second year of Zhu Yuanzhang's reign, ironically records that Zhu Yuanzhang "has conquered the whole country with force, [and] has become the emperor of the Ming dynasty. ... The edict is issued because Tubo [Tibet], located in the west, may not have received the news of China's unification." The authors seem not to recognize that if China was unified without those in Tibet being aware of it, then Tibet was *ipso facto* not part of China! Moreover, as Elliot Sperling has pointed out, this first Ming communication with Tibet explicitly acknowledges that Tibet (Ch. *Tufan*) is a country, nation, or state (Ch. *bang*), a term that was deliberately dropped from Wang and Nyima's translation of this passage.²⁰

These obvious discrepancies aside, it would be understandable that a new dynasty might take some time to gain control of all the outlying areas once ruled by the previous dynasty, so the more important question for Wang and Nyima to answer would be: Did Zhu Yuanzhang *ever* effectively assert authority over Tibet from a Chinese base of power in the East? The evidence that Wang and Nyima provide demonstrates that Zhu Yuanzhang tried to claim Chinese authority, but also that no show of force backed up his efforts. Ming "rule" of Tibet consisted largely of handing out titles to nearly any Tibetan figure who already possessed local authority, *with no expectation* (as the Mongols had had) that any one appointee would administer Tibet on behalf of the dynasty. As the Ming had no Chinese

officials or military presence in Tibet, they also made no effort to issue legal documents regarding land ownership or tax exemption or to collect census data as the Mongols had done. Unlike the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the Chinese Ming dynasty did not even try to manage the administration of Tibet by sending out its own officials to oversee the Tibetan leaders or to collect taxes. Thus, we must ask whether Zhu Yuanzhang was able to exercise any real influence over Tibet.

Wang and Nyima, in keeping with their argument that Zhu followed the system set up by the Yuan dynasty, emphasize a direct line of continuity between the religious official appointed by the Yuan emperors and the one appointed by Zhu Yuanzhang himself. However, Wang and Nyima's account of the Mongol exercise of power in Tibet is so abbreviated that I must provide further details to explain their presentation of Ming dynastic policy in Tibet. Wang and Nyima note that the Mongols originally gave the Sakya family gold and silver tallies as a sign of their authority to rule Tibet in the emperor's name. Over time, these symbols of authority were converted to a more typically Chinese form: jade, gold, silver, bronze, iron, or even wooden seals that could be pressed in red ink and used to stamp official documents. Under the Yuan system, the Sakya family was given supreme authority in Tibet, to be exercised by the Great Lord (Tib. *dpon chen*). This Great Lord was the secular arm of the Sakya family, while the religious leadership in the family was held by the Imperial Preceptor, starting with 'Phags pa. Although the Sakya family never totally succeeded in extending their rule over all of Tibet, at the height of Mongol power (in the 1280s and 1290s), the greatest rivals of the Sakya were crushed by Mongol armies in support of the Sakya.²¹ However, as Mongol power weakened at the center in Beijing, its ability to enforce Sakya hegemony declined. Although the Mongols kept up the pretense of still "ruling" Tibet through the Sakya family, when the family was challenged and defeated by a rival myriarch ("leader of ten-thousand" in the Yuan system) the Mongols were forced to recognize this new power in Tibet by granting its leader a title.²² More than a decade before the Chinese overthrew the Mongols in China proper, this Tibetan rival was granted recognition by the Mongols and by 1354 had occupied the Sakya headquarters and confiscated all the Yuan-issued legal documents that had conferred its authority.²³

Thus, in 1573, when Zhu Yuanzhang exercised the powers of “appointing,” or more accurately recognizing, leaders in Tibet, there was no single leader upon whom he could confer supreme authority. The rival to the Sakya family had already died, and none of the host of religious and noble leaders who sought recognition and reward from the Ming dynasty held sway over all of Tibet. The central element of the Yuan system of exercising power in Tibet had been the appointment of a single leader with the expectation that other Central Tibetans would submit to this authority. But when Zhu Yuanzhang recognized the local noble and religious leaders in Tibet, he had no intention of enforcing compliance with their authority as the Mongols had originally done. Wang and Nyima try to explain this difference as a continuation in the *system* of the Yuan with different *methods*.

Wang and Nyima use this distinction between “system” and “methods” to ignore the very real political differences between these two dynasties’ relations with Tibet. For instance, they argue that Zhu Yuanzhang issued

imperial edicts to invite ex-Yuan officials to the court for official positions in the early years of the its founding, won submission from the ex-Yuan religious and administrative leaders in the Tibetan areas, thereby incorporating Tibetan areas into the rule of the Ming court. Thus, the Ming court won the power to rule Tibetan areas formerly under the rule of the Yuan Dynasty.

It is true that this part of the Yuan system was maintained: titles and seals of Yuan officials could be exchanged for new titles and seals issued by the Ming court. But only this single aspect of the much larger Mongol system was kept in place. The Mongols’ broad system of rights and responsibilities associated with these symbols of authority was dropped. The right of these appointees to expect support from the dynasty towards enforcing the power that was nominally conferred by these titles was never contemplated or granted by the Ming. The responsibilities of taking the census, collecting a fixed annual tax, and delivering them to the Ming were also not involved in this system. This is why there was no issuance of documents to determine legal status of property or decide tax matters in Tibet, as there had been in the Yuan period. Only one of the four powers exercised by the Mongol Yuan dynasty over Tibet was continued by the Ming dynasty.

In any case, Wang and Nyima's choice of the main official to devote attention to as an exemplar of the smooth transition of authority from the Yuan to the Ming is especially telling, because he had no practical political power in either China or Tibet. In the chaos of dynastic transition, Namgyal Palzangpo, the last of the Imperial Tutors of the Yuan dynasty, had retreated to Tibet from the normal station of his office in the capital (Dadu/Beijing). Some five years after the Ming founding (and not in the second year of Zhu's reign as Wang and Nyima assert), in 1373, Namgyal Palzangpo "went to Nanjing to show his allegiance. ... [and] recommended more than 100 ex-Yuan officials in U-tsang and other Tibetan areas."²⁴ Rejoicing in this act, Zhu Yuanzhang appointed this ex-official of the former dynasty and a now-subordinate Tibetan family as a "State Tutor" (a rank below his former position) with a jade seal of authority. At the time, Namgyal Palzangpo had neither temporal authority over Tibet nor any religious authority over the numerous schools of Tibetan Buddhism that were backed by various noble families in Tibet. Yet this is the first, and presumably the best, example Wang and Nyima can offer of the one continued system of authority—the appointment of Tibetan officials—exercised by the Ming dynasty. Yet, as recently demonstrated by Leonard van der Kuijp, the remnants of the Mongol court in Qara Qorum also continued the tradition of appointing Tibetans to such positions at least as late as 1375, granting the very same title to a Tibetan lama "of the former Yuan."²⁵ If such appointments were sufficient to constitute rule of Tibet, then Tibet would absurdly have been "ruled" simultaneously from both Nanjing and Qara Qorum!

In addition, later in the chapter on the Ming dynasty, Wang and Nyima bring up the case of the rival leader who had defeated the Sakya rulers of Tibet at the end of the Yuan dynasty. They note in passing that the Ming emperor sent people to Tibet to grant this leading Tibetan figure's son a title commensurate with that conferred on him by the Yuan dynasty. Only then, in response to this Ming offer and not out of a need to seek Ming approval for his authority, did this official send a mission to the court. I believe the reason that they chose to list this event so late in the chapter, rather than at the start, is because this leading Tibetan family did not depend on the authority of the Yuan or the Ming dynasties to rule Tibet. Rather, this family first took control of Tibetan affairs, and then was recognized

by both these dynasties precisely because they were able to exercise power in Central Tibet. Yet Zhu Yuanzhang and his court were unaware of just how powerful a figure this man was at the time, merely noting the arrival of his envoys in the records, without acknowledging their master's preeminent role in Tibetan politics. I suspect that this is the reason that Wang and Nyima do not cite the passages from the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* (*Ming shilu*) for their information about this figure, as they did for other historic details at the start of the chapter. The two relevant passages in the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty* are very brief and reflect the court's ignorance of the true state of affairs in Tibet. That ignorance meant he was only rewarded a religious title, not a title that reflected his secular power in Tibet.²⁶ Aside from the confirmation of old Yuan officials in their previous positions in the early years of Zhu Yuanzhang's reign, the principal type of titles awarded to Tibetans throughout the Ming period were religious titles, which were given to learned Tibetan monks without regard for whether or not they exerted political power in Tibet.²⁷

As only a single aspect of the old system of the Yuan was continued by Zhu Yuanzhang, we must examine instead the new methods that Wang and Nyima assert were so central to Ming "control" over Tibet. These new methods were twofold: first, the Ming dynasty supported a host of Tibetan officials, and not just a single religious tradition (or sect) as the Mongols had done; and second, Zhu Yuanzhang and his successors did not militarily intervene in Tibetan affairs. Since supporting a single leader and religious tradition, as well as intervening militarily, had been crucial to the Yuan dynasty's control of Tibet, acknowledging that these prerogatives were dropped under the Ming dynasty is certainly a step forward in reaching a consensus about the historic relations of Tibet with the ruling dynasties in China. Wang and Nyima say that "the Ming Dynasty refrained from acting like the Yuan Dynasty, which gave special support to only the Sagya Sect. In carrying out a policy of pacification, the Ming Dynasty granted various new offices and titles of honor to leaders of various religious sects that ruled their own areas." In this statement, the authors recognize both that the Ming dynasty was only conferring rule on those who already "ruled their own areas" and that no one leader or religious group was able to rule all of Tibet. Moreover,

Wang and Nyima contend that the Ming emperors from Zhu Yuanzhang on were, rather than evincing a desire to rule Tibet, merely carrying out “a policy of pacification.”

The second point, regarding the absence of military intervention in Tibet, was also characteristic of the Ming dynasty’s new methods in Tibet. While asserting that the Ming “exercised full sovereignty over Tibet” Wang and Nyima ironically also admit that the Ming dynasty “was not as powerful in national military might as the Yuan had been.” Thus, part of its new method for “ruling” Tibet was that the Ming dynasty “refrained from sending troops to subdue Tibet or from garrisoning troops in Tibet.” Of all the differences in the Yuan and Ming systems, this is the most telling, for Zhu Yuanzhang and several of his successors were actually very powerful militarily, pursuing the Mongols deep into Inner Asia and sending huge fleets overseas where they intervened in political affairs of Southeast Asian polities. However, their attention was clearly not focused on exercising the military might necessary to incorporate Tibet into the Ming domains, as could have been easily accomplished given the absence of strong central leadership in Tibet. Without such a presence, the Ming were forced to recognize as the legitimate authority whichever strong leader took control of a particular Tibetan region. They were also unable to enforce any sort of taxation regime on the Tibetan regions as the Mongols had done, depending instead on the Ming court’s largess to attract powerful leaders and their “tribute” from Tibet.

Wang and Nyima’s realistic assessment of the fiscal relations between Tibetan leaders and the Ming dynasty is the most refreshing and honest aspect of their account. As is clear from even the earliest granting of titles to former Yuan officials in Tibet under Zhu Yuanzhang, there were substantial monetary incentives that accompanied a visit to the Ming court. Sometimes simply called “rewards” (*Ch. shang*), fine fabrics, horses, and so forth were awarded to Tibetans newly re-appointed to positions of authority by the Ming dynasty.²⁸ More important than the initial gifts, however, was the right to regularly visit the Ming court, which was very lucrative for the Tibetans. While it may technically be true that those granted titles by Zhu Yuanzhang and his successors were “required to pay tribute to the Ming dynasty court within stipulated periods of time,” Wang and Nyima readily acknowledge that this was much more of a privilege

than an obligation: "Tribute payers shuttling back and forth between the Ming court and their own areas were actually what we would today call trade delegations." This is because the gifts given to the Tibetans in return for their tribute "amounted to several times the value of the tributes." Under Zhu Yuanzhang, these trade delegations were not so frequent as to be troublesome, but later in the dynasty limits on the frequency of visits and number of visitors in each delegation were repeatedly invoked to try to stem the tide of Tibetan traders seeking to benefit from this favorable exchange of commodities. From this we can see that this supposed "obligation" was in fact a great boon to the Tibetans and an unwanted burden to the Ming court. Thus, far from exercising the sovereign power to extract resources from Tibetan areas, as the Yuan dynasty had more or less effectively done in Tibet through the imposition of a census and local tax collection, the Ming practiced no system of direct taxation on the Tibetan regions. And even the indirect tribute the dynasty was said to collect was really only a result of the very favorable exchange of goods made available by the court.

Zhu Yuanzhang was hardly the most important figure in Sino-Tibetan relations during the Ming dynasty, yet he is the focus of Wang and Nyima's chapter on this dynasty. The Yongle and Xuande emperors are both much better known for their relations with prominent Tibetans who visited China. But these later relations are most famous for their religious nature, which would not have helped Wang and Nyima make their case.²⁹ The reason that they focus so closely on affairs at the start of the Ming dynasty is that they are trying to create a narrative of dynastic continuity across the centuries, to assert Chinese sovereignty over Tibet across time. Once political relations were established, they want to assert that religious appointments can be seen as preserving the political authority of China-based empires over Tibet. These religious appointments were not made to politically powerful people, and lapsed in the middle and late Ming period; despite these facts, Wang and Nyima argue that the inheritance of these (originally Chinese) titles through the principle of reincarnation obviates the need to demonstrate any continuous political relations. Since the China-based Mongol Yuan dynasty was the first to exercise power over Tibet, Zhu Yuanzhang takes on an exaggerated role in Wang and Nyima's evaluation of his place in Sino-Tibetan

relations. He becomes the vital link between the so-called “Yuan system” of governing Tibet and the new “Ming methods” of influencing Tibet from afar, albeit without military or fiscal control over Tibet proper. In this modern, Chinese-state-sponsored narrative, the concerns of international law are paramount, as signaled by Wang and Nyima’s explicit response to W. D. Shakabpa’s *Tibet: A Political History* and especially Michael van Praag’s *The Status of Tibet: History, Rights and Prospects in International Law*.

The motives of Zhu Yuanzhang in his own time drop from view. What might they have been? Facing the very real threat of Mongol power in northern Inner Asia, Zhu Yuanzhang may have been much more concerned to maintain friendly relations with, and not necessarily sovereignty over, the Tibetan regimes on his western flank. He must have been aware of the rich rewards the Tibetans had reaped from serving in the Mongol court and awarded them much the same, without either demanding much in return or expecting Tibetans to govern Tibet according to Ming dynastic administration. Having seen the power of religious ideas in his own rise to the throne, he may have been eager to gain the legitimacy associated with being a patron of Tibetan Buddhism. He, like his successors, may also have been acutely aware of the need to maintain positive trade relations with the Tibetans, most especially in order to have a good supply of horses for warfare with the steppe Mongols. These are just a few of the circumstances that may have motivated Zhu Yuanzhang to keep open relations with Tibetans. But, as I hope I have made clear, although relations continued with Tibet during the Ming dynasty through nominal recognition of Tibetan leaders and through tribute/trade exchanges, continuity of *rule* from the Yuan to the Ming can be argued only on the flimsiest of grounds.

Notes to Chapter Nineteen

¹ Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain, *Historical Status of China's Tibet*, "Postscript." References are to the (short) chapters, as pages on the Web site are unnumbered.

² A more complete Tibetan-language version of Shakabpa's book was later published in Dharamsala, India: Zhwa sgab pa [Shakabpa], Dbang phyug bde ldan, *Gangs ljongs bod chos srid gnyis ldan gyi rgyal khab chen po'i srid don gyi rgyal rabs gsal bar ston pa zla ba 'bum phrag 'char ba'i rdzing bu'am / Blo gsar bung ba dga ba'i rol mtsho* (also known as *Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs* [*Political History of Tibet*]).

³ For the researchers involved in critiquing these texts, see Yin Fatang's introduction in Wang Gui, Xirao nima [Shes rab Nyi ma], and Tang Jiawei, *Xizang lishi diwei bian* (Debating Tibet's historical status).

⁴ Bill Coleman's suggestion that the impetus for such work "comes from a perceived notion by Chinese authorities of an interest/sympathy for these works in the west" (personal communication, 2004) applies to Wang and Nyima's English language translation under consideration here. However, I do not think this was the primary impetus for the Chinese and Tibetan language works on this topic. Any foreigner who knew enough to read such works would be wary of their propagandistic aspects. To my knowledge, no Western scholar has examined these works and few are even aware of them, so I doubt that they have reached a general audience.

⁵ Tsering Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 376–377.

⁶ Xizang zizhi chu "Xizang zhengzhi shi" pingzhu xiaozu, *Xiageba de "Zangqu zhengzhi shi" yu Xizang lishi de benlai mianmu* (Shakabpa's "Tibet: a Political History" and the true face of Tibetan history), 1–3.

⁷ Wang Gui, Xirao nima [Shes rab nyi ma], and Tang Jiawei, *Xizang lishi diwei bian*.

⁸ Dbang rgod [Wang Gui], Shes rab nyi ma, and Thang ca we [Tang Jiawei], *Bod ljongs kyi lo rgyus bab dpyad zhib* (Cover title: *Comments on the Historical Status of Tibet*).

⁹ Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain, *Historical Status of China's Tibet*, "Postscript."

¹⁰ Bill Coleman has gone further; he is "almost positive that these authors are employed by the China Tibetology Research Center, a state research institute belonging to the United Front whose researchers produce 'scholarship' based on government requests and/or orders." (Personal communication, 2004).

¹¹ Derong Tsering Dhondup's *A General History of Tibet: Auspicious Vase* (Ch. *Zang-zu tongshi: Jixiang baoping*) was "published in Lhasa by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, [but] the authorities issued directives soon afterwards not to release the book for sale" (Tibet Information Network, "TAR Authorities Ban Book by Tibetan Author," news release, March 16, 2004). The 1994 Chinese translation of Melvyn Goldstein's *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), entitled *Lama wangguo de fumie* (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe), was withdrawn from circulation shortly after being published, and was hard to find, although some Beijing bookstores may have had it until at least 2004. A new (politically correct?) translation by the original translator, Du Yongbin, has been issued.

¹² For details on these incursions, see Beckwith, *Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, and "The Tibetans in the Ordos and North China."

¹³ Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyancain, *Historical Status of China's Tibet*, "Introduction."

¹⁴ Most Western Tibetologists, including Guiseppe Tucci, Luciano Petech, Dieter Schuh, and Leonard van der Kuijp, who have researched thirteenth- and fourteenth-century (Sino-)Tibetan history, seem to accept that the Mongols ruled Tibet to a greater or lesser degree. Some historians of China who do not deal with Tibetan materials disagree. For example, see Mote, *Imperial China*, 483, which states that despite the Mongols' appointment of Tibetan Buddhist clergy and other staff to bureaucratic offices created to govern Tibet, these "measures, however, clearly did not bring Tibet under Beijing's rule." For similar statements see Franke, "Tibetans in Yuan China."

¹⁵ Wang and Nyima cite "the Dege edition of the *Sagya's Lineal Descriptions*," one of several (it is not clear which) texts entitled in Tibetan *Sa skya['i] gdung rabs*. Several works with this title are listed in Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, but one pre-dates the encounter in question and so is irrelevant, and the others are all from the fifteenth century or later.

¹⁶ Jackson, "Sa-skya Pandita's Letter to the Tibetans."

¹⁷ Polo, *Travels of Marco Polo* (1993 reprint), vol. 1; see inside front cover (for color image) or the page facing page 352 (for black and white image) for an illustration of these tallies.

¹⁸ Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, vol. 1, 11–25.

¹⁹ Compare the documents from the Yuan and Ming dynasties translated in Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region, ed., *Collection of the Historical Archives of Tibet*. See also Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, and "The Mongol Census in Tibet."

²⁰ Sperling, "Early Ming Policy Toward Tibet," 58. For the original see Gu Zucheng et al., eds., *Ming shilu Zangzu shiliao* (Tibetan historic materials from the "Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty"), vol. 1, "Xizang yanjiu congkan" (Collection of research on Tibet), 3.

²¹ Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, vol. 1, 16

²² Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, vol. 1, 17–23.

²³ Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, vol. 1, 22; Snellgrove and Richardson, *Cultural History of Tibet*, 153.

²⁴ Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain, chap. 3; Gu Zucheng et al., eds., *Ming shilu Zangzu shiliao*, vol. 1, 20–21.

²⁵ Leonard van der Kuijp, *The Kālacakra and the Patronage of Tibetan Buddhism by the Mongol Imperial Family*, 28, citing Gu Zucheng et al., eds., *Ming shilu Zangzu shiliao*, vol. 1, 26 ff.

²⁶ Gu Zucheng et al., eds., *Ming shilu Zangzu shiliao*, vol. 1, 17–8, 20.

²⁷ See Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region, ed., *Collection of the Historical Archives of Tibet*.

²⁸ Gu Zucheng et al., eds., *Ming shilu Zangzu shiliao*, vol. 1, 13–22. (Editor's note: for such expenses in foreign relations, see also chapter 5 in this volume.)

²⁹ See Sperling, "Early Ming Policy Toward Tibet;" Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan Art*; Berger, "Miracles in Nanjing," and "Preserving the Nation."

