

PHILIPPE VAN HEURCK: Chants attribués à Tsang Yang Gyatso, sixième Dalai Lama. Contribution à l'étude de la littérature tibétaine. (Opuscula tibetana 16). Rikon: Tibet-Institut, 1984. 145 pp., sFr 25.-

This new translation of the songs attributed to the 6th Dalai Lama, Tsang Yang Gyatso (1683-1706), together with introduction and commentary, both grammatical and exegetical, can look back on several translations four of which were recently edited between 1981 and 1983 (Dhondup 1981, Tatz 1981, Houston 1982, Savizkij 1983) some fifty years after the first by Dawchyan in 1930. This, however, is no drawback but a benefit, the present publication being the first complex study of the poetry of this Dalai Lama that deals with the literary and historical background to which a third of the book is devoted.

The translation refrains from all clarificatory additions and tries to express the little verses in adequate, but readable and empathic manner. All necessary explanations are given in the commentary. The author discusses different opinions about the meaning, yet he leaves it to the reader to decide the significance of these small songs, each of them containing no more than four lines.

Although the greater part of the introduction is devoted to Tibetan poetry as the subtitle indicates, van Heurck draws in the first fifteen pages a picture of the 6th Dalai Lama which is remarkable as regards the historical context. I think that given the present state of research, it is the only correct one: a person who renounced the Buddhist vow in favour of life as a layman; who was nevertheless raised to the throne of the Dalai Lama and who was torn apart by politics, and who paid for this with imprisonment and perhaps a violent death. He was the only lay Dalai Lama in Tibetan history, for, although he renounced, he was still a Tulku, the reincarnation of his predecessor, the Great Fifth. Nevertheless, van Heurck sees him as an upright character and rejects an interpretation that makes him a libertine.

Seen against this background the poems are thus not merely love songs of any ordinary person, an expression of the libertinage of a celibate, but an expression of the strained relations between the person as individual and the reluctantly accepted rôle of Dalai Lama. In some poems van Heurck shows the relation to politics and how the Dalai Lama could, in poetic form, deal a blow to his enemies which he could hardly have done in an official form.

Some poems may have been falsely attributed to him by his enemies, but the author fortunately gives all the 66 songs traditionally attributed to this Dalai Lama.

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