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Arriving Ahead of Time: The *Ma 'das sprul sku* and Issues of *Sprul sku* Personhood¹

Marcia S. Calkowski
University of Regina

Abstract: *A ma 'das sprul sku is a non-hereditary reincarnate lama (sprul sku) who assumes his or her predecessor's status, but who takes birth before his or her predecessor's death. This paper presents ten oral histories of ma 'das sprul skus and examines what they and their narrators reveal about the logic of transference in establishing the personhood of a ma 'das sprul sku, how ma 'das sprul sku personhood may challenge conventional understandings of sprul sku personhood and temporality, ma 'das sprul sku and their creators as reflective agents, and what the dearth of ma 'das sprul sku hagiographies may imply.*

Introduction

A Tibetan *sprul sku* (reincarnate lama) represents a unique articulation of the temporally conditioned integration of personhood.² Unlike the English distinction between the king's "body politic" and "body natural,"³ which assures the continuity of the king's "person" no matter who is invested in the office, the reincarnate lama

¹ Research for this article was supported by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council standard fellowship and a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation. I am most grateful to Bkra shis tshe ring, director of the Amnye Machen Institute, for introducing me to the *ma 'das sprul sku* phenomenon and suggesting several individuals who could possibly shed light on *ma 'das sprul sku*, and to Shes rab rgya mtsho for his exceptional research assistance and friendship. I presented an earlier version of this paper at the Eighth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies held in Bloomington, Indiana. I thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

² I use the terms "person" and "personhood" in the sense of the social representation of someone, thereby following A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "On Social Structure," in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1940; repr., New York: Free Press, 1965), 188-204; Meyer Fortes, "On the Concept of the Person among the Tallensi," in *La Notion de la Personne en Afrique Noire*, ed. G. Dieterlen (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1973), 283-319; J. S. La Fontaine, "Person and Individual in Anthropology," in *The Category of the Person*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge, London, and New York: Cambridge University Press), 123-140; and Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; the Notion of Self," trans. W. D. Halls, in Carrithers, *The Category of the Person*, 1-25.

³ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

system asserts that the birth of each reincarnation of a given reincarnate lama is the return to a living human embodiment of the previous incarnation's transmigrating consciousness (*rnam shes*). This is not to say that the same individual is reincarnated, but rather that each reincarnation continues the association of a particular *rnam shes* with a certain role and status or "office," and distinguishes reincarnate lamas from other sorts of persons. Such an association would appear to inform Wylie's Weberian argument that the continuing reincarnation of a particular reincarnate lama would

facilitate the transition from charisma of person to a charisma of office: a change essential to the establishment of a hierocratic form of government that could survive as an institution regardless of the charisma of any individual hierarch.⁴

However, the political implications of what Geoffrey Samuel calls the reincarnate lama "cultural pattern" are inseparable from the spiritual and economic.⁵ I exclude the concept of a reincarnate lama as the emanation of a celestial bodhisattva from a minimal definition of reincarnate lama personhood because, as Samuel observes,⁶ of thousands of reincarnate lamas, only the highest are regarded as such emanations.⁷ Moreover, reincarnate lama personhood encompasses successive and distinctive life spans, implying that the identity of a reincarnate lama is a constant, or that "one of the most obvious features of the reincarnate lama system is its implicit denial of passing time."⁸ This encompassment of successive and distinctive life spans is conventionally understood to mean that the birth of the reincarnate lama must be preceded by the death of the previous incarnation.

The *ma 'das sprul sku* poses a serious challenge to this definition of reincarnate lama personhood. A *ma 'das sprul sku* is a non-hereditary reincarnate lama who assumes his or her predecessor's status, but who takes birth before his or her predecessor's death. A further condition, according to three of the oral accounts of *ma 'das sprul sku* I obtained, is that the *ma 'das sprul sku* was clearly identified by his or her living predecessor. According to my informants, many Tibetans have been unfamiliar with the concept of such a reincarnate lama, and question its plausibility. This may be due in part to the fact that with one exception, my

⁴ Turrell Wylie, "Reincarnation: A Political Innovation in Tibetan Buddhism," in *Proceedings of the Csoma de Koros Memorial Symposium*, ed. Louis Ligeti (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1978), 584.

⁵ Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 497.

⁶ Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 283.

⁷ Martin Mills offers the intriguing thesis that "the social identity of the tulku is explicitly formulated...in terms of processes of ritual subjugation," which he supports by citing the association of rebirths of reincarnate lama with "powerful geological disruptions and the shattering of normal processes of fertility." *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 288-289. However, although such phenomena are indeed associated with the rebirths of some reincarnate lamas, many of the accounts related to me suggest that the circumstances of the rebirths of many reincarnate lamas are far less remarkable.

⁸ Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 496.

informants could not recollect any hagiographies of *ma 'das sprul sku*. On the other hand, three well-documented reincarnate lamas were identified by my informants as *ma 'das sprul sku*, although they do not appear to be generally received as such. Within the past few years, however, the possibility that the next Dalai Lama could (or should) be a *ma 'das sprul sku* has emerged in political discussions in the Tibetan exile community. In 2007, the Dalai Lama alluded to the possibility that he could create a *ma 'das sprul sku* as one solution to the determination of his successor, but expressed his wish not to elaborate on this option.⁹

In this paper, I consider what may underlie resistance to the possibility of a *ma 'das sprul sku* by exploring the logic of *ma 'das sprul sku* personhood as revealed by oral histories and their narrators in terms of constructions of time and agency. In so doing, I shall be concerned, in part, with what aspect is transferred to create the *ma 'das sprul sku*, the status of that aspect with respect to the living predecessor after the transfer, how the creation of a *ma 'das sprul sku* informs temporal sequence, and the dearth of *ma 'das sprul sku* hagiographies. I begin with ten oral histories which I collected in India and Nepal.

Ten Oral Histories

(1) Phra rgyug sprul sku (1951-),¹⁰ a Dge lugs pa reincarnate lama, recalled a *ma 'das* legend from A mdo:

A long time ago in A mdo, there lived a highly educated and very famous reincarnate lama, Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje. He was the spiritual teacher of one of the emperors of China. When this reincarnate lama grew quite old, he announced that he would soon be leaving the world. The Emperor pleaded with him not to pass away since it would be a very long and difficult process to find his reincarnation and teach his reincarnation everything that Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje knew. To this the reincarnate lama replied, "All right, I will find another way." He found a boy, taught everything to him, and then announced that this child was his reincarnation. Following this announcement, Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje passed away.

(2) Gnas mdo Kar ma chags med sprul sku (1926-), the Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku, a *ma 'das sprul sku* whose Rnying ma monastery was originally Gnas mdo dgon in Khams, was traveling in Tibet when I went to visit him at his current residence in Nepal. His personal attendant, Pad ma 'phrin las (1934-),¹¹ then a sixty-year old Rnying ma meditator originally from Ri bo che, gave the following oral history of the Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku's emergence:

⁹ Ed Lane, "Dalai Lama says successor may not be from Tibet (AP)," November 27, 2007, <http://www.tibet.ca/en/newsroom/wtn/479.html>.

¹⁰ Interviewed on November 22, 1994, in Bodhnath, Nepal. Phra rgyug sprul sku was born in Khams, and is affiliated with Drepung Monastery ('Bras spungs dgon pa).

¹¹ Interviewed on November 23, 1994, near Pharping, Nepal.

The present Kar ma chags med sprul sku is the seventh, and comes from a small principality in Khams called Lha thog on the outskirts of Chab mdo. Lha thog had a king, and Chags med rin po che is the son of one of that king's ministers, who also served as the king's secretary. The minister, whose family name was rgyal mo, had two sons: the eldest, who was to become Chags med rin po che, was expected to be a layman who would look after the family; the youngest son was sent to a monastery. Initially, the minister and his family had no idea that their eldest son would be Kar ma chags med sprul sku, but the boy began to manifest unusual abilities. One day, when Kar ma chags med sprul sku was seven or eight years of age, his family was engaged in the task of dismantling their camp in order to shift their herds to a new pasture. When Kar ma chags med sprul sku's father complained about the amount of work involved in frequently breaking camp, the boy lifted the entire tent and threw it to the other side of the mountain. This feat persuaded people that the boy was very powerful. During his lifetime, the Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku was a great traveler. He visited Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and different places in Tibet. When he grew old, he said, "Now I am old. I have not been very helpful in looking after my monastery because I have been traveling all the time. Since I was always teaching, I failed to take care of the monastery. Now I will come in my next incarnation, and be more effective for the monastery. The next Chags med rin po che, the Seventh, is already born. I am the Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku and this boy is my mind emanation (*thugs sprul pa*)."

The younger Kar ma chags med sprul sku was twelve years old at the time the Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku made this declaration. Although they comprised a Rnying ma lineage, the Kar ma chags med sprul skus were traditionally legitimized by the Kar ma pa (1924-1981). In the case of the seventh incarnation, the Sixteenth Kar ma pa conducted a meditative quest (*thup don*) to identify the candidate and confirmed that the boy was indeed the Kar ma chags med sprul sku. When the Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku left his family for the enthronement ceremony in his monastery, his party had to cross a huge lake. On the way, he received an offering of one small black conch shell from the denizens of that lake, the serpent-like being (*klu*) and the guardian of the lake (*mtsho dag*). The Fifth Kar ma chags med sprul sku had been so powerful that people had remarked on his similarity to Gu ru rin po che (Padmasambhava) and the hat worn by the Kar ma chags med sprul sku even resembles Gu ru rin po che's hat. If a butter lamp were to have been placed in front of the Fifth Kar ma chags med sprul sku, people standing behind him could see the butter lamp clearly since the Fifth Kar ma chags med sprul sku's form was transparent. The Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku performed his own miracle during the Chinese invasion. When the Chinese invaded Tibet, they arrested Kar ma chags med sprul sku in accordance with their policy to arrest lamas. The Chinese beat him and wished to get rid of him, but decided that since he was such an important person in the region, it would be best to take him to a remote area in order to do so. Accordingly, they tied his arms behind his back and, with six of them preceding Kar ma chags med sprul sku and six following him, marched off. It was very difficult for Kar ma chags med sprul sku to move, but as they marched, strange things began to happen. There was the sound of thunder, and then a whirlwind arose. Without any warning, the Chinese simply lost him. Kar ma chags med sprul sku had vanished and the ropes lay in the hands of the Chinese soldiers. Afterwards, Tibetans related what they had observed of the incident to Kar ma chags med sprul sku and asked him what indeed had happened. Kar ma chags

med sprul sku's reply was that at the time the Chinese came to arrest him, he was not very afraid. In fact, he was just laughing at them, wondering what they could do. But when they seized him and tied him with ropes, he was convinced that they had come with the intention to destroy Buddhism. For this reason, as he was being led away, he began to pray to all the protectors, the deities, and to the three jewels of Buddhism. Although he was tied, he prayed from his mind, "Now is the time to empower me. If this is not to be the end of Buddhism, I need your help. If this is going to be the end of Buddhism, then I need to die under the Chinese. I request all the gods to be my witness and empower me." After he prayed, thunder clapped and a tornado emerged. After his disappearance, Kar ma chags med sprul sku discovered that he had landed in a wooded area and, having lost his robe (*chu pa*), was clothed only in his pants and shirt. Then he sat down and reflected upon what had happened. Gradually, he recalled that he had been arrested and beaten. Then he realized that while being taken by the Chinese, he was praying and had suddenly begun to feel stronger. He found himself walking above the ground, levitating in the sky, and he perceived the Chinese soldiers as beneath him and appearing very small. He also remembered having picked up one of the Chinese soldiers and thrown him much as he threw his father's tent when he was a child. All of the Kar ma chags med sprul skus display the same birthmarks. They have tiger's stripes (scratch-like marks) on both sides of their bodies which are said to indicate that they are reincarnations of Rta mgrin (Hayagrīva). Another connection between the Sixth and Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku is revealed by their monastic education. When the Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku was small, he received many beatings from his tutor. The Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku therefore prayed that in his next incarnation he would work hard to find a way to avoid so many beatings. Thus, when the Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku arrived at his monastery, he was very knowledgeable, and all his teachers were happy, petting him, and telling him that he would not need a beating since he was doing very well.

According to Pad ma 'phrin las, no textual biographies of Kar ma chags med sprul sku exist, but the Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku wrote religious commentaries. The Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku has been asked to write his life story, but he had not taken much interest in doing so because he so frequently travels to give empowerment rituals. Moreover, his attendant declared that Kar ma chags med sprul sku felt that if people do not take the possibility of a *ma 'das sprul sku* seriously, there is no need for such autobiographies.

(3) Bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje rin po che (1913-),¹² a Rnying ma reincarnate lama, recalled that a Mgo log lineage had a *ma 'das sprul sku* who had lived in the distant past. Before that reincarnate lama's death, he appointed a child as his reincarnation. That child and his successors were subsequently called great pacifier (*zhi chen*) *ma 'das sprul sku*. Bya bral sprul sku also remembered his teacher, whom he called a celestial female spiritual guide (*mkha' 'gro ma*), as a *ma 'das*

¹² Bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje is a Great Perfection (Rdzogs chen) master and lineage holder of klong chen snying thig. Among his teachers were Bdud 'joms rin po che (1904-1989), Rdzong sar mkhyen rtse'i chos kyi blo gros, and Mkha' 'gro 'das pa'i rdo rje. Interviewed on November 23, 1994, in Nepal.

sprul sku. Her name was Mkha' 'gro 'das pa'i rdo rje and she was a 'das log (one who dies and returns to life).¹³ When she reached the age of thirty, Mkha' 'gro 'das pa'i rdo rje announced that she would shortly depart from this life and that she had already emanated in five forms – that is, in five different individuals, some male and some female. She identified the places where they were born in different parts of Khams. At the age of forty-five, Mkha' 'gro 'das pa'i rdo rje passed away, but her incarnations had already been born. He informed me that he possessed a scripture concerning her biography entitled *Rnam par thar pa skal ldan 'das pa'i chos mdong*.

(4) Nang chen a lde sprul sku,¹⁴ a 'Brug pa bka' brgyud master who was born in Nang chen, related that the monastery called Trülzhik Monastery ('Khrul zhig dgon pa) was the residence of a 'Khrul zhig rin po che:

This precious guru was fairly well known and was growing old. One day he visited a family who had a small boy. There was an instant reaction between 'Khrul zhig rin po che and the boy, so 'Khrul zhig rin po che picked up the child, placed him on a seat, put the amulets and the rosary he was wearing on the lap of the child, and sat back to observe him. Then 'Khrul zhig rin po che announced that from that day onwards, this boy was the 'Khrul zhig rin po che. Since his *thugs* (mind) had gone to the child, whenever people wanted consultations, rituals, or teachings, the boy was the person they should approach. 'Khrul zhig rin po che said that he himself was just a physical representation, the old remains, but that the boy was now the 'Khrul zhig rin po che. After this announcement, the former 'Khrul zhig rin po che lived for only two more years.

(5) Bco bgyad khri chen rin po che (1920-2007),¹⁵ former head of the Tshar pa branch of the Sa skya order, could not recollect which Paṇ chen bla ma was a *ma 'das sprul sku*, but he believed that an incarnation who came after Paṇ chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570-1662) was one and gave the following account:

It was said that the previous Tenth Penchen Lama announced that his reincarnation had arrived, but there were some objections to this statement. One day the Tenth Penchen Lama was asked how his reincarnation could have possibly arrived since he was still living. He quickly replied, "Oh, Oh, I have made a mistake! I already sent the mind (*thugs*)!" After this he passed away.

¹³ Lawrence Epstein describes a 'das log as one who leaves his or her body to experience aspects of *bar do* [the liminal period between death and rebirth] or to witness the suffering of those in various Buddhist hells, and miraculously returns to life to instruct others about the suffering of samsaric existence. "On the History and Psychology of the Das-log," *Tibet Journal* 7, no. 4 (1982): 20-85.

¹⁴ Interviewed on November 22, 1994, in Kathmandu, Nepal.

¹⁵ I interviewed the Eighteenth Bco bgyad khri chen rin po che of Nalendra Monastery (Na len dra dgon pa, 1425) on November 24, 1994, in Bodhnath, Nepal.

(6) Mkhan po kun dga' dbang phyug (1921-2008),¹⁶ a Sa skya abbot, identified 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, one of the founders of the Ris med movement,¹⁷ as a *ma 'das sprul sku*.

When 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820-1892) was twelve and a monk at Rdzong sar dgon pa, an abbot arrived from the reincarnate lama's estate (*bla brang*) known as Thar tshe in Ngor claiming that 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po was the incarnation of Ngor thar tshe Byams pa nam mkha' 'chi med (1765-1820). But when Byams pa nam mkha' 'chi med passed away, 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po was already six months old. This raised several difficulties. Consequently, when the reincarnate lama's estate officials came to fetch 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, the latter's family and monastic brethren said that it was impossible for him to be the reincarnation. 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po said, "If I were the reincarnation, I would have to have come after Byams pa nam mkha' 'chi med's death and stayed a full term in my mother's womb, nine months and some days, but it did not work out this way. Therefore, on logical grounds, I could not be the reincarnate lama." But 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po was told that while Byams pa nam mkha' 'chi med was still alive, his *thugs* was already inside the womb of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po's mother. 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po and Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje were contemporaries, but the latter was elder. Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje began his career as a lama only to disrobe, engage in a layman's activities, hunt, kill animals, and eat meat; however, he returned the animals he killed alive to the forest. Since 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (who lived at Rdzong sar in Sde dge) and Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje (who lived at Thar tshe mdo) were far apart, it was difficult for them to reach each other. If someone were to travel from Sde dge to Thar tshe mdo, it would take ten to fifteen days on horseback. When Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje passed away, it would have been very difficult for the news to reach 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po quickly. One day 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, who was unaware of the death of Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje, went to meditate at a distant place accompanied by his personal attendant. As 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po sat reciting his prayers his servant approached, and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po asked him, "Do you see any changes in me?" The servant looked up and immediately noticed that 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po had changed and looked different. So the servant replied, "Oh yes, Your Holiness, you have changed. How did this happen?" 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po responded, "I have changed because that unkempt one (*na ra*), Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje, entered me." As soon as 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po uttered these words, a messenger from

¹⁶ Mkhan po kun dga' dbang phyug was the chief abbot (*mkhan po*) at the Dzongsar Institute in India. Among his teachers were Rdzong sar mkhyen brtse'i chos kyi blo gros and the Sa skya master Kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1885-1952). I interviewed him on November 12, 1994, in Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Samuel describes the Ris med movement in Tibetan Buddhism as developing mainly in Kham during the nineteenth century as a synthesis of Rnying ma, Sa skya, and Bka' brgyud teachings and as a counter-hegemonic practice to the theocratically dominant Dge lugs pa school. Its adherents maintained the practices of their specific lineage traditions while also following those of the Ris med movement. *Civilized Shamans*, 274, 537-543, 546-551.

Thar tshe mdo reached Rdzong sar with the news of Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje's death.

(7) A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros (1921-2005),¹⁸ a 'Brug pa bka' brgyud yogi (*rtogs ldan*) who had accompanied the Eighth Kham sprul rin po che (1931-1980) into exile and eventually to Bkra shis ljongs in Himachal Pradesh, did not identify 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po as a *ma 'das sprul sku*, but his narrative suggests that the personal development of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po represents a variation of *ma 'das* personhood:

'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po lived with many other monks in Rdzong sar dgon pa. He was yet to be recognized as a reincarnation, so he was only an ordinary monk. However, he displayed many special indications, became very well educated, and came to be considered the reincarnation of King Khri srong lde'u btsan (742-797?). A contemporary of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po was a layman called Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje. Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje possessed great knowledge and was able to perform many miracles. He was a successful hunter and bandit. His extraordinary power was revealed by the miracles he could perform when hunting. After killing an animal and removing its internal parts, he would lay out the skin and reconstitute the animal. Thus restored to life, the animal would then walk back into the forest. People came to know that there was something very unusual about Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje's power. Although there was no relationship between Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, when Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje passed away, 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po's physical appearance began to change. People noticed this and asked him why he suddenly looked better, could speak better, and had more charisma (*dbang thang*). 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po had been nicknamed "unkempt one" because he used to live like a ascetic holy man (*sādhu*) with his unkempt hair and dirty appearance. 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po's reply to these questions was, "Oh, Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje absorbed into me, a person like me, an unkempt one. Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje's *sku* had entered 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po at the point of the former's death."

According to A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros, both were incarnations of King Khri srong lde'u btsan: 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po was the mind emanation (*thugs sprul pa*); Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje, the body emanation (*sku sprul pa*).

(8) Nang chen a lde sprul sku also did not identify 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po as a *ma 'das sprul sku*, but his account of the merging of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po and Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje, like that given by A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros, suggests a variation of *ma 'das* personhood:

While 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po was sitting in his room in the monastery, a servant came in to pour tea. 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po asked him, "Do you notice any change in me? I have grown big, do you see?"

¹⁸ Interviewed on November 6, 1994, in Bkra shis ljongs, Himachal Pradesh, India.

The servant looked up and said, "Oh, yes, I see a change." Then 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po said, "Yesterday, Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje passed away, and his *thugs* and mine united."

Nang chen a lde sprul sku identified 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po as the incarnation of Ngor mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, who was one of two coeval incarnations of Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po. One of the incarnations was associated with Ngor Monastery (Ngor dgon pa, 1429); the other, with Dzongsar Monastery (Rdzong sar dgon pa, 1275).

(9) Dge bshes blo bzang rgya mtsho (1928-1997),¹⁹ founder of the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics (Rig lam slob gra) in Dharamsala, India, had not heard of the *ma 'das sprul sku* concept, but did recall an account of the Sixth Dalai Lama which essentially asserts that the Seventh Dalai Lama was a *ma 'das sprul sku*:

Due to his unusual practices such as drinking *chang* and sneaking out of the Po ta la to visit Lha sa tea houses, the Sixth Dalai Lama was disliked by Lhazang Khan, the Mongol chieftain, who thought that the Sixth Dalai Lama should be banished. When the soldiers came to take the Sixth Dalai Lama away, they were faced with a dilemma. They could not take him to China, where it would be dangerous, and they could not leave him in Lha sa because of Lhazang Khan. They therefore requested the Sixth Dalai Lama to leave this world. The Sixth Dalai Lama did not die, but left Lha sa of his own accord. He is said to have lived for a very long time, even returning to Tibet where he stayed with nomads and performed his religious rituals. One day he returned to Lha sa in the guise of a common man and joined others to seek a blessing from the Gnas chung oracle. The oracle realized that Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, the Sixth Dalai Lama, was in the audience and immediately prostrated three times before him. The Sixth Dalai Lama, however, did not wish this and gave the oracle a signal not to show any indication that he was recognized. The Gnas chung oracle was uneasy because he had already completed his prostrations, but resolved the matter by continuing his prostrations in all four directions. In this way, people would not have doubts about the meaning of the oracle's initial prostrations. The Seventh Dalai Lama was found and enthroned while the Sixth was still alive.

(10) Dge bshes blo bzang rgya mtsho also recalled an account of Paṇ chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan, which essentially asserts that his successor, Paṇ chen blo bzang ye shes (1663?-1737), was a *ma 'das sprul sku*:

The Fifth Dalai Lama's personal tutor, Paṇ chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan, was concerned that the Fifth Dalai Lama was patronizing the Rnying ma pa tradition. Thus, although his time to pass away had come, Paṇ chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan decided to lengthen his life span in order to have time to change the Fifth Dalai Lama's mind and teach him more about the Dge lugs pa sect. As the Fifth Dalai Lama came of age, he studied different Tibetan Buddhist sects but also learned more about the Dge lugs pa sect, enabling him to write a book on the subject. Once this book was written, his tutor was satisfied that the Fifth Dalai Lama was

¹⁹ Interviewed on July 30, 1993, in Dharamsala, India.

truly a Dge lugs pa head. Paṅ chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan then passed away. The Tenth Penchen Lama's reincarnation was discovered, but had been born before Paṅ chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan died.

The Logic of Transference

These oral histories and their narrators offer different interpretations of the logic of aspect transference in the establishment of the personhood of a *ma 'das sprul sku*. Four of the oral histories (narratives two, four, five, and six) describing the creation of *ma 'das sprul sku* and one, narrative eight (which may describe a variation of the process), specify the preceding reincarnate lama's dispatching of his *thugs* into either a human being or a human fetus as the definitive moment in the creation of the *ma 'das sprul sku*. But if the *thugs* or some other aspect is transferred to establish a *ma 'das sprul sku*, what is the status of that aspect with respect to the living predecessor?

An explanation offered by several of my informants, albeit from different perspectives, views the *ma 'das sprul sku* in terms consistent with the concept of the emanation (*sprul pa*) of a Bodhisattva or highly achieved spiritual master.²⁰ Phra rgyug sprul sku maintained that what Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje and the child who became his reincarnation had in common was their character (*gshis kha*). Bya bral sprul sku's brief account of his teacher (narrative three) does not mention the transfer of the *thugs*, but his explanation of the phenomenon asserted that a real reincarnate lama has attained an extraordinarily high stage and at such a stage, the reincarnate lama can emanate in thousands of forms. His *thugs* can emanate in many forms as can his *sku* and so forth. Such a reincarnate lama could reincarnate from his sleep. Moreover, the reincarnate lama's *rnam shes* can divide into hundreds of *rnam shes* and enter into hundreds of embodiments, only to become unified once more. According to Bya bral sprul sku, the ability of the *rnam shes* to reproduce itself in this fashion permits the possibility of a *ma 'das sprul sku*, since the reincarnate lama can retain his *rnam shes* while at the same time transferring it to the individual who becomes the *ma 'das sprul sku*. Although Dge bshes blo bzang rgya mtsho was unfamiliar with the term "*ma 'das sprul sku*," he noted that this type of reincarnation would be possible for higher lamas since they can reincarnate in the form of body (*sku*), speech (*gsung*), or mind (*thugs*). Abbot Kun dga' dbang phyug (narrative six), who identified 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po as a *ma 'das sprul sku*, found it difficult to say whether Ngor thar tshe Byams pa nam mkha' 'chi med retained a *thugs* after he sent his *thugs* to 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po since lamas can reincarnate in many forms. He did, however, state that it was Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje's *sku* that entered 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po. He noted that when 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen

²⁰ See, for example, Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653-1705) account of the reincarnations of Avalokiteśvara, *Life of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, trans. Zahiruddin Ahmad (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1999), and Yumiko Ishihama's discussion of the Dalai Lamas as such manifestations, "On the Dissemination of the Belief in the Dalai Lama as a Manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara," *Acta Asiatica*, no. 64 (1993): 38-56.

Brtse'i dbang po died, his *thugs* was said to have been absorbed into five mountain peaks in a place called Ri bo rtse lnga. These mountain peaks, in turn, each emanated five *thugs*.

Yogi A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros (narrative seven), does not identify 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po as a *ma 'das sprul sku*, but describes Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje's *sku* as entering 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po at the point of the former's death. This union is particularly interesting given that the two were coeval reincarnations of King Khri strong lde'u btsan (who was himself an emanation of Avalokiteśvara/ Spyān ras gzigs) and that the *sku* reincarnation (Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje) was joined with the *thugs* reincarnation ('Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po) at the point of the former's death. In discussing the logic of the creation of a *ma 'das sprul sku*, A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros maintained that a *ma 'das sprul sku* and his predecessor share two modes of thinking. Firstly, they share the same empty nature (*chos nyid*) mind. Secondly, they share what emerges when the empty nature mind tries to perceive the higher level or come into action, what is known as perfect absolute divine wisdom (*ye shes*). The term *rnām shes*, however, applies to common people. The *rnām shes*, which is compelled to pass through *bar do*, is not the bodhicitta mind. A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros further observed that most people are confused as to the distinction between *rnām shes* and mind, and defined *thugs* as the honorific term for *rnām shes*.²¹ In the case of the *ma 'das sprul sku*, he held that what is shared must be understood as a kind of perfect absolute divine wisdom, a mind which strives only to do good deeds.

Nang chen a lde sprul sku's account (narrative eight) of the merging of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po and Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje specifies that, at the point of his death, Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje sent his *thugs* to unite with 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po's *thugs*. Nang chen a lde sprul sku maintained that in the case of a *ma 'das sprul sku*, the elder and younger reincarnate lama would retain their identities, each having his own *rnām shes*, but that the *thugs* is transmitted from the elder to the younger reincarnate lama. This means, he said, that the ability and the knowledge of the elder affects the personality of the young child, and that the elder's knowledge becomes effective in the child. If the *rnām shes* leaves a reincarnate lama's body, that reincarnate lama has to die. The *thugs*, however, can unite with another *thugs* as well as multiply, giving the *thugs* the ability to enter other embodiments.²²

Considering the creation of a *ma 'das sprul sku* as an emanation from the predecessor might, at first glance, appear to support Aziz's argument that the

²¹ The fact that these terms summon different scholarly interpretations is underscored by Daniel Bärlocher's note that according to Rag ra bkraś mthong rin po che, "*rnām shes*," "*sems*," and "*thugs*" "are used interchangeably in Tantric texts." *Testimonies of Tibetan Tulkus*, vol. 2, Appendices, Opuscula Tibetana Arbeiten aus dem Tibet-Institut Rikon-Zürich (Rikon, Switzerland: Tibet-Institut, 1982), 15.

²² The transfer of aspect to create a *ma 'das sprul sku* is suggestive of Marilyn Strathern's concept of "partibility," whereby Melanesians exercise agency by detaching "parts of themselves in their dealings with others." *The Gender of the Gift* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 192.

creation of a reincarnate lama as an emanation from a deity or “bygone saint” constitutes a special case of spirit possession.²³ However, Aziz’s assumption that the reincarnate lama maintains a distinct personality and mind from the deity possessing him (or her)²⁴ is inconsistent with Mills’ informants’ explanations of the nature of an “incarnate’s individual personality and moral constitution”²⁵ and with my informants’ explanations of the role the transferred aspect assumes in a *ma ’das sprul sku*. On the other hand, a facetious Nang chen a lde sprul sku observed that the Gnas chung oracle is quite possibly a *ma ’das sprul sku* since in the trance state, the medium’s body sustains the *rnam shes* of the human medium while hosting the deity’s *rnam shes*. Mills would disagree with him on the grounds that oracles are “possessed by worldly gods (*jigtenpa’i-lha*), whilst incarnates are seen as the manifestation of supra-worldly divinities (*jigtenlasdaspa’i-lha*).”²⁶ Moreover, human mediums are possessed by deities having a penchant for revisiting, but not permanently residing in, their human mediums, and not all reincarnate lamas are regarded as manifestations of divinities.

Ma ’das Personhood and Temporality

I suggest that incredulity concerning the concept of a *ma ’das sprul sku* is not predicated on the logic that such a reincarnate lama results from an emanation from predecessor to successor, but rather on confusion with respect to the predecessor’s and successor’s personhood. With the exception of narratives seven and eight, which describe ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po as receiving either Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje’s *thugs* or *sku* at the point of the latter’s death, these oral histories present the reincarnate lama who created the *ma ’das sprul sku* as living for some time after transferring his (or her) aspect. The distinction between the personhood of the predecessor and successor is most transparent in Nang chen a lde sprul sku’s recounting (narrative four) of the old ’Khrul zhig rin po che as stating, after he identified his *ma ’das sprul sku*, that he was “just a physical representation, the old remains,” and that people should consult the one to whom he had dispatched his *thugs* for spiritual assistance, etc. In other words, the old ’Khrul zhig rin po che appears to be declaring that his successor should thence forward be received as fulfilling the “personhood” of ’Khrul zhig rin po che – that is, as the one whose *thugs* should be associated with a particular role and status. On the other hand, the overlap between the personhood of the predecessor and successor appears to be problematic for ’Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse’i dbang po (narrative six), who, when informed that he was the reincarnation of Ngor Ngor thar tshe Byams pa nam mkha’ ’chi med, initially found the pronouncement logically impossible since he was born when that reincarnate lama was still alive,

²³ Barbara Aziz, “Reincarnation Reconsidered: Or the Reincarnate Lama as Shaman,” in *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, ed. John T. Hitchcock and Rex L. Jones (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips Ltd, 1976), 346.

²⁴ Aziz, “Reincarnation Reconsidered,” 347-348.

²⁵ Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State*, 271-272.

²⁶ Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State*, 272.

and for the Tenth Penchen Lama (narrative five), who announced that “he had forgotten and dispatched his *thugs* too early.” This is a stunning announcement, provoking us to consider the implications of “being too early.”

“Being too early” means, of course, that according to the narrative, the Tenth Penchen Lama realized that he had forgotten to die before dispatching his *thugs*, and suggests that the Tenth Penchen Lama expected that he would journey through the liminal period between death and rebirth experienced by the *rnam shes* before directing his *thugs* to another incarnation. Although *bar do* is typically understood as a forty-nine-day period, variations in the length of *bar do* may occur.²⁷ According to Thup dogs rin po che,²⁸ a Dge lugs pa reincarnate lama, a reincarnate lama may remain only a very short time in *bar do* (which he described as not a time, but rather a kind of road),²⁹ but must pass through it to gain experiences for future teachings and to succeed in his pursuits after taking rebirth. For my present purposes, what is most significant about *bar do* is that it is conventionally considered to be a mandatory prelude to the continuation of a reincarnate lama’s personhood in a human incarnation. The individual who becomes a *ma 'das sprul sku*, however, has passed through *bar do* before taking birth, but assumes the personhood of the reincarnate lama predecessor sometime after taking birth. Thus, that aspect which definitively transforms someone into a *ma 'das sprul sku* does not undergo *bar do*. According to Nang chen a lde sprul sku, the transferred *thugs*, which, under non-*ma 'das sprul sku* circumstances, would pass through *bar do*, bypasses it. Phra rgyug sprul sku described the situation concerning *bar do* and the creation of a *ma 'das sprul sku* as a bit complicated. Although both the reincarnate lama and the *ma 'das sprul sku* have gone through *bar do*, the former’s character is transferred from the reincarnate lama to the *ma 'das sprul sku* and bypasses *bar do*. Moreover, following the recognition of the *ma 'das sprul sku*, the reincarnate lama has to die. The latter, in turn, will pass through *bar do* and take another reincarnation. Thus, he said, the reincarnate lama has the ability to transfer himself immediately to a *ma 'das sprul sku* as well as to pursue the conventional route to reincarnation. Bya bral sprul sku’s explanation that a reincarnate lama’s *rnam shes* can reproduce itself and thus be retained by the predecessor as well as be transferred to a *ma 'das sprul sku* implies, of course, that the “reproduced” *rnam shes* transferred to the successor has not passed through *bar do*.

Bar do figures most significantly in the argument advanced by Chinese government officials in their efforts to discredit the legitimacy of the boy identified in 1995 by the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the Tenth Penchen Lama. These

²⁷ See Lati Rinbochay and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Press, 1979).

²⁸ Interviewed on November 20, 1994, in Kathmandu.

²⁹ Thup dogs rin po che’s analogy situates *bar do* as what M. M. Bakhtin would call a “chronotope” (literally “timespace”), a narrative device which spatializes time and temporalizes space. M. M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258.

officials pointed out that a child born on April 25, 1989, could not possibly be the reincarnation of the Tenth Penchen Lama who had died on January 28, 1989. Hilton observes that

the Chinese were later to claim that even this date was false: he had been born before the death of the tenth Panchen Lama and his parents had lied about the date. After all, the government's case ran, a child born before the death could hardly be an authentic reincarnation, having failed to fulfill the regulations on the minimum number of days in *bar do*.³⁰

The confidence invested by the Chinese officials in their argument that *bar do* "regulations" must be fulfilled notwithstanding, I suggest that "regulations" are not the basis of a kind of temporal dissonance provoked for some by the concept of a *ma 'das sprul sku*, but that a contradiction between the notions of identity and continuity (or duration and sequence) in the re-identification of the *ma 'das sprul sku* person may be. The possibility of such a contradiction is consistent with Amélie Oksenberg Rorty's comparison of the two dominant philosophical responses to the question of how persons are re-identified. One response centers on how a continuing person is distinguished from a predecessor or successor and is thus concerned with sequence; the other is concerned with what characteristics are essential to the continuity of a unique person, thereby foregrounding duration.³¹

A conventional reincarnate lama continues his or her personhood from the time of his or her human rebirth, unlike a *ma 'das sprul sku*, who assumes the personhood of his or her "creator" after absorbing the latter's transferred aspect. This suggests that the accomplishment of *ma 'das sprul sku* personhood is a staggered process, entailing the intersection of two distinct temporal sequences. One of these sequences plots the career of the future embodiment, who has passed through *bar do* but did not emerge as the person of the reincarnate lama; the other sequence, that of the career of the transferable aspect, which, when appropriately recognized, establishes and continues the reincarnate lama's person in the form of a *ma 'das sprul sku*.

But apart from the necessity of considering two as opposed to one temporal sequence in the constitution of the *ma 'das* person, how else might a *ma 'das sprul sku* challenge assumptions about the temporal integration of reincarnate lama personhood? Recall that reincarnate lama personhood is conventionally understood as a linkage of successive and distinctive life spans – in other words, a sequence of mutually exclusive durations of time. These durations are punctuated by sojourns in *bar do* and/or elsewhere. In the case of the *ma 'das sprul sku*, however, two life spans or durations of the same person overlap, which implies that duration, without the convenience of *bar do*, can no longer be readily delimited. In this way, the personhood of the *ma 'das sprul sku* confounds conventional assumptions regarding sequence and duration in the temporal integration of the reincarnate lama person.

³⁰ Isabel Hilton, *The Search for the Panchen Lama* (London: Viking, 1999), 282.

³¹ Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, Introduction to *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 1-16.

If reincarnate lama personhood is understood as encompassing a sequence of incarnations, then it evokes a concern for linear time, what Greenhouse refers to as “time with a purpose” which “is also a powerful rationale for resisting multiple and simultaneous engagements.”³² Since the *ma 'das sprul sku* obviates the requirement that reincarnate lama personhood be defined in terms of an identity that incorporates a specific sequence of birth, death, and passage through *bar do* to rebirth, to accept the possibility of a *ma 'das sprul sku* is to suspend expectations concerning normative sequence. Although the accounts of *ma 'das sprul sku* that I collected do preserve one expectation of normative sequence in that they describe the transmission of an aspect of consciousness from elder to younger, the recognition on the part of the Tenth Penchen Lama (narrative five) that he sent his *thugs* “too early” and the resistance on the part of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (narrative six) to abandoning his assumptions about the *bar do* sequence underscore the notion that sequence has not been conventionally followed.

Moreover, the notion that human rebirth continues reincarnate lama personhood appears to be challenged as my informants did not credit the individual at birth who eventually becomes a *ma 'das sprul sku* with any of the predecessor reincarnate lama's attributes. The *ma 'das sprul sku* confounds normative sequence since the *ma 'das sprul sku* embodies two intersecting cycles of reincarnation while also embodying, according to narratives two, four, five, six, and eight, this reincarnate lama's “essential” characteristic, the *thugs* that bypasses *bar do*. In this way, the imbricated life spans of a *ma 'das sprul sku* could be interpreted as dismantling implicit expectations about the impetus of sequence, or the agency of time.

However, perhaps a parallel, although unremarked, challenge to conventional assumptions about the temporal conditions of reincarnate lama personhood may be found in the recognition of multiple coeval rebirths of distinctive aspects of a specific reincarnate lama, as is the case with the separate recognitions of the *sku* (body), *gsung* (speech), *thugs* (mind), *'phrin las* (deeds), and *yon tan* (accomplishments) reincarnations. Recall that the union of Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (narrative seven), does not, according to A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros, describe the creation of a *ma 'das sprul sku*, but rather the rejoining or fusion of coeval reincarnated aspects of King Khri srong lde'u btsan in one individual, 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po. After his *sku* is fused with that of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje does not reincarnate.³³ 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po does, and prolifically,³⁴ but in a staggered process. For example, among 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po's reincarnations are: a *sku* incarnation born in 1894; a *gsung* incarnation born in 1896; a *thugs* incarnation born in 1910; another

³² Carol J. Greenhouse, *A Moment's Notice: Time Politics across Cultures* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 22.

³³ Lokesh Chandra, ed. *Kongtrul's Encyclopedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture*, Parts 1-3 (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1970), 22.

³⁴ A 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros numbered 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po's coeval reincarnations as 25.

thugs incarnation born in 1900; a *yon tan* incarnation born ca. 1897; and a *'phrin las* incarnation born in 1896.³⁵ They do not share birth dates, but are essentially born within the same generation. In cases of more or less coeval reincarnations of the same reincarnate lama, the *thugs* incarnation is given precedence and assumes the role and status of the previous incarnation. Thus, a further challenge posed by the example of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po to the notion that a reincarnate lama's personhood joins successive and non-coterminous life spans is, of course, the fact that three of his coeval reincarnations were *thugs* incarnations.³⁶ On the other hand, the view expressed (narrative seven) that the coevally reincarnated aspects of a reincarnate lama can later reunite perhaps suggests an answer to a complex question – i.e., does the reincarnate lama who has created a *ma 'das sprul sku* and then taken rebirth (which would allow for the possibility of the reincarnated reincarnate lama and the *ma 'das sprul sku* existing coevally) share his or her personhood with that *ma 'das sprul sku*?

A Rationalized Existence

The temporal concerns expressed by the Tenth Penchen Lama (narrative five) and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (narrative six) are closely related to the desire on the part of some reincarnate lamas who created *ma 'das sprul sku* to rationalize their actions or of some *ma 'das sprul sku* to rationalize their existence. The Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku acknowledges his oversight with respect to his monastic responsibilities and decides to be more helpful by coming in *ma 'das sprul sku* form; 'Khrul zhig rin po che admonishes people to cease coming to him for consultation and to seek his *ma 'das sprul sku* instead; 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po expresses astonishment that his person could be the recipient of such enhancement from Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje's *sku*, and the Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku resists writing his autobiography on the grounds that people might not find it credible. What might these rationalizations suggest?

In one sense, they cast the personhood of *ma 'das sprul sku* or their creators in what Charles Taylor would consider a modern mold – that is, these rationalizations reveal reincarnate lama as agents who have a sense of themselves as agents “in the making of life plans, holding values, and choosing between them.”³⁷ More specifically, these rationalizations or quests for rationalizations signify, as Charles Taylor puts it, that these *ma 'das sprul sku* or their creators cast themselves as interlocutors, they are “open to different significances” and “open to strong evaluations.”³⁸ The Sixth Dalai Lama (narrative nine), for example, disguises his existence for political reasons. Although not all of the narratives make the intentions

³⁵ Chandra, *Kongtrul's Encyclopedia*, 22.

³⁶ Chandra, *Kongtrul's Encyclopedia*, 22.

³⁷ Charles Taylor, “The Person,” in *The Category of the Person*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, 258.

³⁸ Taylor, “The Person,” 276.

of the creators of *ma 'das sprul sku* relatively explicit, those that do (particularly narratives one, two, and four) suggest that these creators perceive that they would better serve their followers by choosing to eliminate the disruption (caused by death) to the immediate continuity of their human personhood. Implicitly, in these narratives, the creators of *ma 'das sprul sku* reveal that they are willing to brook no interference or errors in the discovery of their reincarnations – in other words, they may be casting themselves essentially as the authorizers of their successors.³⁹

Given the Chinese objections to the reincarnation of the Tenth Penchen Lama recognized by the Dalai Lama on the basis that the constraints of *bar do* were not observed, the following remarks made by the Tenth Penchen Lama shortly before his death in 1989 to a group of reincarnate lamas were prescient:

The seventh Dalai Lama was born before the death of the sixth Dalai Lama. From the point of view of our spiritual tradition, there is no need for a year to pass before the reincarnation is born. A realized being can manifest himself in many forms at the same time. He need not rely on the passage of his previous body's consciousness. Premature and belated birth of reincarnation is possible in Buddhism.⁴⁰

Unscripted Agency

Thus far, I have considered resistance to the concept of *ma 'das sprul sku* personhood in terms of temporal concerns. However, the possible absence of certain practices that shore up the social personhood of a reincarnate lama may also contribute to such resistance. These practices include enthronement ceremonies, which may have taken place, but are not referred to in the oral histories specifically identifying individuals who became *ma 'das sprul sku*. With respect to the individual who would undergo such a ceremony, Bourdieu observed that investiture “transforms the representations which other agents make of him, and perhaps above all the attitudes which they adopt towards him.”⁴¹ Furthermore, although the creators of *ma 'das sprul sku* may cast themselves as the authorizers of their successors, their agency in this respect appears to remain for the most part unscripted. The lack of *ma 'das sprul sku* hagiographies presumably contributed to a widespread ignorance of the *ma 'das sprul sku* concept. Had the Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku written an autobiography explaining his rationale for creating a *ma 'das sprul sku*, for example, he would have done much to dispel disbelief in the unusual status of the Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku. However, the death of the Sixth Kar ma chags med sprul sku shortly after creating the Seventh would appear to have precluded the possibility of such an autobiography. A question remaining, of course, concerns why there is a dearth of *ma 'das sprul sku* biographies. This question, in

³⁹ Pad ma 'phrin las did not indicate whether the Sixteenth Kar ma pa made any reference to the Seventh Kar ma chags med sprul sku's *ma 'das* status.

⁴⁰ The Tenth Penchen Lama's last speech, translated by TIN (Tibet Information Network) document no. 15 (VN).

⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Rites as Acts of Institution,” in *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*, ed. J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 82.

turn, raises further questions about the relationships between the motivations of the creators of *ma 'das sprul sku* and the various agencies which publicly legitimate reincarnate lamas.

Glossary

Note: The glossary is organized into sections according to the main language of each entry. The first section contains Tibetan words organized in Tibetan alphabetical order. Columns of information for all entries are listed in this order: THL Extended Wylie transliteration of the term, THL Phonetic rendering of the term, the English translation, the Sanskrit equivalent, the Chinese equivalent, other equivalents such as Mongolian or Latin, associated dates, and the type of term.

Ka					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>kar ma chags med sprul sku</i>	Karma Chakmé Trülku				Person
<i>kar ma pa</i>	Karmapa			1924-1981	Person
<i>kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan</i>	Künga Tenpé Gyeltsen			1885-1952	Person
<i>klu</i>	lu	serpent-like being			Term
<i>bka' brgyud</i>	Kagyü				Organization
<i>bkra shis ljongs</i>	Trashi Jong				Place
<i>bkra shis tshe ring</i>	Trashi Tsering				Person
<i>sku</i>	ku	body			Term
<i>sku sprul pa</i>	kuṭrülpa	body emanation			Term
Kha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>kham</i>	Kham				Place
<i>kham sprul rin po che</i>	Khamtrül Rinpoché			1931-1980	Person
<i>khri srong lde'u btsan</i>	Trisong Deutsen			742-797?	Person
<i>mkhan po</i>	khenpo	abbot			Term
<i>mkhan po kun dga' dbang phyug</i>	Khenpo Künga Wangchuk			1921-2008	Person
<i>mkha' 'gro 'das pa'i rdo rje</i>	Khandro Depé Dorjé				Person
<i>mkha' 'gro ma</i>	khandroma	celestial female spiritual guide			Term
<i>mkhyen brtse'i dbang po</i>	Khyentsé Wangpo				Person
<i>'khrul zhig dgon pa</i>	Trülzhik Gönpa	Trülzhik Monastery			Monastery
<i>'khrul zhig rin po che</i>	Trülzhik Rinpoché				Person
Ga					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>gu ru rin po che</i>	Guru Rinpoché		San. <i>Padmasambhava</i>		Person
<i>dge lugs pa</i>	Gelukpa				Organization

<i>dge bshes</i>	geshé	monk who has mastered metaphysics			Term
<i>dge bshes blo bzang rgya mtsho</i>	Geshé Lozang Gyatso			1928-1997	Person
<i>mgo log</i>	Golok				Place
Nga					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>ngor</i>	Ngor				Place
<i>ngor mkhyen brtse'i dbang po</i>	Ngor Khyentsé Wangpo				Person
<i>ngor dgon pa</i>	Ngor Gönpa	Ngor Monastery		1429	Monastery
Ca					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>bco brgyad khri chen rin po che</i>	Chogyé Trichen Rinpoché			1920-2007	Person
<i>lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje</i>	Changkya Rölpe Dorjé				Person
Cha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>chu pa</i>	chupa	robe			Term
<i>chos nyid</i>	chönyi	empty nature			Term
Ja					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po</i>	Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo			1820-1892	Person
Nya					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rnying ma</i>	Nyingma				Organization
Ta					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rta mgrin</i>	Tamdrin		San. <i>Hayagrīva</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>rtogs ldan</i>	tokden	yogi			Term
Tha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>thar tshe mdo</i>	Tartsedo				Place
<i>thugs</i>	tuk	mind			Term
<i>thugs sprul pa</i>	tuktrülpa	mind emanation			Term
<i>thup dogs rin po che</i>	Tupdok Rinpoché				Person
<i>thup don</i>	tupdön	meditative quest			Practice
Da					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>bdud 'joms rin po che</i>	Düjom Rinpoché			1904-1989	Person

<i>mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje</i>	Do Khyentsé Yeshé Dorjé			1800-1866	Person
<i>'das log</i>	delok	one who dies and returns to life			Term
<i>sde dge</i>	Degé				Place
Na					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>na ra</i>	nara	unkempt one			Term
<i>na len dra dgon pa</i>	Nalendra Gönpa	Nalendra Monastery		1425	Monastery
<i>nang chen</i>	Nangchen				Place
<i>nang chen a lde sprul sku</i>	Nangchen Adé Trülku				Person
<i>gnas mdo kar ma chags med sprul sku</i>	Nemdo Karma Chakmé Trülku			1926-	Person
<i>rnam par thar pa skal ldan 'das pa'i chos mdong</i>	<i>Nampar Tarpa Kelden Depé Chödong</i>				Text
<i>rnam shes</i>	namshé	transmigrating consciousness			Term
Pa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>pad ma 'phrin las</i>	Pema Trinlé			1934-	Person
<i>pan chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan</i>	Penchen Chökyi Gyeltsen			1570-1662	Person
<i>pan chen bla ma</i>	Penchen Lama	Tenth Penchen Lama		1938-1989	Person
<i>pan chen blo bzang ye shes</i>				1663?-1737	Person
<i>po ta la</i>	Potala				Building
<i>spyen ras gzigs</i>	Chenrezik		San. <i>Avalokiteśvara</i>		Buddhist deity
<i>sprul sku</i>	trülku	reincarnate lama			Term
<i>sprul pa</i>	trülpa	emanation			Term
Pha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>phra rgyug sprul sku</i>	Tragyuk Trülku			1951-	Person
<i>'phrin las</i>	trinlé	deeds			Term
Ba					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>bar do</i>	bardo	liminal period between death and rebirth			Term
<i>bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje rin po che</i>	Jadrel Sanggyé Dorjé Rinpoché			1913-	Person

<i>byams pa nam mkha' 'chi med</i>	Jampa Namkha Chimé			1765-1820	Person
<i>bla brang</i>	labrang	reincarnate lama's estate			Term
<i>dbang thang</i>	wangtang	charisma; lit. "field of power"			Term
<i>'bras spungs dgon pa</i>	Drepung Gönpa	Drepung Monastery			Monastery
<i>'brug pa bka' brgyud</i>	Drukpa Kagyü				Organization
Ma					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>ma 'das sprul sku</i>	mandé trülku	the reincarnation of an incarnate lama who has not died in another living individual			Term
Tsha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho</i>	Tsangyang Gyatso	Sixth Dalai Lama		1653-1705	Person
<i>tshar pa</i>	Tsarpa				Organization
<i>mtsho dag</i>	tsodak	guardian of the lake			Term
Dza					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rdzogs chen</i>	Dzokchen	Great Perfection			Doxographical Category
<i>rdzong sar</i>	Dzongsar				Place
<i>rdzong sar mkhyen rtse 'i chos kyi blo gros</i>	Dzongsar Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö			1893-1959	Person
<i>rdzong sar dgon pa</i>	Dzongsar Gönpa	Dzongsar Monastery		1275	Monastery
Zha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>zhi chen</i>	zhichen	great pacifier			Term
Ya					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>ye shes</i>	yeshé	perfect absolute divine wisdom			Term
<i>yon tan</i>	yönten	accomplishments			Term
Ra					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>rag ra bkras mthong rin po che</i>	Rakra Trentong Rinpoché			1924-	Person
<i>ri bo che</i>	Riwoché				Place
<i>ri bo rtse lnga</i>	Riwo Tsénga				Mountain
<i>rig lam slob gra</i>	Riklam Lopdra	Institute of Buddhist Dialectics			Monastery

<i>rin po che</i>	rinpoché	precious guru			Term
<i>ris med</i>	Rimé				Doxographical Category
Sha					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>gshis kha</i>	shikha	character			Term
Sa					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>sa skya</i>	Sakya				Organization
<i>sems</i>	sem	mind			Term
<i>gsung</i>	sung	speech			Term
La					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>lha thog</i>	Lhatok				Place
<i>lha bzang khang</i>	Lhazang Khang				Person
<i>lha sa</i>	Lhasa				Place
A					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Other	Dates	Type
<i>a mdo</i>	Amdo				Place
<i>a 'phrin 'phrin las blo gros</i>	Atrin Trinlé Lodrö			1921-2005	Person
<i>a myes rma chen</i>	Anyé Machen				Place
Sanskrit					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Sanskrit	Dates	Type
		ascetic holy man	<i>sādhū</i>		Term
Mongolian					
Wylie	Phonetics	English	Mongolian	Dates	Type
		Dalai Lama	<i>dalai lama</i>		Person
		Seventh Dalai Lama		1708-1757	Person
		Fifth Dalai Lama		1617-1682	Person
	Lhazang Khan		<i>lhazang qayan</i>	1683-1706	Person

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