ABSTRACT

In the past, there were numerous studies done showing images of Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799) of the Qing Dynasty as a Confucian moralist-monarch. However, there are also existences of many Tibetan thangkas which depict Emperor Qianlong as Boddhisattva Manjushri. Scholars, for instance, David M. Farquar and Michael Henss see this as Emperor Qianlong’s political propaganda to rule the Mongolians and the Tibetans. However, they fail to see that such political propaganda implemented by Emperor Qianlong was a close, if not exact replicate of the Buddhist Political Ideology that was adopted by the rulers of the Chinese imperial court as early as when Shi Hu implemented it in the Kingdom of Houzhao (后赵, 335 – 348).

This paper argues that the Manchu ruler was implementing the Manjusri Buddhārāja tradition (文殊佛王传统) as his political tool in embracing the minorities especially the Mongolians and the Tibetans. The paper also proves that the Manjusri Buddhārāja tradition adopted by Emperor Qianlong suggests that he is a cakravatin, who rules in four directions in the universe. It is such that many Manjusri thangkas depicted Emperor Qianlong as the emanation of Manjusri. Also, the intimate relationship between Emperor Qianlong and Rupai Dorje(1717-1786), the Third Changkya Huthugtu, spiritual advisor of Emperor Qianlong, was never studied in depth, this paper offers a clearer picture of this politically motivated relationship.