



## **Mishandled mail: The strange case of the Reting Regent's letters to Hitler**

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In March 1939, during the visit of the 1938/39 Ernst Schaefer-Tibet-Expedition to Lhasa, Reting Rinpoche, the Regent of Tibet, twice wrote letters to the then German leader, Adolf Hitler. This was perhaps the most famous outcome of the Schaefer expedition, and although it was not the most important result, it has played a major role in the legacy of the expedition and the resulting judgement of contemporary German-Tibetan relations.

My paper seeks to reveal the implications of these letters. After external and internal structural analysis of the letters (which presents some surprising results), further questions remain to be discussed: why did Reting write them and why did he send two letters? Are the letters comparable in their style to similar Tibetan letters to other rulers, and do they correspond to the rules for the compilation of such letters, in the official "letter writers" *yig bskur rnam gzhag*? Were they just rather innocuous and noncommittal letters written out of politeness, and to what extent do the accompanying gifts reflect the state of the relationship between Reting and Schaefer? What happened to the letters – did they reach Hitler? What was their later fate?

This paper will also focus on the implications of the contemporary translations and the differences between these. The paper will conclude with a discussion of some unexpected political consequences of the letters.