A photograph of a smiling Tibetan man sitting in front of a stone wall. He is wearing a brown beanie, a red jacket, and a red skirt. He has a silver belt buckle and a silver earring. A wooden staff is leaning against the wall behind him.

# *the* Tibetans

**Matthew T. Kapstein**

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# The Tibetans

Matthew T. Kapstein



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# Preface

In 1979, when the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) was created at Oxford, most of the world's scholars of Tibet could gather in a single, small lecture hall. Tibet was then an obscure field of study, far removed from the public view, and the little community of Tibetanists had the feel of a close-knit clan. All inhabited a common microcosm, in which it was more or less taken for granted that one should be familiar with all things Tibetan: topics as diverse as history, anthropology, art, medicine, literature, philosophy, and religion. Since that time, however, public interest in Tibet has increased dramatically, fueled in part by a flood of popular publications on Tibetan matters generally and above all on Tibetan religion. Simultaneously, the academic field of Tibetan studies has grown to a considerable extent, becoming more specialized in the process and divided into several distinct subdisciplines, sometimes with relatively little communication among them. Whereas the 1979 Oxford meeting produced a modest publication documenting its proceedings, the ninth seminar of the IATS held in Leiden in 2000 yielded ten specialized volumes of new research.

Despite this expansion, there are few works that suitably introduce current knowledge of Tibet to a general readership. Academic texts frequently address minutely defined topics and seldom have the non-specialist in mind. Popular writings tend either to dwell one-sidedly on religion, often supposing the reader to be a seeker of spiritual guidance, or else concern personal experiences in Tibet, whether from a Tibetan or foreign perspective. Though such accounts often have considerable value for the testimony and insights that they provide, they do not supply an orientation to the study of Tibet overall. *The Tibetans*, in accord with the program set out for Blackwell's *The Peoples of Asia* series, offers an introduction to Tibet that is based upon the conclusions of recent scholarship, but at the same time presupposes no prior knowledge of Tibet.

Although an abundance of information about Tibet is now readily available, it has been necessary to keep this book within strict limits of length. One hopes that brevity will contribute to accessibility in this case, but it has required that hard choices be made about just what topics to cover and to what degree of detail. Inevitably I have adopted some restrictions that others would contest. Some of these must be mentioned at the very beginning.

"Tibet" is not now and never has been a monolithic entity, and the Tibetan people, far from being homogeneous, are diverse in terms of lifestyle, language, religion, and indeed most areas of culture. One of the ways in which Tibetan studies have positively matured in recent years has been precisely through their affirmation of this complexity, so that few scholars now entertain simple notions thought to pertain universally to the Tibetans or to Tibet as a whole. What is emphasized in current research tends to be the particular and the local, and some would suggest that it makes little sense to speak of such things as "Tibetan identity" any longer. We know of peoples who identify themselves (and in some cases are officially designated) as Tibetan, but whose language is not Tibetan. At the same time, we find others who speak languages that are clearly related to Tibetan, and whose history and culture are closely tied to Tibet, but who have nevertheless come to regard themselves as ethnically distinct from the Tibetans. There are even communities that neither speak Tibetan, nor are regarded by themselves or others as ethnic Tibetans, but whose culture is so thoroughly Tibetanized that they have for centuries been thought of as constituting an integral part of the Tibetan cultural world. To avoid conveying an oversimplified account of the Tibetans, therefore, it would be necessary to detail these and many other ethnic, political, and linguistic particulars that are comprised within the Tibetan realm as a whole. Nevertheless, in the span of the present work, to do so is clearly impossible.

Given this, however, we can still speak sensibly, if tentatively, of a Tibetan civilizational sphere, focusing upon that which has at least the appearance of greatest universality within it. If I have chosen to stress in this context primarily the main lines of Tibetan history, language, and religion, as well as the Tibetan plateau itself and the special environmental conditions that obtain there, it is because these seem to me to be foremost among the factors that define the Tibetan world, despite very considerable variation in each of these areas. Ideally, in order to balance my account, the present volume would be supplemented by one or more works treating, for example, the Tibeto-Burman-speaking peoples of the Himalaya, the Sino-Tibetan frontiers, and so on. Excellent volumes on



*The Mongols* by David Morgan (Blackwell 1986) and *The Manchus* by Pamela Kyle Crossley (Blackwell 1997) may be recommended as introductions to two of the neighboring peoples with whom the Tibetans have long sustained political and cultural ties, and among whom Tibetan religion and learning have at times played significant roles.

A second restriction that I have imposed upon this work concerns the time-frame it covers. My primary interest throughout has been to introduce the traditional Tibetan world as it was before the mid-twentieth century, when revolutionary China asserted its control of Tibet. The tumultuous period that followed, during which time great political, economic, and cultural upheavals transformed many aspects of Tibetan life, has been treated primarily in the last chapter, and no claim is made that this offers anything more than the briefest glimpse of a complex and much-contested history. It may appear therefore that I have skirted some of the compelling and difficult issues that most interest readers about Tibet: the tragic events surrounding Tibet's absorption into the People's Republic of China, the flight of the Dalai Lama and many of his compatriots to South Asia, and the very recent "globalization" of Tibetan culture. Because a number of readily available and excellent works (noted in the Bibliography) deal with these and other aspects of modern Tibet, I have not attempted to reproduce their contribution here: Melvyn C. Goldstein's fine essay, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, may be recommended in particular as providing an accessible, but nuanced, introduction to recent events. The final chapter, accordingly, is intended just to orient those who are new to Tibet to the most essential and pertinent information.

In its general outlines, this book primarily concerns Tibetan cultural history. I have used the historical chapters to introduce not just the conclusions of recent research, but also salient features of traditional accounts, which often are legendary in character. These are of value to us for their testimony regarding Tibetan conceptions of Tibet's past. As such they form a fundamental aspect of the Tibetan cultural background, with implications for Tibetan literature, law, politics, and religion. For similar reasons I have quoted liberally from Tibetan writings so as to convey something of the manner in which Tibetans have themselves spoken of their land, its history, and their civilization. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Tibetan works are my own. While I have always aimed to represent the texts chosen within reasonable bounds of accuracy, I have refrained from burdening them here with the technical apparatus required in more specialized contexts. A more comprehensive anthology of translated Tibetan text selections will be found in the forthcoming *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*, which will complement the present work.

The Western-language sources from which this book has benefited may be found entered in the Bibliography. This follows the organization of the book overall and therefore indicates for each section the works that I have consulted and that I recommend to those who wish to explore in greater depth topics raised here. For those familiar with this literature, my many intellectual debts will be sufficiently obvious so that I may be excused, I trust, from the obligation to add extensive annotation throughout. Direct quotations, of course, are another matter and full citations are provided in the notes that accompany them. The references to Tibetan works given there will balance, to some extent, the emphasis on secondary literature in the Bibliography. To all those past masters and present colleagues whose writings have contributed to this work, I extend heartfelt thanks.

Matthew T. Kapstein  
Paris, November 2005

# Acknowledgments

My reflections on Tibetan history are indebted throughout to four of the great modern Tibetan historians with whom it was my privilege to have discussed many of the topics surveyed in these pages: Dudjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje (1904–87), Deshung Rinpoche Kunga Tenpei Nyima (1905–87), Dungkar Rinpoche Losang Tinley (1927–97), and Tsepön Shakabpa Wangchuk Deden (1908–89). Their counsel and their works, together with their erudition and humility, have long stood before me as models of the particular excellences of Tibetan learning.

In grappling with the problems inherent in the interpretation of traditional sources in the light of contemporary approaches to historical and cultural study, I am grateful for ongoing conversations over many years with fellow Tibetanists including the late Michael Aris, Anne-Marie Blondeau, Ronald Davidson, Georges Dreyfus, David Germano, Janet Gyatso, Yoshiro Imaeda, David Jackson, Samten Karmay, Leonard van der Kuip, Per Kværne, Fernand Meyer, Elliot Sperling, Heather Stoddard, Tashi Tsering, and Roberto Vitali. Since the early 1970s E. Gene Smith has constantly encouraged, and through his bibliographical activities materially contributed to, all aspects of my research. More recently it has been a pleasure to see some of the discussions in the field taken up and advanced by a new generation of scholars of Tibet, among whom Bryan Cuevas, Kurtis Schaeffer, and Gray Tuttle have particularly contributed to my thinking on Tibetan cultural history.

For their specific advice and responses to queries in connection with this book I am indebted to Cynthia Beall, Lawrence Epstein, Melvyn Goldstein, and Daniel Miller. A number of organizations and individuals have assisted my research in Tibet and China over the years in ways that also furthered its development. The Committee for Scholarly Communication with China sponsored travel and fieldwork in 1990, 1992, and 1998, on which occasions I enjoyed the cooperation of the Sichuan Academy of

Social Science (SASS) in Chengdu and the Tibetan Academy of Social Science (TASS) in Lhasa. The Tibetan-Himalayan Digital Library (THDL) project based at the University of Virginia, aided by a grant from the US Department of Education, permitted documentation of central Tibetan historical sites in 2002 in collaboration with the TASS. In connection with these fruitful visits, I thank, in particular, the current president of the TASS, Tsewang Gyurme, and researchers including Pasang Wangdu, Buchung, Dongbu Lhagyal, Drongbu Tsering Dorje, and Tsering Gyalpo. Thanks, too, to the noted historian Chen Qingying, of the Center for Tibetan Studies in Beijing. For its support of my translation work, from which extracts are given here, I acknowledge the National Endowment of the Humanities, under translation grant number RL-22065.

The publishers and editors of the following among my previous work have graciously permitted me to use extracts from them here:

“The Royal Way of Supreme Compassion,” “The Guide to the Crystal Peak: A Pilgrim’s Handbook,” “The Journey to the Golden Mountain,” “The Sermon of an Itinerant Saint,” and “Turning Back Gossip: A Village Ritual of Exorcism,” in *Tibetan Religions in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez, Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

*Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, ed. Melvyn C. Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

“The Indian Literary Identity in Tibet,” in *Literary Cultures in History: Perspectives from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

“A Thorn in the Dragon’s Side: Tibetan Buddhist Culture in China,” in *Governing China’s Multi-ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

I am grateful, too, to Morris Rossabi for his invitation to make this addition to the Peoples of Asia series, and to Tessa Harvey, Angela Cohen, Gillian Kane, and Helen Lawton at Blackwell, for patiently but persistently urging me to get it done. David Williams and his colleagues at The Running Head efficiently effected its production, with the careful editorial contribution of John Gaunt. Christine Mollier has long urged me to address non-Tibetanists in my writing on Tibet; I hope that this at least in part responds to the charge. It goes without saying that I am solely responsible for the faults herein, in awareness of which, as Tibetan writers like to put it, I ask that the protectors be patient.

# A Note on Transcription and Translation

Because the exact transcription of written Tibetan offers little guide to the actual pronunciation of the language, Tibetan is given in the main body of this book in simplified phonetic spellings. The scheme employed here is based on that used in my *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), modified so as to conform to the usage recently adopted by the Tibetan Himalayan Digital Library. For a detailed description of this, one may refer to the article by David Germano and Nicolas Tournadre, “THDL Simplified Phonetic Transcription of Standard Tibetan” ([http://iris.lib.virginia.edu/tibet/xml/showEssay.php?xml=/collections/langling/THDL\\_phonetics.xml](http://iris.lib.virginia.edu/tibet/xml/showEssay.php?xml=/collections/langling/THDL_phonetics.xml)).

Most of the letters used may be pronounced according to their common English values. The exceptions to this rule are:

ö and ü, which are pronounced as in German

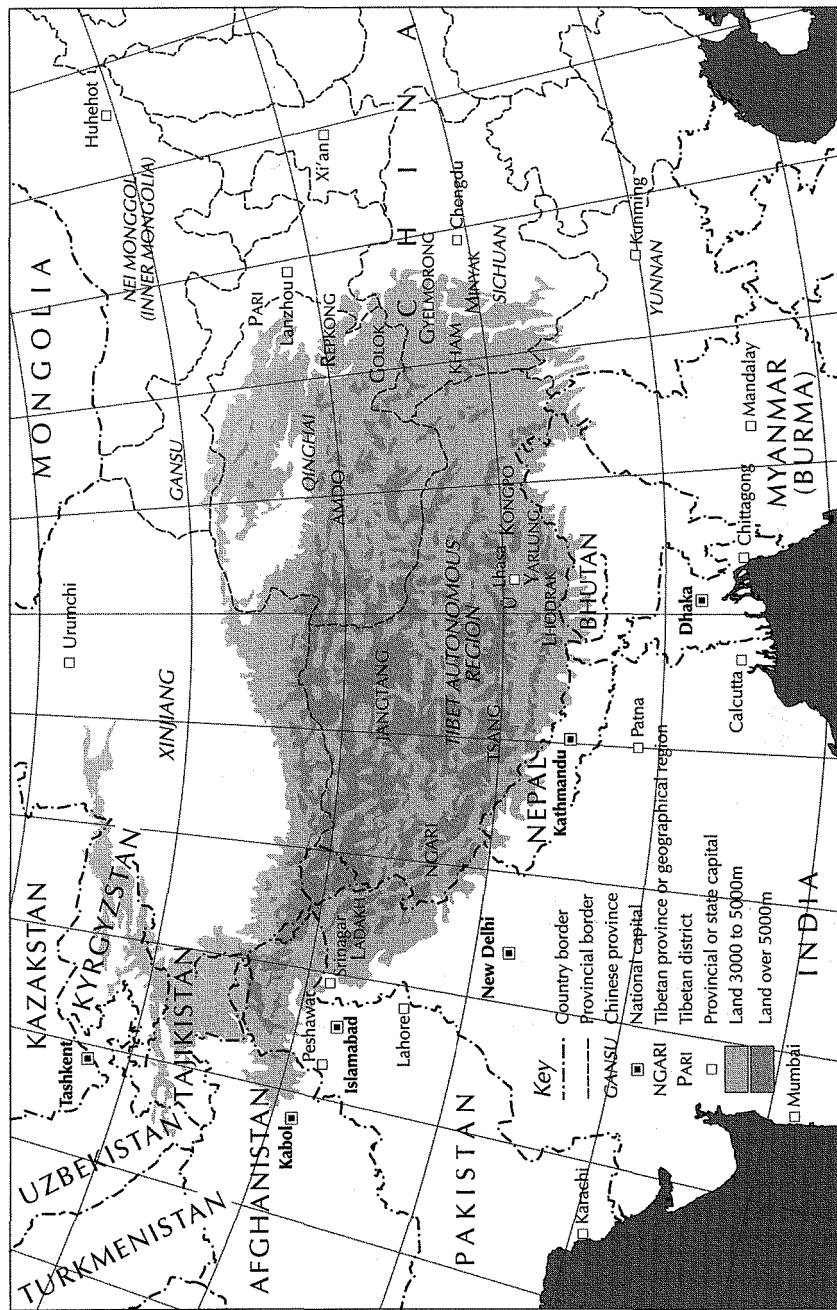
e and é, which are both pronounced like the French é, the accent being used here only at the end of words, to remind readers that a final e is not silent: e.g. *dorjé*

z and zh, which resemble s and sh; thus *Zhalu* sounds rather like *Shalu*

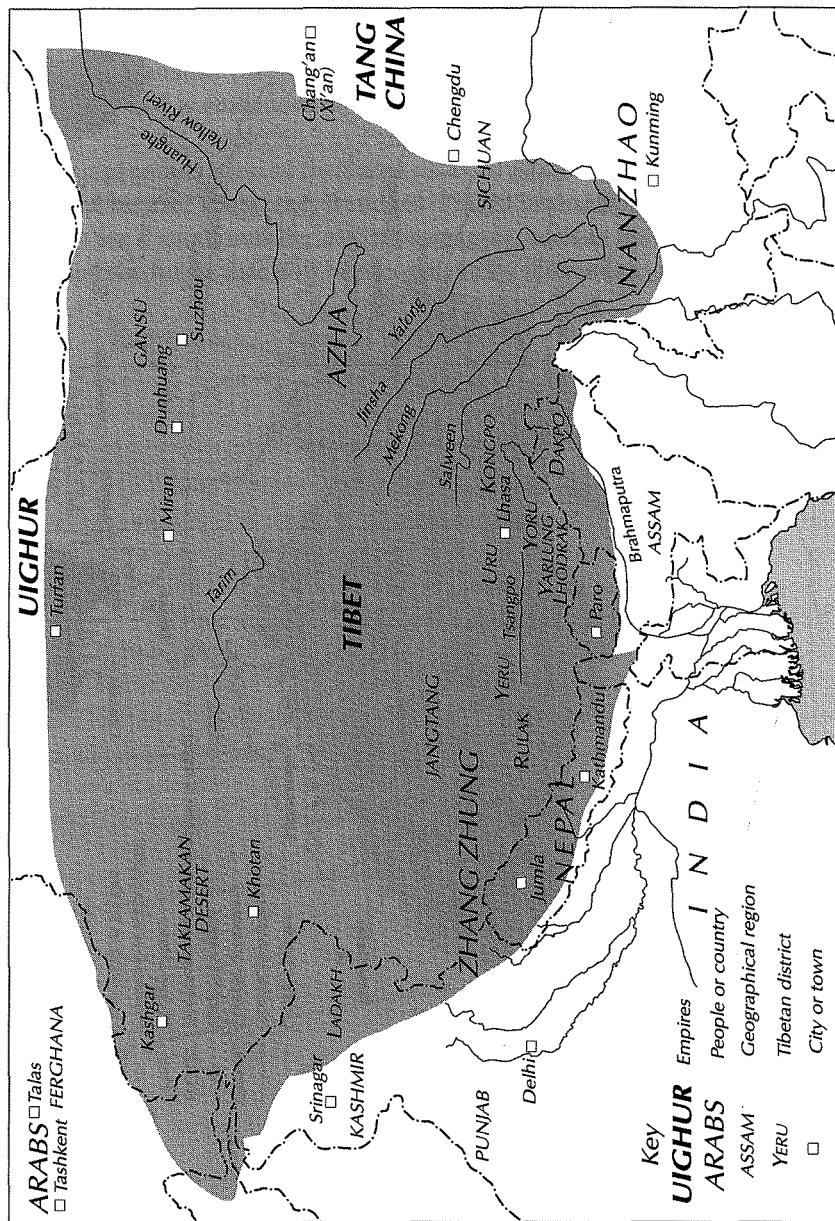
In a few cases, however, I have retained current conventional spellings for proper names, instead of phonetic transcriptions; for instance, Shigatsé instead of phonetic Zhigatsé (for literary Tibetan *gzhis-ka-rtse*), and Reting for Radreng (lit. *rwa-sgreng*). The Tibetan spelling glossary given at the end of the book provides the exact literary orthography for all Tibetan names and terms used herein. It includes also the Tibetan equivalents of certain Sanskrit, Chinese, and Mongolian words used in the text, as well as of book titles for which I give only English translations.

Sanskrit words are given here without diacritical marks. I have followed the Sanskrit pronunciation, except in those instances in which a Sanskrit word is embedded in a Tibetan name, e.g. Padmasambhava (in accord with the Sanskrit), but Pema Jungné (where *pema* represents the Tibetan pronunciation of the Sanskrit word *padma*).

For Chinese, I use the standard Pinyin transcriptions throughout, though for a small number of proper names, such as Sun Yat-sen, I have retained the forms that will be recognized by most anglophone readers.

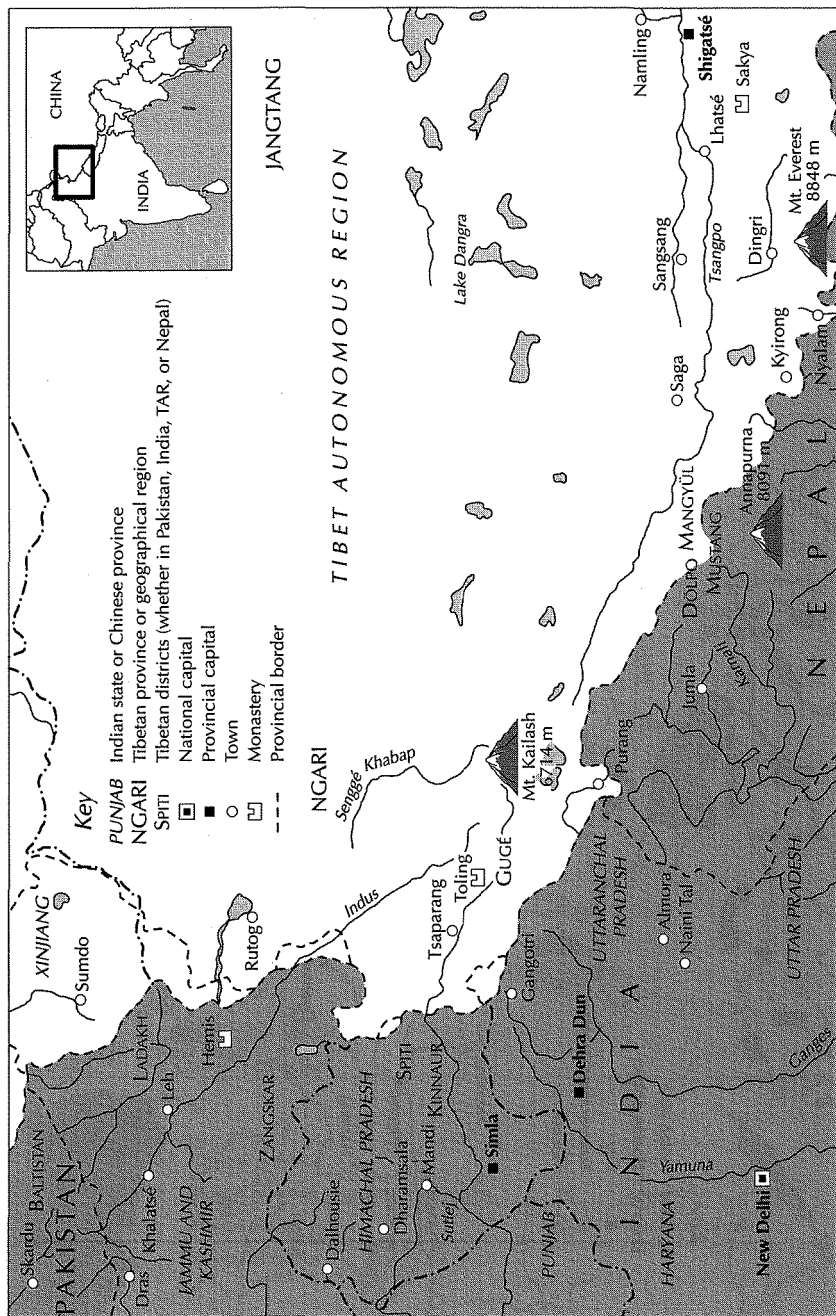


**Map 1** Tibet's geography

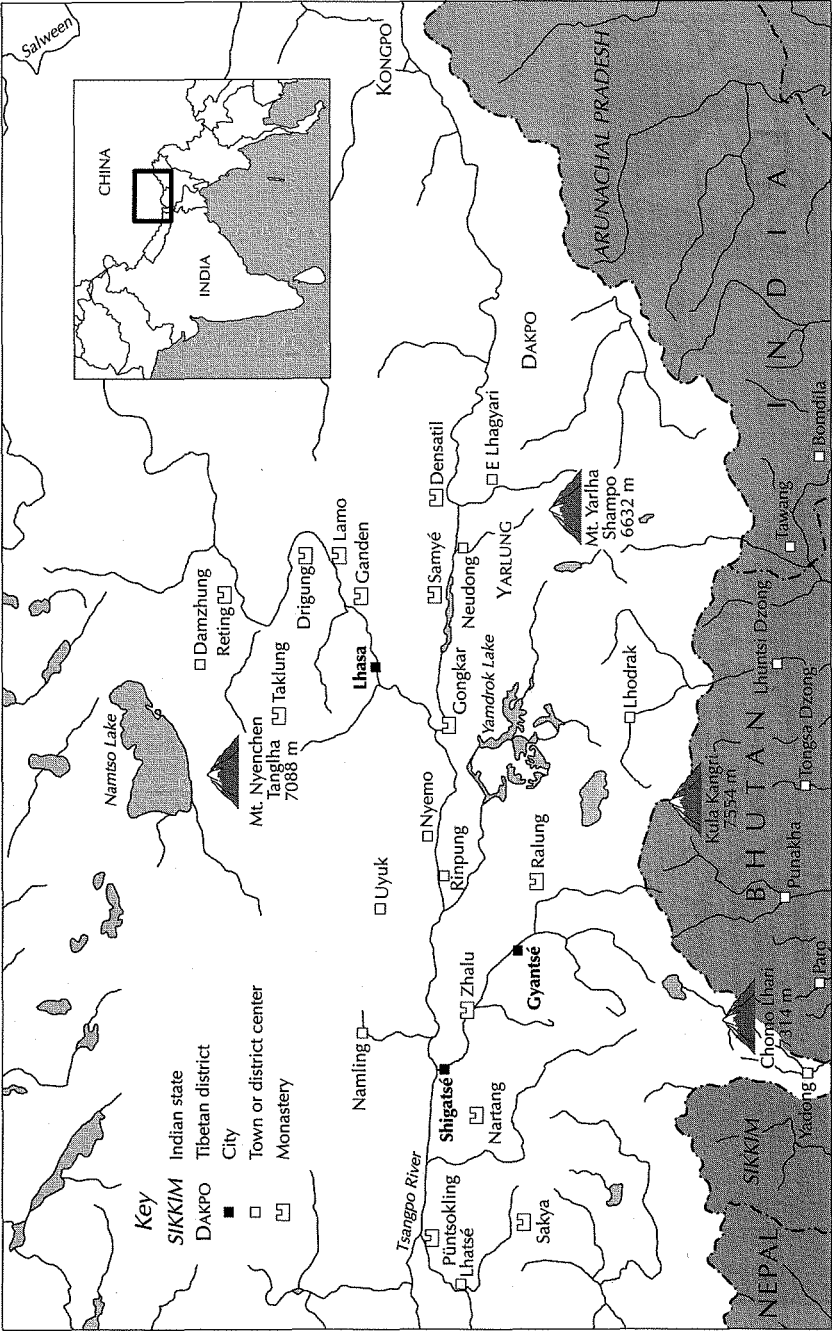


**Map 2** The Tibetan Empire, late eighth–early ninth centuries (with modern borders for reference)





Map 3 Western Tibet



Map 4 Central Tibet and Tsang



### Key

**GANSU** Chinese province

**AMDO** Tibetan province or geographical region

**GOLOK** Tibetan district

■ Provincial capital

□ Town

⊞ Monastery

----- Provincial border

**Map 5** Far Eastern Tibet



# The Vessel and Its Contents

“Tibet” means many things. Geographically, it designates the vast uplift, popularly referred to as the “roof of the world,” that extends from the Himalaya to the great deserts of Inner Asia. Linguistically, it embraces those regions, from northern Pakistan to China’s Gansu Province, in which varieties of the Tibetan language are spoken. In its socioeconomic dimensions Tibet may be thought of in terms of its dominant modes of production: high-altitude pastoralism and a barley-based agriculture. Culturally Tibet is distinguished by the use of classical Tibetan as a literary medium, by shared artistic and craft traditions, and by the important role of the religious system of Tibetan Buddhism. Politically, according to one’s ideological standpoint or historical frame of reference, Tibet may be a particular administrative unit of the contemporary People’s Republic of China, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), or else the much vaster territory that, nominally at least, came under the rule of the Fifth Dalai Lama during the seventeenth century, which many Tibetans still see as defining their rightful political domain. Depending upon the story one wishes to tell, therefore, one must first choose among several distinct, but nevertheless overlapping, Tibets.

Though cultural and historical Tibet will be our main concern throughout this book, it is impossible to consider this apart from the distinctive geographical and ecological zone formed by the Tibetan plateau and its equally distinctive population of farmers and nomads, whose livelihoods are based respectively on the cultivation of highland barley and the husbandry of sheep and yak, and who for the most part speak languages that are part of the tightly knit linguistic system of Tibetan. These people have not always considered themselves to be Tibetans, and do not always so consider themselves today, but in most cases they regard their culture and history as intimately tied to Tibet under one description or

another. We will begin, therefore, with a general sketch of the Tibetan environment and its inhabitants – the “vessel and its contents” according to a traditional locution – and also of the language through which the Tibetan cultural sphere is in some measure defined.

## High Peaks, Pure Earth

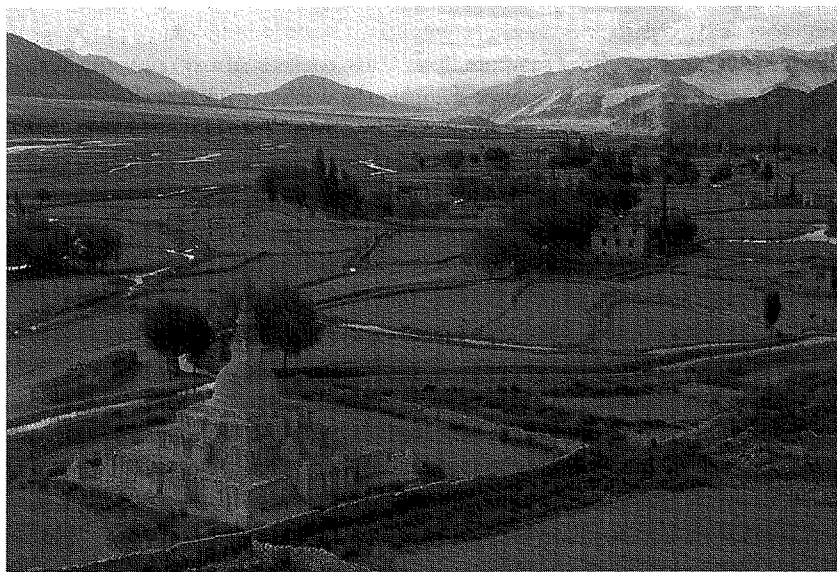
A popular legend provides a useful entry into the “land of snows.” At some time in the distant past, Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, gazed upon our world with the intention of saving the creatures of Tibet. He looked and looked, but could find no hint that the Buddha had visited that land, or that his teaching had ever reached it. What Avalokiteshvara saw, as he continued his inspection, was a great area of darkness, which seemed to him to be without doubt the worst place on earth. Not long before, it had been a vast sea, but now that the waters had receded it appeared that the high regions of western Tibet were encircled by glacial mountains and fractured by ravines. Herds of hoofed animals roamed wild there. With its glaciers and lakes, feeding the rivers that flowed from the high plateau, this region resembled a reservoir. In the middle elevations of the plateau were grass-covered valleys interrupted by rocky massifs, where apes and ogresses made their lairs in caves and sheltered hollows. Broken up by the great river valleys, this part of Tibet seemed like the fractured terrain surrounding an irrigation canal. And following the plateau’s descent to the east, the bodhisattva saw forests and pasturelands, where birds of all kinds and even tropical creatures were to be found. This looked to him like land made fertile by irrigation. Still, with all the power of his divine sight, Avalokiteshvara could find no candidates for discipleship in Tibet, for no human beings were yet to be seen there.<sup>1</sup>

The tale of the bodhisattva’s first glimpse of Tibet serves to direct our vision to several key features of the Tibetan landscape. For much of Tibet was indeed formerly at or beneath sea level; in this the legend accords with geological fact. Roughly forty-five million years ago, as the Indian tectonic plate collided with and began to be drawn underneath Southern Tibet, then the south coast of continental Asia, the bed of the ancient Tethys Sea that had separated the continents began to rise. The ensuing uplift gave birth to the Himalaya and contributed to the formation of the other great mountain ranges of Inner Asia: Karakorum, Pamir, Tianshan, and Kunlun. During subsequent cycles of glaciation, many lakes, large and small, were also formed on the rising plateau. Follow-

ing the last great Ice Age, these began to recede – in some places one finds ancient shorelines as much as 200 meters above present water levels – and, because they were frequently without outlet, they became rich in salts and other minerals, trade in which has played an essential role in the traditional economy. So not without reason do the old legends speak of a primordial ocean covering Tibet. The ongoing subduction of the Indian subcontinent, moreover, means that the Tibetan plateau (also called the Tibet–Qinghai plateau) is still in formation and is especially prone to earthquake. With a mean elevation of over 12,000 feet and an area of some 1.2 million square miles, it is by far the most extensive high-altitude region on earth. Roughly speaking, the Tibetan plateau embraces one-third of the territory of modern China and is the size of the entire Republic of India, or nearly half the area of the lower forty-eight among the United States. To appreciate Tibet as a human habitat, therefore, its sheer immensity must first clearly be grasped.

Tibet is further depicted in our tale as a wilderness, a place that came to be peopled and tamed only at a relatively late date through the divine agency of the bodhisattva, a civilizing influence originating from beyond the frontiers of Tibet itself, perhaps a mythical reflection of the fact that much of Tibet was settled in comparatively recent times. Indeed, in some Himalayan districts, Tibetan settlement dates back only a few centuries. The origins of the Tibetan people will be considered in more detail in the following chapter, but here we should note that populations on the plateau were always comparatively thin. If the current ethnic Tibetan population of China, about 5.5 million, offers any indication, the population density of the Tibetan plateau could seldom have been much more than three or four persons per square mile, and for most of Tibet's history even less. Of course, the population is concentrated in habitable areas that comprise only a fraction of the Tibetan geographical region overall; it has been estimated, for instance, that only about 1 percent of the Tibetan plateau sustains regular agricultural activity. Still, the dispersal of the populace over a vast, inhospitable terrain was clearly a factor inhibiting early civilizational development.

When Avalokiteshvara gazed upon Tibet, he saw three main geographical zones. The tripartite division of the Tibetan plateau into its high and harsh western reaches, the agricultural valleys of its mid-elevations, and the rich pasturage and forested lowlands as one descends towards China schematically depicts the topography of the land as one moves from west to east. In comparing the land to an irrigation system, with its reservoir, channel, and fields, the story underscores the central role of the control of water resources in the emergence of civilization in Tibet. Indeed,

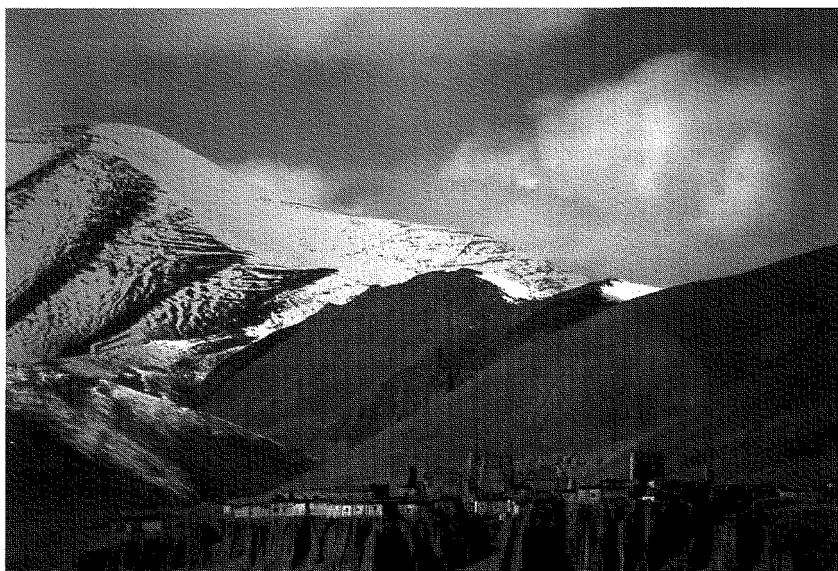


**Figure 1** Irrigation works in the Indus River Valley, Ladakh, 1975.

the Tibetan term for governmental authority (*chapsi*), literally “water-regime,” derives from the polite and honorific word for water, *chap*.

In traditional Tibetan geographical terms, the three zones described by the bodhisattva correspond to the three great divisions of Tibet: (1) the “three circuits” of Ngari in the west, (2) the “four horns” of Ü (the “Center”) and Tsang, and (3) the “six ranges” or “three realms” constituting the eastern provinces of Amdo and Kham. The first embraces the territories of the ancient Zhangzhung and later Gugé kingdoms, centered in the areas around Mt. Kailash (alt. 6,714 meters) that now constitute the Ngari Prefecture (Ch. Alizhou) of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The “three circuits” (whose exact enumeration is treated variously in different sources) also include the regions of Ladakh and Zangskar, now in India’s Jammu and Kashmir State, and neighboring locations in Himachal Pradesh, as well as in former times Baltistan in far northern Pakistan. (Baltistan was in most respects removed from the Tibetan cultural sphere following its conversion to Islam after the fifteenth century.) The area as a whole is characterized by high desert and pasture, with numerous salt lakes, and is subject to very severe winter conditions, temperatures in some places regularly plunging to minus 50° Fahrenheit. Irrigated river valleys, whose fresh waters spring from glacial sources in the high mountains, permit crops to be grown, though there is evidence that desiccation





**Figure 2** A typical landscape in western Tibet, 1985.

during the past millennium has reduced the land available for agriculture in some parts of Ngari. Indo-European peoples were among the early inhabitants in this area – so, for instance, the Dardic-speaking populations of ancient Ladakh – and the region as a whole was integrated into the Tibetan cultural sphere only gradually following the seventh-century expansion of the Tibetan empire. The “three circuits” of Ngari are at present the most thinly populated part of the Tibetan world, the home of not more than four or five percent of all Tibetans. The barren beauty of the desert, dominated by endlessly varying formations of rock and mountain, was nicely captured in the remark of a leading lama in Ladakh on recalling the impression made by news of the Apollo moon landing in 1969: “We Ladakhis have never been motivated to visit the surface of the moon because we had it here all along.”<sup>2</sup>

The provinces of Ü (often referred to simply as “central Tibet”) and Tsang (the region to the west of Ü, with the town of Shigatsé as its main center) form the traditional Tibetan heartland, whose chief arteries are the Yarlung Tsangpo River (often just “Tsangpo”), which in India becomes the Brahmaputra, and its tributaries. (The “four horns” into which these parts of Tibet are subdivided are ancient administrative divisions, as will be explained in Chapter 3 below.) Alluvial plains support relatively prosperous farming in many places here, such as the Nyang



**Figure 3** A Central Tibetan ferryman with his *kowa*, a yak-hide boat resembling a coracle, on the Kyi River near Lhasa, 1984.

River valley in the vicinity of Gyantsé in Tsang, and the Yarlung Valley in Ü. Lhasa, the capital of Tibet in modern times, is located in one such valley, that of the Kyi River in Ü. The climate in the central river valleys is relatively mild, with warm summers and temperatures rising above freezing on sunny days even during the coldest months of the year. Higher valleys in the mountains separating the tributaries of the Tsangpo permit grazing in relatively close proximity to arable land, so that a mixed agricultural-pastoral economy is often the norm. To the north of Ü-Tsang, extending west into Ngari and northeast toward Amdo, is the high plateau called the Jangtang (the “northern plain”), whose inhabitants are exclusively pastoralists. The imposing Nyenchen Tangla range, the highest summit of which soars to 7,088 meters, traverses central Tibet and is regarded as the abode of that region’s principal protective divinity, while two of Tibet’s greatest lakes, Nam Tso (or Tengri Nor, “Heaven’s Lake,” as it is known in Mongolian) and Yamdrok Tso, are prominent among the waters of the central region.

Traveling to the east and southeast, one reaches some of Tibet’s lowest elevations as one descends towards eastern India from the districts of Dakpo, Kongpo, and Powo. Here one finds rich forest and abundant water resources. The dietary importance of fish in some places, and the

cultivation of such crops as rice and millet in the lower valleys, distinguishes the way of life in these parts from the basic economy as known elsewhere. This is a transitional zone communicating with the adjacent territories of South Asia, including Bhutan and India's Arunachal State, regions where Tibetan culture has long been influential. The great bend of the Tsangpo River, which turns here to dive into India, forms the deepest gorge in the world, dominated by the great summit of Namchak Barwa (alt. 7,756 meters), the "blazing meteor." Further descent leads to the region of Pemakö, a "hidden land" that came to be regarded in Tibetan legend as a paradise on earth. Its subtropical environment was described by Chögyam Trungpa (1939–87), a celebrated teacher from Kham who passed this way en route to exile in India in 1959:

We crossed . . . a slender bamboo bridge and, beyond it, found ourselves on steep hard ground. There were no rocks, but footholds had been cut on the stony surface in a zig-zag pattern to make the climb easier. As we went further up we could see the Brahmaputra again, now on its south-westward course: the ranges on its south side looked very beautiful with patches of cloud and little groups of houses dotted about. These foothills of the Himalayas have a continual rainfall and everything looked wonderfully green. We could not recognize most of the plants here for they were utterly different from those which grow in East Tibet.<sup>3</sup>

The eastern reaches of traditional Tibet are the vast expanses of Kham and Amdo, now divided among five provincial units in China. Kham today comprises the western parts of China's Sichuan Province, together with adjacent districts in the Tibet Autonomous Region and northern Yunnan; Amdo corresponds to Qinghai Province, with some neighboring parts of Gansu and northern Sichuan. Both Kham and Amdo are characterized by abundant, rich pastureland, making their nomads some of the most prosperous Tibetans. To the west and north of Amdo, the steppe becomes desert as one approaches Gansu and Xinjiang, while to its southeast, as well as in the river valleys throughout Kham, wheat, barley, and other crops may be cultivated. Intervening between the eastern districts of Kham and Amdo, in the Jinchuan river system of Sichuan, is the region known in Tibetan as Gyelmorong, whose people, though speaking a group of distinct languages, have nevertheless long considered themselves Tibetans and are adherents of the Tibetan Bön or Buddhist religions. To one degree or another, similar patterns of Tibetanization of originally non-Tibetan populations may be found throughout the eastern reaches of Amdo and Kham. Among the Yi of Sichuan, the Naxi of Yunnan, and the Tu of Qinghai, for instance, Tibetan culture has long



**Figure 4** Yak and hybrid cattle grazing at a nomad camp in Ngaba, Sichuan Province, 1990.

played an important role. Other groups – the Minyakpa of Chakla in far eastern Kham are an example – would be indistinguishable from neighboring Tibetan populations were it not for the non-Tibetan origin of their local language.

The metaphor of the reservoir and irrigation canal, which we have seen applied to Tibet in particular, pertains too to the Tibetan plateau in its relation with South and East Asia. The Indus and one of its major tributaries, the Sutlej, rise in Ngari and bring their waters to the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent in Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, and the Punjab. Other major rivers originating in Ngari, including the Gandaki, which descends to join the Ganges, and the Tsangpo, figure prominently among the essential water resources of northeastern India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The origins of these rivers in the area around Mt. Kailash led early on to that mountain's becoming analogically regarded as Himavat, the legendary mountain of ancient Indian Buddhist cosmology, adjacent to the Anavatapta lake, from which, in spiral courses, four great rivers descend. As we read in verses attributed to the poet-saint Milarepa (1040–1123):

The lord of glacial peaks  
Resembles a divine mound of white butter

At the head of four rivers:  
 To the east, the mountain of incense perfume,  
 Where the turquoise lake Mapam's waters are gathered;  
 To the south, the defile of the golden ledge;  
 In the west is the eight-peaked mountain king;  
 And in the north, the indigo meadow, the meadow of gold.<sup>4</sup>

Proceeding east from the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra gorges, southeastern Tibet and Kham are scored by a series of important rivers that sustain life throughout Southeast Asia and southern China. The Salween (Tib. Ngülchu), rising in Tibet's northern plain in the region of Nakchu, descends into Burma, while the Mekong (Tib. Dachu) wends its way from Nangchen in Kham down through Laos and Vietnam. As they leave Tibetan territory, the parallel courses of these two great rivers are separated by the summits of the Kawa Karpo range (6,740 meters), prominent among Tibet's sacred mountains. Further east, the two major tributaries of the Yangzi, the Jinsha River (Tib. Drichu) and Yalong River (Tib. Dzachu), define the principal regions of Kham. Along the length of the Jinsha, from north to south, lie many of Kham's major centers, including Jyekundo, Ling, Dergé and Batang. Situated in the area between the rivers are the districts of Ganze, Nyarong, and Litang. East of the Yalong one approaches the Chinese cultural sphere in Sichuan via the still Tibet-anized regions of Gyel morong and Minyak Chakla, the latter dominated by the massif of Minyak Gangkar (7,555 meters). It is here that the town of Dartsedo (Ch. Kangding, formerly Dajianlu), serves as an entrepôt linking the Tibetan and Chinese worlds.

The northeastern province of Amdo is the source of the Yellow River (Tib. Machu) and is dominated by the heights of Amnyé Machen (6,282 meters). Amdo Tso-ngön, the "blue lake of Amdo," known as Kokonor in Mongolian and Qinghai in Chinese, lends its name to the region as whole. The Yellow River valley to the east of the Kokonor includes the richest agricultural lands in the region and is a zone of considerable ethnic diversity, with Tu, Salar, Chinese Muslim (Hui) and other populations. Amdo also has long had a substantial Mongol presence, particularly in the prairies to the north and southwest of the Kokonor. In the southeast of Amdo are the Tibetan districts of Repkong (Ch. Tongren) and Luchu (Ch. Gannan, "southern Gansu"). One reaches the northeastern extremity of the Tibetan world in the district of Pari (Ch. Tianzhu) in Gansu, famed for its herds of white yak. Like the far west of Tibet, the northeast is subject to remarkably harsh winter conditions. Here, as throughout much of the Jangtang, summer snow is a regular occurrence.

Tibetan geographical nomenclature distinguishes several kinds of terrain in terms of natural features and human use. The main agricultural areas are known by the term for cultivated fields, *zhing*, while *tang*, “plain,” generally designates the high plateau on which only pastoral activity is possible. “Highland,” *gang*, describes the elevated ridges and ranges dividing river systems and agricultural terrain, and *drok* is used for the pasturage found in the uplands. Farmers are *zhingpa*, “those of the fields,” while the nomads are *drokpa*, “those of the pastures.” A special term sometimes refers to those who pursue a mixed agricultural and pastoral livelihood, *samadrok*, literally, “neither earth nor pasture.” The deep valleys to the south and east of Tibet, leading into South Asian and Chinese territories respectively, are frequently called *rong* and the term *rongpa*, “valley folk,” often applies to the non-Tibetan peoples inhabiting these lower regions.

Though the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was concerned that the Tibet he inspected was still unpopulated, he took note nevertheless of its rich wildlife. Among the hoofed animals whose herds he observed he would have remarked several species of wild sheep, including bharal sheep and argali, as well as deer, gazelle, and the so-called Tibetan antelope (*chiru*). The Tibetan wild ass (*kyang*) would have been especially plentiful, as indeed it was until the mid-twentieth century, when large-scale extermination greatly reduced populations in the TAR. Seeking what was most iconic of Tibet, he might have gazed with admiration and awe upon the wild yak, or *drong*, described here in the words of the naturalist George Schaller:

While walking in the Chang Tang [Jangtang], I occasionally met several yak bulls ponderously at rest on a hillside. They would rise and face me with their armored heads before fleeing. Their mantles of hair almost obscured their feet. Black and massive, they conveyed power and mystery . . . Supremely well adapted to the harsh highlands with their thick coats, great lung capacity, and ability to clamber nimbly over rough terrain like giant goats, they are marvels of evolutionary perfection. Even their blood cells are designed for high elevations in that they are about half the size of those of cattle and are at least three times more numerous per unit volume, increasing the blood's capacity to carry oxygen.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the drong, argali, and other ungulates, Tibet is home to an abundance of distinctive species of many kinds. Small mammals, including varieties of pika, marmot, and hare, are numerous in many places, pika indeed to such an extent that their burrows can be a major cause of erosion. These smaller species afford a rich source of nutrition to both

birds of prey and mammalian carnivores, including foxes, wolves, and lynx. Among them, the rare and elusive Tibetan snow leopard continues to survive in the fastness of mountains and cliffs, where its spoor and its kill sometimes betray its furtive presence.

Though the low human population density of Tibet would seem to leave ample space for other animal species, the protection of wildlife from hunting and environmental degradation has in some instances become urgent in recent years. In the case of the snow leopard, its naturally small numbers leave it vulnerable even to relatively modest poaching by hunters and trappers, eager to profit from the prize of its magnificent coat. Natural rarity, however, is not a sole, decisive factor driving the need for species conservation; the chiru, for instance, which resembles a graceful East African antelope, was once plentiful throughout much of the Tibetan plateau, but has been hunted almost to extinction, mercilessly and stupidly, for the sake just of its wool. This fiber, called *shahtoosh* in Kashmir, is finer than pashmina and, despite the classification of the chiru as an internationally protected species, it has been eagerly sought for ladies' scarves in the fashion houses of New York, Paris, and Milan, where astronomical prices (US\$10,000 or more for a single shawl) have fueled a trade that gives poachers every incentive to slaughter entire herds.

## Peasants, Nomads, and Traders

Although harsh conditions prevail on large parts of the Tibetan plateau, the environment has permitted relative prosperity within a narrow range of productive activities. The cultivation of barley, together with some wheat, buckwheat, and peas, and the herding of domestic yak, horses, goats, and sheep, emerged early on as the predominant livelihoods and are generally complementary. Nevertheless, though most agriculturists had access to at least some animal produce, it was by no means unknown for nomads far removed from farming communities to live almost entirely on a dairy and meat diet, supplemented by whatever edible plants could be gathered, such as nettles or the wild sweet potato called *droma*.

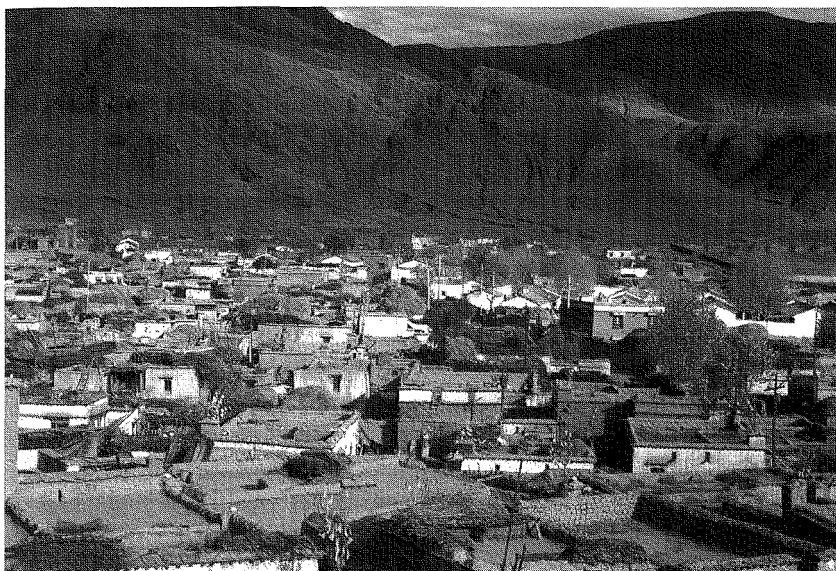
In the popular imagination, including not least the Tibetan imagination, nomads are generally regarded as the archetypal Tibetans. There is reason to believe, however, that in many parts of Tibet, as in the ancient Near East, nomadism began as an extension of agricultural settlement, as the herds and flocks kept by settled populations were grazed ever farther afield. This pattern of mixed agriculture and animal husbandry, that of the *samadrok*, still persists throughout large parts of the

Tibetan world, and wherever it is possible it is generally considered the preferred mode of production. The primacy of agriculture in the early development of Tibetan civilization is suggested both by early agricultural sites, such as the Neolithic village of Karo (to be examined in the following chapter), and the legendary and historical traditions of the Tibetans, which always locate the birth of Tibetan society in the fertile valleys of Southern Tibet. That the control of the waters and the construction of irrigation channels played central roles in the emergence of the early Tibetan state is underscored, we have seen, by one of the main Tibetan words for "government." If, however, Chinese paleoanthropologists are correct in their supposition that the yak was first domesticated by the Qiang peoples to China's northwest, that is, in or around north-eastern Tibet, then it is imaginable that the dominant Tibetan patterns of sustenance emerged from the interactions among agricultural and pastoral peoples whose origins were in fact independent.

The grains grown on the Tibetan plateau, primarily barley and wheat, were probably ultimately derived, via Iran and Inner Asia, from Anatolia or Upper Mesopotamia, the home of many of the Eurasian cultivated grasses, but the exact time and source of their introduction to Tibet remains uncertain. In some low-lying valleys in southeastern Tibet, rice cultivation, relating those regions to Southeast Asia, is also known. Nevertheless, the staple grain for most Tibetans has long been barley, usually roasted in sand (which is sifted out once the roasting is done) and then ground into a very fine flour, called *tsampa*. This nutritious food, which has a distinctive, nutty taste, may be consumed without further cooking, when mixed with tea and butter to give it body and moisture, sometimes with additional flavouring agents such as powdered dry cheese. Grain may be also used to make breads, dumplings, and pastas of various sorts, as well as the alcoholic beverages known as *chang*, thick ales made from the fermented mash of all types of cereals. Distilled alcohol is a rarer grain product whose Arabic name, *arak*, betrays its relatively late appearance in Tibet.

The marked resemblances between Tibetan and Middle Eastern village and fortress architecture, if not strictly fortuitous, may reflect the ancient west-to-east transmission of agricultural practice. Agricultural villages consist of flat-roofed, two- or three-storey houses built of stone and mortar, with only small windows so as to conserve heat in winter. In wealthier peasant communities the houses are notably capacious and solidly constructed. The recent introduction of manufactured glass panes has in some places permitted the windows to be made larger than was the case in the past, providing both light for the interior and an escape





**Figure 5** An agricultural village in Trachi, in the Lhokha district of central Tibet, 1998.

route for the smoke of the hearth, which often pervades the chimneyless traditional home, stinging both lungs and eyes. The ground floor of the Tibetan house typically serves as a livestock shelter, the heat of the animals transmitting some warmth in winter to the persons who dwell above. A level roof serves as a drying floor for both grain and fuel (usually dung), and provides also a pleasant patio whenever the weather is favorable. As the highest part of the house, it is a place for communication with the local divinities, and so often is surmounted by a *sangtab*, a sort of furnace used to burn incense offerings, as well as by prayer flags and other auspicious emblems.

Though the genuine nomadic populations – those who are not *samadrok* – may sometimes have permanent winter dwellings, their primary home is always the black felt tent, which hangs from a framework of poles and ropes, giving it an altogether distinctive appearance. Robert Ekvall, an American missionary who lived among the nomads of Amdo in the 1920s and 1930s, describes a typical interior:

As one comes in through the front entrance by the center pole, on the right-hand side in the far corner is the place for the altar. Prized possessions of the family are stacked along the side. The open space by the hearth is for the men and where guests are entertained. On the left-hand side

buttermaking and cheesemaking gear and the kitchen utensils are kept and the women do their work and sit by the fire to eat and drink. In the front corner is the pile of fuel.<sup>6</sup>

Though Tibetan nomads do break camp and move with their herds at regular intervals during the year, it must be borne in mind that they do not wander freely, contrary to the widespread image of nomadism in the West. Precise principles of territorial right govern the nomads' movements and their use of pasture, and encroachments of one group upon the grazing land of another could be a cause for warfare among them. Sometimes whole groups did migrate to new territory, and historically one notes a general tendency for such movements to have proceeded from eastern to western Tibet. Reasons for tribal migration might include overgrazing of the original range, the splintering of a tribal group, or warfare with neighbors. Though Tibetan nomads were sometimes wealthy, a single family possessing tens of thousands of animals, this was by no means the norm and in many places the nomads were impoverished. And even those who were fortunate could be quickly ruined by cattle-disease, exceptionally harsh weather, or battles with neighbors. Nomadism was thus always a precarious livelihood. To supplement the income derived from one's herds, Tibetan nomads therefore frequently turned to hunting and trapping, raiding of caravans or of settled communities, or begging in the towns.

As in traditional societies generally, agricultural and pastoral activities in Tibet are governed by seasonal cycles. In farming communities the growing season is always relatively short, the winter affording time for the practice of crafts, or for trade and pilgrimage. Although care of animals is a year-round activity, nomads too often find their work concentrated in the summer season, when dairy production is at its height.

The valley of Tarap, in the region of Dölpo in northwestern Nepal, situated at an elevation of roughly 4,000 meters, was studied in depth by the anthropologist Corneille Jest, whose analysis of the cycle of barley cultivation there may be taken as exemplary. During the beginning of the spring, in the second lunar month of the Tibetan year (late March and early April), agricultural activity begins with the preparation of the irrigation canals, repairing them as needed. In the following month (April–May), the fields are manured, irrigated, and seeded. The principal fieldwork during the summer months then consists of regular weeding and ongoing maintenance of the irrigation system. During this season, too, those engaged in the import of salt from adjacent districts in Tibet join caravans for this purpose, while those who attend to the herds bring them up to summer pasturage. Preparations for the harvest begin in the

seventh month (mid-August to early September), and the harvest itself is mostly completed during the month that follows, when the grain is winnowed and dried. Later autumn activities include trade journeys south, into the lower valleys, where Tibetan salt may be exchanged for additional supplies of grain. End-of-year tasks include wintering the herds, spinning and weaving, ropemaking, etc.

The nomadic cycles are governed by one overriding concern, the need to maintain adequate forage for the herds, and actual patterns of migration are determined by the pasture available for grazing. In most regions, the distances covered by the nomads when they move – three or four times per year in some places, as many as eight or more in others – tend to be relatively small, seldom more than thirty or forty miles, and often much less. New grass does not grow during the Tibetan winter, so there is little point in moving herds far from one's home base, when sparse, dry winter fodder is all that will be available to them in any case. Migration, moreover, is often vertical, involving the move between lower and higher ground. In some locations, because certain types of vegetation growing at high altitude are well preserved throughout the winter, herds of yak, which withstand the bitterest cold, may even be moved to higher elevation to graze during the coldest months of the year.

The essential problem for Tibetan pastoralism, therefore, is to ensure that the animals will have adequate nutrition, given a restricted migration range and the positive assurance that, during some five to seven months annually, there will be no fresh supplies of fodder forthcoming. Hence, in winter and spring, before the new grass appears, the herds become particularly vulnerable, and, when conditions are poor, it is not unusual for the nomads to suffer considerable loss at this time. The annual cycle of nomadic activity in Amdo, northeastern Tibet, was summarized by Robert Ekvall, who contrasts the routine during the shortest and longest days of the year:

At the winter solstice the pastoralist's day is a short and lazy one, stock being turned loose as late as 9:00 a.m. to wander slowly by themselves to nearby pasturage. There is little earlier activity such as milking, and letting them out of the pens is simple. By 5:00 p.m., or earlier, it is time to gather them in, but there is little milking and time-consuming tethering. In mid-June, however, the stock are pulling restlessly on their tether lines before 4:00 a.m. and, for at least an hour prior to that, there is much activity – milking, getting ready for the day's herding, and attention to other chores. The workday starts before dawn and tethering the stock goes on until dusk is turning to night, before the members of the family can gather around the fire for a very late evening meal, with the beginning of another day

only four or five hours away. The summer day of the nomadic pastoralists is relentlessly long – at high hot noon, they are sleepwalkers, drugged with drowsiness – and filled with tasks that give them little pause for rest.<sup>7</sup>

Farming and pastoralism both made their contributions to the emergence of Tibetan military power from the seventh century onwards. The nomads, of course, were a source of resources in the form of horses, cattle, and men trained to ride and bear arms, as well as of leather, felt, dried meat and cheese, and of other products serving the needs of a mobile army. For its part, the settled, agricultural populations, besides growing grain, also cultivated a range of skills of martial value, including the knowledge of stonemasonry and trench-digging needed to quickly create fortified positions, together with carpentry, bridge-building and other arts that could be put in the service of military engineering. Visitors to Tibet during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries observed that the nomads, although sometimes capable of raising imposing bands of warriors, were seldom in a position to attack fortified villages and towns, whose defenses could be broken only by those familiar with siegecraft.

The vast majority of Tibetans belong to one or another of the groups just described: farmers, nomads, or *samadrok*. The numerically most important occupational group besides these in pre-1960 Tibet belonged to those who had entered into a full-time religious vocation. Urbanism was but poorly developed and even the largest Tibetan city, Lhasa, was a modest town, with a population in 1952, according to the estimate of Hugh Richardson, of about 25,000–30,000, to which some 20,000 might be added if one were to include the inmates of the surrounding monasteries.<sup>8</sup> But despite the very low level of Tibetan urbanization, there were opportunities (and obligations) for some to pursue typically urban professions, such those of skilled artisans, physicians and pharmacists, merchants, and beggars, together with small numbers who served in government or estate administration. Trade, in particular, played a vital role in the Tibetan economy, promoting circulation of domestic production and bringing some foreign goods, such as Chinese tea and silk, Indian cotton and utensils, to market, though in remote places mercantile activity remained meager or nonexistent.

Literary descriptions of the common agricultural and pastoral occupations, in which most Tibetans were employed, were in general incidental to the purposes of the religious authors responsible for much of Tibetan literature, though eastern Tibetan nomad life does sometimes find a positive literary reflection in the epic of Gesar. For the most part, however, Tibetan writing glorified the spiritual over and against the worldly, so

that common occupations were depicted only incidentally, or in contexts in which they served to advance religious discourse as elements in narratives, parables, or moral reflection. One of the great authors of the nineteenth century, Dza Peltrül (1808–87), thus singles out the tea trade, barley farming, and animal husbandry – the three fundamental elements of the Tibetan economy – in order to exemplify the suffering from which worldly existence is never exempt:

Tea is a plant grown in China. When planting it and trimming the leaves, countless animalcules are killed. As far as Dartsedo (modern Kanding in Sichuan), it must be borne by coolies, who each carry two times sixty catties. With pack-straps across their foreheads, the skin is pulled back until the white bones of their skulls are exposed, but even then they must march on with their loads. Then, up to Dotok, the burden is transferred to cattle and mules, which suffer unthinkable hardship, their backs almost broken and bleeding with wounds. And when the tea finally reaches the market, where there are neither guarantees nor shame, the sale is always subject to fraud and argumentation.

Most of the commerce, moreover, is carried out on mats of wool or fleece. The wool is gathered during the summer, when the sheep have plenty of ticks, lice, and other small creatures, most of which are killed during the shearing. Those that survive are bundled together with the wool and arrive in a kind of hell when it is washed and carded. The fleece comes from lambs that have been born with their senses intact, able to experience pleasure and pain, happy to be in the first stage of life. Precisely then they are killed. Even though they are just dumb beasts, they are scared to die and eager to live. They experience gut-wrenching pain and their mothers, too, suffer at the death of a child, as we know is natural. If you think of your purchase with these things in mind, you will see that even a bowl of tea is no more than a cause for infernal rebirth.

As for *tsampa*, when at first the earth is turned in the fields, all the subterranean worms are forced up and the surface bugs crushed below. Wherever the oxen drag the plough, crows and smaller birds follow to feast on them. Similarly, when water is channeled into the fields, the animals that dwell in the water are all stranded on dry land, while those that live in the earth are innundated and drown. Then, when the seeding is done, alternately breaking into the soil and pounding it down, more without number are killed. When you think about this, every mouthful of flour seems a mouthful of worms.

In the same way, although we regard the “three white foods” and the “three sweets” – butter, milk, and the like – to be pure and sinless, most of the colts, calves, and lambs are nevertheless slaughtered and those that are not are tied up and restricted from drinking the mother’s milk they desire. When still, they are tied to the post and, when moving, tethered together.

It is we who steal, and treat as essential, the sweet milk that it should be their fortune to consume.<sup>9</sup>

Passages such as these are sometimes offered as proof that, as a rule, the Tibetans abhorred killing, even of vermin. But as his words in fact make clear, abhorrence did not imply abstinence. Dza Peltrül's moral standpoint aside, he offers us an incisive and realistic portrait of Tibet's three principal occupations – trade, pastoralism, and farming – and of the human and animal suffering that they entailed. This was an inalienable dimension of traditional life, and it was this that the Buddhist clergyman accentuated, as a goad to promote the religious values of compassion and renunciation. Despite the hardships and cruelties of worldly life, however, the Tibetan disposition was generally bright, preferring to find joy in what pleasures came one's way, than to dwell upon the troubles to which all were inevitably subject. This dimension of the Tibetan character by no means escaped the notice of traditional authors. Lama Shabkar (1781–1851), a celebrated master from the far northeastern region of Amdo, for instance, records lyrics such as these, sung during the festivities following his public sermons:

It's fine to have *chang* as your wealth,  
 For to *chang*, there is no end:  
 Up to the door's upper portal  
 The storeroom is filled with barley!  
 Even if you get a god's body next time,  
 The offerings you'll get are just water!  
 So now, when you have a human body,  
 Be joyous and energetic!  
 This seems so joyous!  
 The sun has arisen on the snow mountain's peak!<sup>10</sup>

## The Tibetan Language

If the Tibetan people have assured their livelihood through a small number of characteristic occupations within the limits imposed by the Tibetan environment, this is in itself not sufficient to explain the pronounced cultural connections that are evident throughout the Tibetan world. Though these can be adequately described and understood only in relation to the details of cultural history, it is nevertheless clear that the presence of a common language throughout much of geographical and economic Tibet has been an essential factor in enabling the formation of such connections.

The "common" language, however, is in fact highly variable. As an oft-quoted Tibetan proverb would have it, just as every lama has his own teaching, so each valley has its own tongue. The linguistic complexity of the Tibetan world recalls by analogy Western Europe during the Middle Ages, when Latin remained the medium of literacy and learning while in each locality the inhabitants spoke Latin-derived dialects that were on the way to becoming the modern Romance languages. Among Tibetans today, a nomad from the region of Labrang in Amdo (Xiahe in southern Gansu) speaks a language quite distinct from the Central Tibetan heard in the Lhasa marketplace, so distinct, in fact, that at present Mandarin Chinese may be sometimes used as a common tongue when efforts at oral communication in Tibetan itself prove inadequate. Whenever literate Tibetans correspond, however, they write in much the same language, regardless of how far separated are the regions from which they hail. This situation may be thought of in part as the distant afterglow of the old Tibetan empire, whose rule embraced (and extended at times far beyond) the present Tibetan linguistic area, which runs from northern Pakistan in the west to Yunnan and Sichuan in the east, and from north of the Kokonor lake (Qinghai) south as far as Bhutan. Throughout this vast territory, the spoken languages are mostly recognizable as varieties of Tibetan, whether mutually comprehensible or not, while classical written Tibetan has generally served, for more than a millennium, as the dominant literary language.

From the perspective of historical linguistics, Tibetan most closely resembles Burmese among the major languages of Asia. Grouping these two together with other apparently related languages spoken in the Himalayan lands, as well as in the highlands of Southeast Asia and the Sino-Tibetan frontier regions, linguists have generally concluded that there exists a Tibeto-Burman family of languages, much as there is a Germanic family that includes English, Dutch, German, and the Scandinavian languages. More controversial is the theory that the Tibeto-Burman family is itself part of a larger language family, called Sino-Tibetan, and that through it Tibetan and Burmese are distant cousins of Chinese. As a speech-family presumed to derive from a hypothetical, common ancestral language, posited on the basis of data gleaned from a broad range of historical languages, Sino-Tibetan parallels Indo-European, the family in which we find the Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages, as well as Persian and the languages of North India, among many others. One of the important foundations for the Sino-Tibetan hypothesis is the observation that large parts of the Tibeto-Burman vocabulary are apparently cognate with counterparts in Chinese and related languages.

Some object, however, that the available evidence does not demonstrate an actual filiation between Tibeto-Burman and the Sinitic languages, but merely that, like Japanese (which is genetically unrelated to either Tibetan or Chinese), Tibeto-Burman languages exhibit the result of close and ancient contact with the Chinese cultural sphere in the form of numerous old loan-words.\* Such critics point out, for instance, that there is similar, though statistically less common, evidence for prehistoric Tibetan contact with early Indo-European tongues. Thus, the Tibetan term denoting victory and kingship, *rgyal* (Modern Tibetan *gyel*) seems to resemble the Indo-European word group we find preserved in such English words as *regal* and *royal*.† Are these merely linguistic curiosities, or do such cases suggest that the Tibetan language was exposed in its pre-history to sustained contact with early Indo-European languages? Does

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\* Consider, for example, the numbers one to ten, in Tibetan, Japanese, and Mandarin. Although Japanese is not related to either Chinese or Tibetan, it has borrowed substantial vocabulary from Chinese and, as in the present case, these include borrowings dating back to the Tang Dynasty. Such Middle Chinese loan-words in Japanese often provide evidence of earlier Chinese pronunciation.

	Classical Tibetan	Modern Tibetan	Japanese	Mandarin
one	<i>gcig</i>	<i>chik</i>	<i>ichi</i>	<i>yi</i>
two	<i>gnyis</i>	<i>nyi</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>er</i>
three	<i>gsum</i>	<i>sum</i>	<i>san</i>	<i>san</i>
four	<i>bzhi</i>	<i>zhi</i>	<i>shi</i>	<i>si</i>
five	<i>lnga</i>	<i>nga</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>wu</i>
six	<i>drug</i>	<i>druk</i>	<i>roku</i>	<i>liu</i>
seven	<i>bdun</i>	<i>dün</i>	<i>shichi</i>	<i>qi</i>
eight	<i>brgyad</i>	<i>gyé</i>	<i>hachi</i>	<i>ba</i>
nine	<i>dgu</i>	<i>gu</i>	<i>ku</i>	<i>jiu</i>
ten	<i>bcu</i>	<i>chu</i>	<i>ju</i>	<i>shi</i>

It will be seen at once that there is a notable resemblance between these numbers in Tibetan and Japanese, a resemblance that is quite obvious in all cases but “seven” and “eight.” One way to explain this convergence is to suppose that the Tibetan is cognate with the Chinese, the medieval pronunciation of which is still reflected in the Japanese borrowings. But, alternatively, one may ask whether Tibetan, like Japanese, borrowed the Chinese way of counting.

† Another, perhaps more compelling, example is the word for “wheel.” Our English word (which in Old English was *hweol*) is ultimately derived from an Indo-European word reconstructed as *\*k<sup>w</sup>ek<sup>w</sup>lo*. In Classical Tibetan we find *’khor-lo*, for which the Modern Tibetan pronunciation is *kholo*; compare here the Old Slavonic *kolo*.



the apparent occurrence of large numbers of ancient cognates with words in neighboring language families, whether Indo-European or Chinese, imply that Tibetan is or is not genetically related to them? An additional twist is found in recent speculation that Chinese is indeed related to Tibeto-Burman, not as a separate branch of a larger, Sino-Tibetan family, but as a branch within Tibeto-Burman itself (in this context sometimes called “Sino-Bodic”).

These issues remain far from being settled, and their judicious assessment requires a thorough knowledge of the technical details of the relevant areas of historical linguistics. What perhaps merits emphasis in our present context is that any eventual conclusions that may be reached regarding the precise relationship between Chinese and Tibetan can only be warranted by theoretical and empirical progress in linguistics. It is not the case, as some have incautiously argued, that the hypothetical linguistic connection at issue was posited for political reasons, or that it would have any political entailments whatsoever, should it prove to be true. Theoretically constructed linguistic relationships have simply no application in the political sphere.

What is clear is that, at the beginning of the historical period in Tibet, during the sixth century CE, Tibetan was not spoken throughout the vast territory in which it now is. The language of the ancient kingdom of Zhangzhung in western Tibet, for example, which is now known only through fragments, was Tibeto-Burman but certainly not Tibetan. And to the northeast, in what is today Amdo, we know that the Azha (Ch. Tuyuhun) people spoke a Turkic tongue. By the late seventh century, however, both had been conquered and were being assimilated into the Tibetan imperial state, which promoted the Tibetan language throughout its domains. The present area of Tibetan speech thus in some measure reflects the enduring success of an imperial linguistic policy, though we may note, too, that there were some places administered by the Tibetan empire – parts of present Xinjiang and Gansu are examples – in which the use of Tibetan did not endure. There is a striking congruence between the Tibetan speech zone, as it eventually came to be formed, and Tibet as a distinct geographical region overall. Most types of Tibetan spoken today may be generally classified into one or another of four major dialect groups, corresponding to western Tibet, central Tibet, Kham and Amdo, but many local variations of each of these, as well as dialects that do not fit comfortably into such a scheme, are also known. The language of the Sherpa people of Nepal, and also Dzongkha, the official language of Bhutan, may be counted as well among recognizable varieties of Tibetan.

*The Tibetan Script*

consonants:

ཀ <sup>ka</sup>	ཁ <sup>kha</sup>	ག <sup>ga</sup>	ང <sup>nga</sup>
ཅ <sup>ca</sup>	ཆ <sup>cha</sup>	ཇ <sup>ja</sup>	ཉ <sup>nya</sup>
ཏ <sup>ta</sup>	ཐ <sup>tha</sup>	ད <sup>da</sup>	ན <sup>na</sup>
པ <sup>pa</sup>	ཕ <sup>pha</sup>	བ <sup>ba</sup>	མ <sup>ma</sup>
ཅ <sup>tsa</sup>	ཆ <sup>tsha</sup>	ཇ <sup>dza</sup>	ཉ <sup>wa</sup>
ཞ <sup>zha</sup>	ཟ <sup>za</sup>	ང <sup>'a</sup>	ཡ <sup>ya</sup>
ར <sup>ra</sup>	ལ <sup>la</sup>	ཤ <sup>sha</sup>	ས <sup>sa</sup>
	ཏ <sup>ha</sup>	ཨ <sup>a</sup>	

vowels:

ཨི <sup>i</sup>	ཨུ <sup>u</sup>	ཨེ <sup>e</sup>	ཨོ <sup>o</sup>
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a combined syllable:

བསྟན་པ་ *bsgrubs*, pronounced *drup*

According to tradition, the written Tibetan language was created during the reign of the emperor Songtsen Gampo (c. 605–50, reigned from c. 617), whose minister Tönmi Sambhota was sent to Kashmir for this purpose. Whatever the exact historical background of this tale, the Tibetan writing system was indeed based upon sixth- or seventh-century North Indian or Central Asian scripts that were derived from the more ancient Brahmi script (which, in an early form, had been used to inscribe many of the edicts of the famous Indian monarch of the third century BCE, Ashoka). The Tibetan script has remained remarkably stable down

to the present and, though aspects of grammar and vocabulary have indeed changed, many of the early medieval Tibetan documents are still readily legible, if not fully intelligible, to anyone literate in Tibetan today.

Tibetan is written using an alphabet of thirty letters together with four signs showing vowel modifications. The letters combine variously to form distinct syllabic groups, so that Tibetan is written and read syllabically, with no graphic device used to mark word boundaries. The orthography, which is based upon the pronunciation of more than a thousand years ago, does not correspond precisely to contemporary speech in any dialect, and this is frequently a cause of consternation among newcomers to Tibetan. Thus, the word written *bsgrubs*, meaning “achieved,” is today generally pronounced *drup*. English-speakers, who after all must learn to write and utter such as phrases as “the knight drew a draught from the trough,” are familiar with an analogous disjunction between spoken and written language, similarly explained in part by the retention of archaic orthographic conventions.

From the very beginnings of its literary history, Tibetan was receptive to influences from abroad, above all those of the Chinese and Sanskrit texts that were translated in large numbers. For the most part, however, Tibetan translators preferred to coin Tibetan neologisms to represent foreign concepts rather than to introduce loan-words. Comparing Tibetan with many other languages that were subject to particularly strong foreign influence – as was, for instance, English, with its great debt to Norman French – the relative paucity of direct loan-words in Tibetan is striking. Despite this marked preference for an indigenous vocabulary, however, Tibetan has by no means avoided the adoption of foreign words altogether, and these provide us with important clues in regard to the cultural history of Tibet more generally, particularly with respect to material culture. Thus, for example, *mu-tig* “pearl” (< Skt. *mukta*) is an ancient non-literary borrowing that reflects the early luxury trade with India. *La-phug* “turnip, radish” (< Ch. *luobo*), *tsong* “onion” (< Ch. *cong*), *ja* “tea” (< Ch. *cha*), and *ko-tse* “chopsticks” (< Ch. *kuaizi*) are all indicative of Chinese culinary influences. *A-rag* “alcohol, liquor” (< Arabic *arak*), *’u-lag* “postal relay, corvée labor” (< Mongolian *ulara*), *deb-ther* “record book, register” (< Persian *daftar*), and *chu-ba* “robe, dress” (< Arabic *juba* (which gives us also French *jupe*)) speak of contacts in Central Asia and the Middle East. *Phyi-gling* (pronounced *piling* or *chiling*) “foreigner, Caucasian” (< Urdu *farang* (derived ultimately from “Frank,” as the Crusaders were known to the Arabs)) and *o-ki* “lawyer, pleader” (< Urdu *vakil*) reflect early modern relations with Muslim South Asia. *Mo-tra* “automobile” (< Eng. *motor*) and *be-si-kob*

“motion picture” (< Eng. *videoscope*) remind us of Tibet’s proximity to the Raj, while *gung-tran* “communist” (< Ch. *gongchan*) and *khru’u-zhis* “chairman” (< Ch. *zhuxi*, as in *Mao Zhuxi* “Chairman Mao”) stem from Tibet’s present domination by China. All of this, by the way, puts the lie to the common image of Tibet as an inaccessible land, passing the centuries prior to 1951 in splendid isolation.

Given the relatively small population base and its remarkably thin distribution, the Tibetan love of the written word appears as an exception to the general rule that literary production is strongly correlated with the development of an urban civilization. Though cities were not well supported under the environmental and economic conditions prevailing on the Tibetan plateau, the extant body of Tibetan literature is nevertheless enormous. Our knowledge of Tibet’s past is inevitably founded upon the wide range of documentation created through the centuries by Tibetan authors and scribes. Despite the massive destruction of Tibetan cultural relics that took place before and during China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76), valuable material has survived both in Tibet and in collections elsewhere. During the past few decades it has become apparent, in fact, that the textual record is far better preserved than was previously thought to have been the case and many thousands of previously unknown manuscripts and printed books have surfaced in recent years. In view of the small number of qualified researchers in the field, Tibetan studies now suffer in fact from an embarrassment of riches.

Historical writing in Tibet dates back to the period of the old Tibetan empire and no doubt emerged as an aspect of administrative record-keeping, influenced to some extent by Chinese historiographical practices. The hoard of archaic Tibetan manuscripts discovered during the beginning of the twentieth century at Dunhuang, on the Silk Road in Gansu Province, and dating to the late eighth through tenth centuries, contains a substantial number of official documents from this period, including both a year-by-year record of major events, now referred to as the *Old Tibetan Annals*, and a remarkable narrative history concerned primarily with the Tibetan rulers themselves, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. This latter is a literary work, rather than a documentary history, and provides much insight into the mores and values of the early Tibetan monarchy. The Dunhuang Tibetan documents, now mostly preserved in Paris and London, discuss many other topics as well: law, religion, literature, medicine, and divination, among others. As the major source for our knowledge of late first-millennium Tibet, they are supplemented by a small number of early inscriptions from Tibet, Tibetan documents found in other parts of Central Asia, and records of Tibet in medieval Chinese and Arabic sources.

Later Tibetan writings also sometimes contain apparently reliable citations or paraphrases of older, now unavailable, sources.

The circulation of books in Tibet was in general and throughout much of Tibet's history dependent upon manuscript production. The manufacture of paper began perhaps as early as the eighth century and was firmly established before the twelfth, ensuring a modest domestic supply of this essential requirement for the Tibetan manuscript industry, which seldom made use of other writing surfaces. Printing from engraved wooden blocks was encountered early on, in the course of the Tibetan occupation of the Dunhuang region during the eighth and ninth centuries, though books in Tibetan were probably not printed before the late twelfth century, and this innovation may have occurred in the Tangut kingdom of Xixia (Western Xia), to Tibet's northeast. The expansion of the xylographic printing of texts in central Tibet itself appears to date to the early fifteenth century, a generation before Gutenberg, but it was not until the eighteenth, with the establishment of the great printing houses of Nartang (in Tsang) and Dergé (in Kham), that printing developed sufficiently so as to rival manuscript production. The circulation of books, whether in manuscript or in print, along routes of commerce and pilgrimage amounted, in effect, to a far-reaching distribution network linking even the furthest extremes of the Tibetan world. Thus Lama Shabkar, a native of Amdo, writes in his memoirs that during the course of his extended travels in central and western Tibet during the early 1800s, "I visited Ganden Phuntsokling [in Tsang] . . . where I offered tea and alms to the monks. From the wooden blocks there, I had printed a set of the eighteen volumes of Taranatha's writings, and took it with me."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the great library of Labrang monastery in Gansu preserves thousands of manuscripts and printed books of central Tibetan origin, many of which are unavailable elsewhere today, that were acquired by the great eighteenth-century hierarchs of Labrang, who were passionate bibliophiles. Nothing so well exemplifies the attachment of literate Tibetans to the written word than the aftermath of the Lhasa Uprising of 1959, when numbers of Tibetans escaping to India fled with little more than the clothes they wore and bundles of treasured books, leaving other valued possessions behind.

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If the obstacles posed by great distance and extremes of climate, in conjunction with a landscape broken by profound ravines and towering mountain ranges, appear as factors inhibiting communication and therefore fostering division among the inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau,

these same conditions have contributed to the important role assigned to communications and exchange relations. These latter, in turn, have been in large measure advanced by the use of a common language, allowing most Tibetans to enjoy some degree of spoken interaction, while facilitating the development of a universal culture of literacy. It is in the complementarity of geographical division and economic and symbolic interaction that Tibetan culture finds its basis.

# Prehistory and Early Legends

The earliest historical records preserved in Tibetan date to the late eighth century, about one and a half centuries after the creation of the Tibetan script. These works, as well as certain Chinese documents concerning early Tibet (chiefly the annals of the Tang dynasty), sometimes refer to persons and events attributed to the distant past, but their testimony about such matters must be subject to caution. The early legends, supplemented by additional accounts known from later sources, do, however, sometimes include elements that plausibly reflect prehistoric traditions, or that usefully reveal to us the manner in which Tibetans during the early medieval period thought about their own ancient past. The transition from prehistory to history in Tibet begins with the narrations of the political consolidation of central Tibet under the rulers Takbu Nyenzi and Namri Löntsen (late sixth–early seventh centuries), to be discussed in Chapter 3. In these cases we may presume that our sources do contribute to historical knowledge, though the available documents are for the most part literary retellings of events that transpired many decades before the texts themselves were set down. Before entering into the historical record, however, let us first survey what is known of Tibet's prehistory, Tibetan legendary traditions about this, and the vexed question of Tibet's prehistoric, autochthonous religion.

## Sources of Archeological Evidence

Tibetan archeology is a young and still poorly developed field. Despite tentative explorations by George Roerich, Giuseppe Tucci, Peter Aufschneder, and others prior to 1950, work in this area began in earnest only after China's Cultural Revolution and most of the published

research is in Chinese. Data bearing on the early peopling of the Tibetan plateau remain inadequate, permitting few definite conclusions to be drawn. Nevertheless, an abundance of Paleolithic and Neolithic artifacts from sites distributed throughout the length and breadth of the Tibetan plateau have been discovered. Together with scattered evidence of other types, these permit some preliminary observations in regard to early settlement.

Just how, when, and where the Tibetan people originated remains a mystery. Until very recently some thought that, owing to the probability that a thick ice sheet covered much of the plateau during the last great Ice Age, Tibet was unsuitable for human habitation until perhaps roughly 7,000 years ago. However, finds of Paleolithic tools, including numbers of stone blades, scrapers, and other hunting implements of several kinds, have suggested to archeologists that human activity had begun on the plateau much earlier, as long as 30,000 years ago. In confirmation of this, in 2002 two Hong Kong-based scientists, David Zhang and S. H. Li, announced the discovery of human hand- and footprints and a hearth at a geothermal site near Chupsang, situated at an altitude of 4,200 meters roughly 85 kilometers from Lhasa.<sup>1</sup> Basing their results on the optically stimulated luminescence of quartz, they were able to date their find to approximately 20,000 years before the present, a period presumed to have been close to the height of the last Ice Age, thereby verifying the Upper Paleolithic habitation of parts of the plateau. The location of the find, in a region of particularly intense geothermal activity, helps to explain this occurrence; the ice covering the plateau must have been relatively thin in some areas, with pockets of exposed land, even in the midst of general glaciation. As Zhang and Li argue, it is therefore possible that there was in general far less ice covering Tibet than has often been supposed. Under such circumstances, Paleolithic hunters and gatherers may have found sufficient resources to survive in parts of Tibet. What remains unknown, however, is whether such early penetrations of the Tibetan plateau ever led to enduring settlement. Certainly it would be rash to argue that the people who left their handprints at Chupsang were the ancestors of modern Tibetans. On the contrary, a variety of research suggests that the ancestors of present Tibetan populations began to inhabit the plateau during the postglacial period, some 6–7,000 years ago.

The analysis of mitochondrial DNA among a broad range of Tibetan populations may eventually resolve some questions regarding the relations among the Tibetans and their neighbors and perhaps also Tibetan origins in general, though research along these lines has so far been too



limited to permit us to draw firm conclusions regarding Tibetan genetic affiliations. One study, focusing on minority populations in Yunnan Province, for instance, concludes:

Genetic distances, based on net nucleotide diversities between populations including Han Chinese and mainland Japanese, revealed that the Dai, Wa, Lahu, and Han Chinese are closely related to one another, while Tibetan and mainland Japanese formed a single cluster. . . . although the genetic distance between the Tibetan and Japanese is rather long.<sup>2</sup>

Other research seems to suggest that, among China's ethnic minorities, Tibetan genetic affinities are greatest with the Mongols and a number of neighboring groups. It seems, however, that the studies in question focused upon Tibetans from regions in the far east of Kham and Amdo, where there has been a sustained history of contact with the Mongols over the centuries.

Medieval Chinese historians maintained that the Tibetans originated among the Qiang people, herdsmen to the west of China, to whom the domestication of the yak has also been attributed. According to this theory, Tibet was populated from what are today the Gansu–Qinghai–Sichuan border regions. Contemporary Tibetan scholars have objected that the precise significance of the ethnonym “Qiang” in earlier times is uncertain (today it refers to a distinct people living in the Jinchuan region of northern Sichuan), beyond having been used generally to designate pastoral peoples to China's west. The theory of Qiang origins, too, must be reconciled with the spread of agriculture in Tibet, which, as noted earlier, in its predominant forms almost certainly emanated from Western Asia.

The quest for unique Tibetan origins may, however, be itself suspect. Although there is merit in stressing the importance of east-to-west migration – for this has been a continuing pattern throughout Tibetan history – it must be emphasized that this has always involved the movements of peoples of differing ethnicity. Moreover, there are clearly relations between Tibetans and neighboring peoples to the west, south, and southeast of Tibet. The expansion of the Tibetan empire in Ladakh and adjacent areas, for instance, resulted in the eventual assimilation of earlier Dardic populations. All in all it seems plausible to hold that the peoples of the Tibetan plateau became Tibetan primarily owing to cultural developments during the past two millennia, rather than to common genetic origins. Tibetan legends, nevertheless, do emphasize the notion of a shared Tibetan ancestry, though this perhaps reflects a mythic, rather than a genuinely historical, sense of commonality. And

what the legends tend to emphasize, as we shall see, is not the nomadism of the high pastures in the north, but the settlement of the lower valleys to the south, in which farming communities first took root.

A relatively well-studied Neolithic site is the village of Karo (also known as Kharup), in the district of Chamdo near the eastern border of the modern Tibet Autonomous Region. The settlement has been dated to the third millennium BCE, and has revealed the remains of stone houses with hearths for cooking and large numbers of artifacts including stone and bone tools, ornaments, potsherds, seeds, and animal remains. It appears that the community here was agricultural, supplementing its millet harvest by hunting and perhaps some breeding of pigs. Despite its immediate proximity to a major river, there is no evidence of fishing, leading archeologists to speculate that the ancient inhabitants of Karo already adhered to the widespread Tibetan taboo prohibiting the consumption of fish. (If fishing were conducted with nets, however, and considering the soft bones of smaller freshwater fish, one may wonder whether the negative evidence in this case might not be just by fault of preservation.) A variety of pottery designs and finely crafted objects such as delicate bone sewing needles demonstrates the emergence of a relatively sophisticated material culture. Sites representing more advanced Neolithic settlement patterns and dating to a somewhat later period have now been found at several locations in Tibet, including Qugong in the Lhasa region, the area around Nyalam near the Tibet–Nepal border, and the town of Dingri in western Tibet. It is clear, therefore, that some 3–5,000 years ago the Tibetan plateau was becoming home to a significant, if widely distributed, agrarian population.

In many parts of Tibet, and particularly throughout the western and northwestern reaches of the plateau, petroglyphs have been found dating to the early historical period and before. Just how far back the earliest may be assigned is a matter of dispute; Chinese archeologists have proposed that some may have been engraved as long as 5,000 years ago. Among the designs, however, elements of the Tibetan script and Buddhist motifs such as stupas are sometimes found, so that we can be certain that such glyphs belong only to the seventh century or later.

Besides the relatively recent designs just mentioned, the petroglyphs include illustrations of soldiers; hunters and their prey; animals of various kinds; the sun, moon, and stars; and many other objects. A particularly interesting series of illustrations depicts what appears to be a sacrificial scene, presided over by an elaborately costumed priest, who directs a service involving a complicated array of ritual vessels. There can be little doubt that evidence of the pre-Buddhist religion of western

Tibet is to be found here; whether or not it is to be associated with the legendary Bön religion of the kingdom of Zhangzhung (see below) is less clear. In some cases, too, there appear to be strong affinities between the Tibetan petroglyphs and stone engravings found in other parts of Inner Asia and Siberia, most notably Inner Mongolia. The stylistic evolution of the petroglyphs requires thorough study and will perhaps contribute to resolving the question of just how long before the early historical period the most ancient examples may have been produced.

Tibetan gravesites dating to the prehistoric and early historic periods are also numerous and in some cases suggest the practice of sacrificial rites in connection with entombment. It is significant that both archeological and textual evidence seems strongly to indicate that burial was the preferred means for disposal of the dead, though the consignment of corpses to the rivers may have sometimes been practiced as well. (Only textual references, of course, support this; an example will be found in the legend of King Drigum, given later in this chapter.) Cremation and dismemberment of the corpse for its consumption by vultures, the two preferred practices among Tibetans in recent centuries, were apparently unknown. The ancient tombs excavated to date do not provide evidence for mummification of the dead, though it is clear that this was practiced from early times in connection with royal mortuary rituals. The most impressive of the ancient tombs that are known are the great mausoleums of Tibet's early medieval rulers, the largest of which, the so-called Red Mausoleum, is the resting place of the emperor Songtsen Gampo (d. 649/650) and the last of which, that of King Ösung, dates to roughly 900. These royal tombs were plundered during the period of political fragmentation in the tenth century, and present cultural sensitivities – for they are hallowed places of pilgrimage – have for the while kept them out of bounds for archeological research.

Talismanic value was traditionally attributed to ancient relics of several kinds that were for this reason highly prized by Tibetans. These include a variety of polished agate beads, known as *zi*, the precise age and origins of which have yet to be determined. A wide variety of bronze objects, called *tokcha*, “thunderbolt metal,” are similarly prized. Among them one finds ornaments in the so-called “Central Asian animal style,” as well as Nestorian Christian crosses and old Buddhist ritual objects. The most ancient of them may belong to the Bronze Age and some no doubt originated outside of Tibet. Their extraordinary diversity has contributed to recent interest in them as objects of art.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, European archeologists and explorers, including notably Marc Aurel Stein and Paul



**Figure 6** Scholars from the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences examining one of the ninth-century inscriptions of the emperor Tri Desongtsen at the “Temple of the Hat” (*Uru zhé lhakhang*). The text concerns the grant of estates to the Buddhist monk who had been the emperor’s tutor and adviser. 1990.

Pelliot, began to discover Tibetan artifacts and documents of various kinds in Chinese Central Asia, relics dating as far back as the Tibetan occupation of the region in the seventh through ninth centuries. The most important of these finds was the famous “library cave” of Dunhuang, in Gansu, whose tens of thousands of manuscripts included more than 4,000 in Tibetan. Wooden slips, many of them inscribed with the requisitions of the Tibetan army, were also found in various locations in Gansu and Xinjiang. These have proven to be an invaluable source for knowledge of the actual practices of the Tibetan military administration. To these we must add, among literary witnesses of the Tibetan empire, the inscriptions in stone and on pillars found in several sites in central and eastern Tibet.

Traditional Tibetan scholars from time to time had access to very early documents that are now preserved only in the works into which they copied them. The most faithful of these antiquarian authors was Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa (1504–66), whose transcriptions of eighth-century edicts are generally considered today to be authentic. A number of early manuscript collections, dating to the beginning of the second millennium, have now also been recognized. Among them we may mention those of Tabo Monastery, in Himachal Pradesh, India, and of Öñ Keru Monastery, in south-central Tibet. Moreover, the regular appearance of previously unknown or unexplored manuscript sources continues to enhance the fund of resources available to us for the study of Tibet’s ancient past.

## Children of the Ape and the Ogress

Tibetan legends, as we have seen, tell us that Tibet was at first covered by a vast inland sea. After its waters had receded, there appeared a monkey and an ogress who inhabited the rocky cliffs of Zotang near the modern town of Tsetang (Ch. Zedang). The Tibetan people are descended from their union and are therefore endowed with the cunning of their ancestral father, but also with a touch of savagery due to their common, demonic mother. The story, which is first known only from post-tenth-century Buddhist works, often adds that the monkey and ogress were in fact emanations of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara and the goddess Tara, thus predetermining the nation’s adoption of the Buddhist religion, as well as the compassionate disposition of the Tibetans themselves. Contemporary Tibetan authors have sometimes seized on the tale of descent from an ape to give tradition a Darwinian twist, arguing that Tibetan thinkers

were evolutionists ahead of their time, while recent feminist interpreters in the West have made much of the gendered opposition between the monkey's male cunning (= culture) and the female wildness of the ogress (= untamed nature). For Tibetan mythmakers, like mythmakers everywhere, were of course structuralists *avant la lettre*.

Alternative origin myths were also known. Very widespread, and often associated with the Bön religion, were cosmogonies that regarded the universe as having originated in a primordial egg, the gradual refinement of whose yolk gave rise to the world and its inhabitants. Though these have sometimes been interpreted as representing an indigenous Tibetan mythology, a resemblance to the widespread myth that in its Indian versions speaks of the cosmic egg Hiranyagarbha, the Golden Embryo, is unmistakable. It is conceivable, therefore, that what we find here is evidence of Tibet's close contacts with West and South Asian civilizations, even apart from the later, well-known transmission to Tibet of Indian Buddhism. The myth of the cosmic egg was invoked in the genealogies of aristocratic families that were recorded from about the twelfth century onward and so may reflect early clan traditions. An example is found in the origin myth of the prominent Lang clan, into which Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen (1302–64), who freed Tibet from Mongol rule during the 1350s, would be born:

As the essence of the five elements,  
There appeared a single great egg.  
Its outer shell formed the white divine mountain.  
Its inner fluid gathered as the brilliant white conch lake.  
And from the intervening membrane of the egg,  
The six classes of beings sprang up everywhere.  
The division of the yolk produced eighteen.  
A single conch egg was separated then  
From those eighteen intermediate eggs . . .

The five senses and the limbs then took form upon that conch egg and there appeared a beautiful boy-child, as if fulfilling the mind's wishes, and so he was named Yemön Gyelpo, "King of Primordial Wishes."<sup>3</sup>

The legends generally concur that, over many generations, humans developed by stages. It is from the original divine ancestor, whether monkey-bodhisattva or egg-born divinity, that the patrilineal clans (*rü*) of Tibet are descended. These are enumerated in various ways and at the present time hundreds of clan names of diverse origin are in use. Nevertheless, the mythology generally speaks of four or six ancestral clans

from which the indigenous Tibetan clans were all later derived. The great sixteenth-century historian, Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa, thus describes the descendants of the monkey and the ogress:

They ate grains and wore bark-garments.  
Roaming like wild beasts in the forest,  
They filled Tibet, behaving like [the barbarians of] Lo and Mön.  
And all of them remained in their paternal and maternal clans.

Then, later on, as they increased they divided into four segments, known as the four families among the sons of the little people of Tibet: Sé, Mu, Dong, and Tong. It is well known that in this way the fourfold division of clans arose. Adding the Wra and Dru to them, they became the famed six families among the sons of the little people.<sup>4</sup>

In early times, one's clan affiliation was often an important identifying characteristic, the first feature through which an individual's status and dignity were known. This has remained true in some places down to the present day, as is reflected in the *Epic of Gesar*, for example, where persons are frequently introduced by reference to their clan, as in one passage where we read, "Dralha Tsegyel is of the paternal line of Mukpodong. He is the nephew of King Gesar and the son of Lord Zhalu Zangpo. And he is uncommonly learned and discerning, meritorious and powerful."<sup>5</sup> Clan, immediate family, personal attributes – in this order and no other.

As the population developed, the legends continue, Tibet came to be ruled by local chieftains; a list of twelve minor kingdoms and forty principalities is frequently cited by the historians. At length, the first monarch, known as the Tsenpo, appeared in the line that would eventually unify Tibet. The earliest extant version of the tale (dating to about 800) was found among the Tibetan documents discovered at Dunhuang. It appears to have been an important founding myth for the imperial dynasty:

He came from divine heaven. In the heights of heaven divine dwelt the paternal god Master Six, among whose sons, three elder brothers and three younger brothers, was a seventh, Seven the Joint of the Throne. The son of Seven the Joint of the Throne was Tri Nyaktri Tsenpo . . . When he arrived at the divine mountain Gyangdo, even Mt. Meru bowed in submission, the trees hastened forth, the springs ran clear and cool. . . . When he first came to earth, he went of his own accord to become the lord of all under heaven, in the middle of the heavens, in the center of the earth, in the heart of the continent, in the enclosure of snow mountains, at the head of all rivers, where the mountains were high, the earth pure, the country fine, men born clever and brave, practicing fine customs, a place where

swift horses flourished. Owing to the qualities whereby he differed from other kings, they prostrated in salutation before him, swift of foot. Dignified men dressed respectfully, so that the aristocratic bearing of great persons thence emerged. . . . In the generations of trees, it is the birch that is tall. In the generations of rivers, the river Yar is most clear. And Shampo, the god of Yar, is the crowning god.<sup>6</sup>

This legend, emphasizing the Tsenpo's inherent superiority and his relation to the natural landscape, the mountains and rivers, well reflects the central motifs in the ethos of early Tibet, conceived as a divinely ordained realm. For the mountains giving rise to the waters that sustain life are the abodes of the chief divinities of the land, and lend their support to the appointed ruler. The divine mountain as the waters' source and the divine king as their controller thus occupy parallel positions in the determining structure of worldly powers. The first monarch's name, Nyaktri, "Notch Throne," seems to be related to the numerologically significant position of his divine father as the "joint" between three older and three younger brothers. The term, however, was obscure to later generations, and in the well-known literary versions of the legend it was reinterpreted as "Nyatri," "Shoulder(-borne) Throne." The account was accordingly amplified to state that, after the people had acclaimed him as king, they hoisted him up in a palanquin.

The early kings of Tibet, in whose line the monarchs of the seventh- to ninth-century Tibetan empire claimed to have arisen, were thus held to be close to the gods. Their semi-divine status served to justify both their rule and the hierarchical divisions of society that were entailed. Centuries later a poet would depict a seventh-century courtier as declaring.

Because religious law prevails, the subjects respect their commands;  
Because a god acts as lord over men, the entire kingdom is glad.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, alternative traditions attributed human origins to the royal line. Many of these implausibly sought to make the Tibetan rulers descendants of India's ancient kings, whether the heroes of the epic *Mahabharata* or of the Shakya clan into which the Buddha was born, just as converted barbarian lords in medieval Europe were sometimes given genealogies linking them to ancient Israel. However, still other versions of the tale, dating to about the twelfth century and so perhaps reflecting earlier lore, insist that Nyaktri was born in Powo, in southeastern Tibet. Such traditions no doubt may be related to the old dynastic title of Tibet's monarchs, Puyel, "king of Pu," that is, the southeastern district of Powo.





**Figure 7** Yumbu Lagang, traditionally considered the first fortified castle of Tibet, said to have been originally constructed by Nyaktri Tsenpo. Severely damaged during the Cultural Revolution, it has since been restored, 2002.

Among the divine monarchs, the first seven, beginning with Nyaktri Tsenpo, were known collectively as the “seven heavenly thrones,” who revealed their divinity at death by leaving behind no earthly remains at all. A twelfth-century text describes their passing as follows:

With reference to those seven, they possessed, on their crowns, the so-called “divine dæmon-cord” (*mutak*). This was a ray of white light. When those seven passed from suffering and journeyed to the realm of the gods, they dissolved into light from their feet upwards, and after the light faded into the sky they left no corpses behind. So it is said that the mausoleums of the seven thrones were planted in space.<sup>8</sup>

Though one may well recall here the “teletransportation” of extraterrestrials in contemporary science fiction, the account also has marked parallels in the royal myths of peoples neighboring Tibet, for instance, the Ahong of Assam.

Historians of the Bön religion attribute the establishment of Bön and the translation of their principal scriptures to the reigns of Nyaktri and his immediate descendants. However, no evidence has so far emerged that would confirm the introduction of writing to Tibet prior

to the seventh century CE. Even if this were pushed back somewhat, the hoary age of Nyaktri must have long preceded the beginnings of Tibetan literacy.

The first of the kings to have left mortal remains was the seventh in the line (or, according to some sources, the eighth), Drigum Tsenpo, the "Monarch Killed-by-the-knife." His story, in its revelation of the heroic ethos of archaic Tibet, is one of the finest of the old Tibetan legends. While explaining the origins of kingly mortality, it serves too as the founding myth for the rites of royal mummification and entombment, as were practiced in historical times in imperial Tibet. The earliest version of our present story, once again, is found in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* from Dunhuang. In virtue of its considerable importance and beauty, it merits citation here at length:

When Drigum Tsenpo was little, they asked, "What name should he be given?" When the nurse Dro Shama Kyilingma was asked, the nurse said, "Has Mt. Red Rock in Kyi crumbled or not? Has the Yak-cow pasture of Dangma been scorched by fire or not? Has the sacred lake Lewel dried up or not?" When they said, "The mountain has not crumbled, the lake has not dried, nor has the pasture been scorched by flames," the nurse Dro Shama misunderstood what she heard, for she was old. Having heard it as, "The mountain has crumbled, the pasture has been scorched, and the lake, too, has dried," she said, "Well, then, he'll be killed by water, or he'll be killed by the knife, so name him Monarch Killed-by-the-knife." Hence they named him Drigum Tsenpo, but that name was wrong and this affected his soul.

He was a son of the Dé, in human form, but he possessed magical abilities and great splendor, so that he could ascend visibly into the heavens and so forth. Owing to this, his ferocity and arrogance were invincible.<sup>9</sup>

Later retellings of the tale specify that the lake, mountain, and pasture mentioned at the beginning of the story were associated with the child's *la*, a term that in this context refers to a type of soul, or, more accurately, the dæmonic conditions supporting life and well-being. Although the Dunhuang text does not actually use this term, these later versions are probably correct in insisting that some such concept must be at stake here. *La*, which etymologically is to be related to notions of high ground, the heavens, and divinity, may be regarded as a vital principle that has its external domain or correlate in geomantically significant locations, like the lake, mountain, and meadow mentioned here. It may be also associated with particular trees (*la-shing*), talismanic turquoises (*la-yu*), or particular wild animals, such as wolves (*la-chang*). The ancient Tibetan

belief in the role of such focal points of sacred power and vital energy continues to play an important role in divination and certain types of ritual even at the present time. It is a concept that acquired considerable significance for Tibetan Buddhism, as well, for the term chosen to represent the Indian designation for the spiritual master, the *guru*, was *la-ma*, "vital matrix," underscoring the connection between the Buddhist teacher and the ancient Tibetan sources of spiritual power, whether or not this was consciously intended in the choice of the term, which may also be taken to mean, simply, "superior."

The Dé mentioned in the second paragraph of the story appear to be a class of divinities, for the same word figures prominently throughout the history of the dynasty in royal names and titles. It is, moreover, clearly related to the term *deu*, "a little dé," meaning a riddle, or cryptic oracle. In this sense the word is often found together with *drung*, legends and sacred traditions, and *bön*, perhaps, in this context, ritual expertise (pertaining to funerary ritual above all), as one of the three chief components of the sacred authority whereby the ancient monarchs ruled. In the present tale, however, Drigum Tsenpo's divine qualities gave him great power, but also a fatal inclination to hubris. He began to challenge his vassals, including his paternal and maternal retainers, to do battle with him, but all alike declined. Finally, when Lo-ngam the horseherd (that is, the officer charged with the maintenance of the royal stables) also refused the challenge, the king became furious and ordered him to obey. With no choice but to acquiesce, Lo-ngam requested that he be given a share of the monarch's divine treasures to even the odds. He asked for and received a self-propelling javelin, a sword that cut by itself, a self-fitting coat of mail, and a quiver that dispensed arrows automatically, among other marvels. (We may note in this connection that later tradition claims Drigum's reign as the time when armor was first introduced to Tibet from the southeast.) The narration continues:

Lo-ngam the horseherd went before the fortress at Nyangro Shampo. The Tsenpo, too, went to Nyangro Shampo, whereupon they joined in battle in the Ashen Grove of Nyangro. The horseherd said, "I pray that you sever the long leathern cord at your head, and that you make your nine-stepped 'head-ladder' turn downwards." [This no doubt refers to the "divine dæmon-cord" we have seen mentioned earlier.] In both cases, he did just so. Lo-ngam roped together one hundred oxen bearing two hundred golden spearheads, and he loaded sacks of ash upon their backs. The oxen struggled among themselves, scattering the ashes, and in that cloud Lo-ngam made his passage.

When Highest Dé King-of-Heaven invited Drigum Tsenpo to ascend

into the sky, Lo-ngam drew a hatchet from beneath his arm, and sent Highest Dé King-of-Heaven in flight to the glacial mountain Tisé (Mt. Kailash). Drigum Tsenpo died on the spot. His corpse was put into a sealed copper casket that was placed in the current of the Tsang River. Entering the waters, it arrived in the belly of the naga Odé Bedé the Long. . . . His two sons, named Shakhyi and Nyakhyi, were then forced to flee to Kongpo.

Kongpo, in eastern Tibet, where the Tsangpo river begins its great turn south to descend precipitously into Assam, to emerge from the gorges as the Brahmaputra, has long had a peculiar reputation in the Tibetan world as a place of black magic, but also of great spiritual power. It would become the base from which the dynasty of Tsenpo would eventually reassert itself, following the revenge taken upon the regicide Lo-ngam, who had been clever enough to kill the king, but then in his turn grew careless:

Afterwards, Rhya Morhull Zhikhug and Nanam Tsenhong-gyel together smeared poison into the coats of two great hounds . . . Having passed Gyabo Rock in Trangpo, the male hound was examined for omens and the omens were found to be good. They gathered before Nyangro Shampo and then moved on by stealth.

Now, our horseherd, Lo-ngam, having taken possession of the dogs with the poison in their coats, petted the good dogs with his hand. And because our horseherd thus rubbed the poison smeared into the dogs' coats, he was killed. It was in this way that they got their revenge.

Rhya, however, having done away with Lo-ngam the horseherd, was by no means inclined to restore the dynasty, but intended to rule by himself. This brought him into conflict with another clan among the royal retainers, that of Trak. The strife-filled relations among leading clans that we see reflected here in legend accurately conform to a persistent pattern in Tibetan history that destabilized the ancient dynasty as well as later regimes. The Dunhuang account thus continues:

The paternal family of the son of Trak . . . battled with the paternal family of Rhya. Rhya annihilated the Trak clan and seized all of their possessions, but one of Trak's wives fled and escaped to the land of her forefathers. She went carrying a son in her womb. From about the time the boy could stand, he asked his mother, "As every man has a master, who is my master? As every man has a father, who is my father? Do tell me!"

His mother replied, "A small man musn't have a big mouth! A pony musn't get haughty! I don't know!"

The boy, Ngarlakyé, then said to her, "If you don't tell me, I'll die."

At this, his mother relented. "You're father was killed by Rhya. Your lord is the Tsenpo, who was assassinated by Lo-ngam the horseherd. His corpse was placed in a sealed copper casket and sent into the currents of the Tsang River . . . . "

Ngarlakyé said, "I will ascertain the trail of the lost man. I will seek a channel for the lost waters." And he went off.

In Kongpo he met Shakhyi and Nyakhyi. He also met the naga Odé Bedé the Long. When he asked, "What do you want as ransom for the corpse of the Tsenpo?" he was told, "I want nothing other than this. I want one whose human eye is like the eye of a bird, the eyelids closing from below."

Ngarlakyé, the son of Tibet, searched throughout the four quarters of the heavens, but he did not find one whose human eye, like a bird's eye, closed from below. His food had run out and his boots were torn, so he returned to his mother's side and said, "I have ascertained the trail of the lost man and have found the channel of the lost waters. I also met the sons, Shakhyi and Nyakhyi. When I met the naga Odé Bedé the Long, he said, 'as a ransom for the corpse I want one whose human eye, like a bird's eye, closes from below.' But I have not found such a one and so must go to continue the search. Give me supplies!" And so he went.

When he arrived below the snow mountain of Partrün, he went beside a daughter of Cho the man-bird, who was making an irrigation channel. There was a boy in her cradle-basket whose eyes, like those of a bird, closed from below and so he asked the mother, "What do you want in exchange for him?" The mother said, "I want nothing else but this: whenever, for all time, the lord Tsenpo suffers death, let his crest be bound in a turban, his face smeared with vermilion, his viscera removed . . . For nourishment, let there be food and drink. Will you do this or not?"

After she said this he swore an oath that he would do so, and then went off, taking the daughter of Cho the man-bird with him. She was left [with her son] to be a ransom for the corpse in the belly of the naga Odé Bedé the Long. The two, divine Nyakhyi and Shakhyi, took possession of the Tsenpo's corpse. They built a mausoleum on the lower slope of the sacred prominence of Gyangdo. The younger brother Nyakhyi performed the last rites for his father. The elder brother Shakhyi went to avenge his father. Now, Nyakhyi is indeed the white god of Kongpo. He went off with three thousand three hundred troops. He went to the Chingwa fortress.

The virtues of fealty, courage, and righteous revenge, the divine qualities of those whose true right it is to rule, the dangers of hubris, the ineluctable agency of the dæmonic powers, the origins of the royal funerary rites and the mummification of kings – all are present in this account, which seems a virtual manifesto of the early Tibetan monarchy. Indeed, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, in which the story is found, has

been interpreted precisely as an official document of the Tibetan imperial administration. The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* has almost nothing to tell us, however, of Drigum's immediate descendants, down to the time of Takbu Nyazi during the late sixth century. An accompanying genealogical list does record the names of the rulers and the queens by whom successors were born, and these correspond in general with the records of the royal line as given in later sources. These latter do add some details regarding several kings, though for the most part they appear to mix older tradition with later invention. The historians of the Bön religion, too, preserve narrations of the dynastic history, agreeing for the most part with Buddhist authors in regard to the genealogical record, but frequently departing from them with regard to specific tales. In the case of Drigum Tsenpo, for instance, they relate that in his arrogance he launched a persecution of the Bön priesthood, the first of a series of royal attempts to suppress their religion. It was this, they hold, that set the stage for his downfall.

Buddhism, according to legend, first appeared in Tibet in about the fourth century CE, during the reign of the twenty-eighth ruler of Yarlung, Lha Totori, upon whose palace at Yumbu Lagang scriptures and other sacred objects marvellously fell from the heavens. Because Tibetan was not yet written, the scriptures were incomprehensible mysteries, but they came to be venerated with the other objects, known together as the "awesome secret." The legend perhaps reflects Tibet's place in the early first millennium as a non-Buddhist island surrounded by the vast Buddhist ocean of India, Nepal, Central Asia, and China. The odd appearance of Buddhist monks or artifacts in Tibet during this time cannot be ruled out and, indeed, one version of the legend does maintain that it was a wandering Buddhist monk who gave these tokens of his religion to Lha Totori. The traditions of Bön, which often hold their teachings to be derived from parts of the Iranian world to the west of Tibet, may similarly reflect distant recollections of early contacts between Tibet and its western, Buddhist neighbors.

Among the tales of the early monarchs, particular interest attaches to the story of Dronyen Tsenpo and his son Takbu Nyazi. It is related of Dronyen that he married a marvellously beautiful woman from Kongpo. As they grew older, her beauty remained unchanged, and she became evasive and mysterious whenever her husband inquired about the secret of her youth. At last the king decided to spy on his queen, and to his astonishment he found her with her maidservant in a hidden chamber, eating fishes and frogs, and surrounded by piles of bones discarded over the years. The king contracted leprosy – literally, a "disease of the

nagas" – owing to the shock of his discovery and not long after, when a son was born to the queen, the infant was blind. Doctors from among the Sumpa people to the northeast were called, who succeeded in surgically opening the boy's sealed eyes, whereupon the first thing he saw (*zi*) was an antelope (*nya*) on Tak Mountain (*takri*). He was named Takbu Nyazi for this first vision. The ailing King Dronyen abdicated the throne on his son's behalf and with his eternally beautiful queen entered the mausoleum while still alive, to spend the rest of their days entombed.

No trace of this tale is found in the earliest literature, and it may well be a late composition. As will be seen in the following chapter, Takbu Nyazi seems nevertheless to be the first Tibetan monarch about whom we have a bit of relatively reliable knowledge. The story given here was in part intended as a fanciful explanation of his otherwise obscure name. Despite this, there are elements of the tale that do reveal something of early Tibet, even if the details be fiction. For here, as in the legend of Drigum Tsenpo, the land of Kongpo and the waters that flow there are associated with illness, death, and marvellous power. In both cases, these are related to the agency of the subterranean, aquatic spirits, the nagas (*lu*). Dronyen's queen, as a native of Kongpo, enjoys a special compact with these forces, which therefore preserve her uncanny beauty, but for others those same powers are deadly. Similarly, Drigum's sons Shakhnyi and Nyakhnyi, the latter described as the "white god of Kongpo," were able to channel these mysterious forces to their advantage. The conception of the waters as connected to death perhaps also explains the general Tibetan taboo on the consumption of fish, though Kongpo, once again, was exceptional in this regard. Later Tibetan governments acknowledged that the people of this district were piscivorous and so granted them unique rights to harvest the "turnips of the waters" (*chüi lapuk*), a euphemism coined to avoid the unpleasant suggestion that the slaughter of aquatic life was thus sanctioned.

Because the early Tibetan rulers were dependent for their station upon the support of the nobles with whom they were allied, the deeds of those of ministerial rank were often celebrated alongside those of the Tsenpo himself. This may be seen already in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, whose second chapter is devoted entirely to the enumeration of the most famous ministers of the past, where they are praised for such qualities as "the possession of uncanny cunning, unalterable resolve and fastness of vows, and limitless wisdom."<sup>10</sup> The later traditions would consider some of the ancient ministers as culture heroes, responsible for elements of cultural and technological evolution during this dimly remembered age. Eventually a stereotyped list of seven "clever ministers" was established, the

first of whom, Rulekyé, is none other than Ngarlakyé, Drigum Tsenpo's avenger. The innovations attributed to him were memorialized in verse:

Smelting ore, he produced gold, silver, copper, and iron.  
 Piercing holes into wood, he created the plough and the yoke.  
 Digging the earth, he channeled the waters.  
 Harnessing the plough, he made meadows into fields.  
 Over unfordable rivers he built bridges.  
 The fruits of farming first arose thanks to him.<sup>11</sup>

Later ministerial contributions were said to include the measurement of fields and of pastures, the introduction of weights and measures in order to regulate trade, the use of currency, etc. The traditions of the "clever ministers," in short, provided an evolutionary framework through which to explain the emergence of the conventions of Tibetan society and government overall. If not corresponding in detail to the conclusions of contemporary students of Tibetan antiquity, these traditions nevertheless demonstrate a keen grasp, on the part of their authors, of the fundamental conditions for production and exchange that arose early on in Tibet.

## Tibetan Religion before Buddhism

The religious life of Tibet will be discussed at length in Chapter 7. However, it will be useful at this juncture to review in brief some of the salient features of our knowledge of the religion of archaic Tibet. Because the historical record of Tibetan religion begins only after the seventh century CE, the reconstruction of earlier Tibetan religious beliefs must depend upon the small but growing body of relevant archeological artifacts and the evidence of plausible survivals of prehistoric traditions and practices in later literature and ritual. The royal traditions surveyed above, for example, contain many suggestions regarding the nature of early Tibetan religious beliefs and practices. In connection with the passages from the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* that we have considered, it is clear that belief in the sacred character of the dynastic rulers was of importance, at least to the ideology of the monarchy itself. The monarch, or Tsenpo, was of divine origin and enjoyed a close connection with the awesome, protective divinities embodied in Tibet's sacred mountains. The sacrality of the peaks was associated with their important function as sources of water, and the mountain that fed a given valley's river was also often the abode of its principal *yüllha*, the "god of the land." To this day, many Tibetan



pilgrimages and their attendant rites are focused upon, or incorporate important elements of, the cults of the *yüillha*.

Conventionally, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet is often referred to as Bön, but we must be careful to distinguish this from the organized Bön religion of the present day, which, with its monastic institutions, scriptural collections, and philosophical systems, embodies aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and began to take shape in about the tenth century. Bön, in any case, is not thought by its adherents to be an indigenous religion, but is supposed to have been introduced much earlier from a land called Ölmolungring, said to be in the Iranian regions of Inner Asia to the west of Tibet, and to have flourished especially in the old Zhangzhung kingdom in the southwest of the Tibetan plateau. Recent scholars have questioned whether or not there was an organized religion established in Tibet prior to Buddhism, urging that the historical Bön religion was the product of the interaction between indigenous Tibetan traditions and the Buddhism introduced after the seventh century under the Tibetan empire. Nevertheless, the Bön religion surely preserves elements of genuine antiquity. The enormous body of divinatory, medical, and geomantic lore that is contained in the canons of Bön religion will no doubt contribute to fuller reconstructions of archaic Tibetan belief systems.

The term *bön* itself occurs on a number of occasions in the old documents found at Dunhuang, though never, so far as is now known, as the proper name of a particular religion. Most often it designates a particular type of priest, and so perhaps resembles the nearly homonymous Chinese term *fan* (coincidentally pronounced *bon* or *hon* in Middle Chinese), used for Indian brahman priests and Buddhist monks. It has been proposed, however, that *bön* is related to the word for Tibet itself, *bö*, and indeed we find manuscripts from Dunhuang that on occasion do use *bön* to name Tibet. Whatever doubts may be raised regarding the antiquity of the Bön religion in its modern form – that is, as an organized, monastic and scriptural cognate of Buddhism – there can be no question but that *bön* has deep and ancient roots in autochthonous Tibetan practice and thought.

Contemporary reservations about the proper designation for the pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion(s) stem in part from the absence, in the earliest known documents, of a term that clearly serves this function. Some texts speak of what appears to be the sacral order of the monarchy by means of the words *tsuk*, or *tsuklak*, and Ariane Macdonald has therefore posited that this might be the proper name of the old royal religion. Subsequent research, however, has tended not to confirm her suggestion, and it is now generally agreed that these terms mean roughly “wisdom,” above all

the special capacity whereby a monarch knows to bring proper order to his subjects. What is concerned, therefore, is a particular virtue of kingship, a virtue that surely contributes to the aura of sacrality associated with the Tsenpo, but not a body of doctrine, tradition, and ritual of the type that we might call a religion.

In the literature of the later Bön we find greatly elaborated accounts of the early history of the dynasty, its oscillating relations with various groups of priests, and its sponsorship of particular texts and teachings. Though much of this is legendary in character, these materials no doubt preserve a valid recollection of the religious life of the early monarchy, in which the Tsenpo required the services of a specialized priesthood charged with a variety of ritual functions. These likely included the performance of the propitiatory and therapeutic rituals, such as came to be codified among the lower, or exoteric “vehicles” of the Bön religion (Chapter 7).

Additional evidence for pre-Buddhist Tibetan religious belief and practice is to be found neither in the organized Bön religion, nor in Tibetan Buddhism *per se*, but in the wide range of beliefs and practices that span the two religions and sometimes seem to exist independently of them, in the domain of religious activity that Rolf Stein termed the “nameless religion.” This is most prominent in the ubiquitous cults of Tibet’s innumerable protector deities, powerful and omnipresent beings who usually have a strongly local character, each one associated with a particular mountain or lake, valley, spring, or shrine. Some are powerful gods, dominating whole regions, while at the opposite extreme are minor spirits who may be the concern of just a single household. In the narrative of Drigum Tsenpo, for instance, as a matter of course the human agents interact with nagas and other beings, and mountains and waters are the abodes of uncanny powers, beneficent or malign, though perhaps more often the latter. While some aspects of later Buddhist thought ignored or called this archaic domain into question, it was never to be wholly overturned or otherwise dispensed with, and it remained the inalienable ground in which much of Tibetan religious life unfolds.

An example of the manner in which Buddhism came to incorporate not just indigenous divinities, but indigenous patterns of deification, may be seen in the story of the goddess Achi Chöki Drölma, the “grandmother” who is the protectress of the Drigung Buddhist order and, indeed, of the entire Drigung valley to the northeast of Lhasa. Tradition maintains that the paternal grandmother of the father of Drigung Kyopa (1143–1217), the founder of the order, was a miracle-worker who could transform the elements and who eventually “passed away in the



**Figure 8** Achi Chöki Drölma, “Grandmother Dharma-Savioress,” the revered Buddhist protectress of Drigung, exemplifies the incorporation of the autochthonous Tibetan cults of ancestral and local protective divinities within the Buddhist religion, Drigung Monastery, 2002.

sky.” She prophesied, however, that the essence of the Buddha’s teaching would be realized among her descendents and that she herself would return, in each generation, to protect and to bless the religious lineage that would thus arise.<sup>12</sup> The cult that developed in her honor continues to be observed by adherents of the Drigung order throughout Tibet, as well as by members of all religious orders in the vicinity of the Drigung valley. Though the goddess Achi is a purely Buddhist divinity, with apparently no non-Buddhist antecedents, nevertheless she seems clearly to represent a cult of ancestors, of a type that was perhaps more prominent prior to the ascendancy of Buddhism in Tibet. Further evidence of the relation between such ancestral cults and those of the *yüllha* may be seen in the common use of the term *anyé*, “grandfather,” as a sobriquet for important male protective deities, for example Machen Pomra, or Amnyé (= *anyé*) Machen, the great sacred mountain of Amdo.

Funerary rites played a central role in archaic Tibetan religion. Though our knowledge of early beliefs concerning the afterlife is very

limited, it is certain that the rites of the dead were intended in part to guide the deceased to a realm of happiness and to prevent the dead causing upset in the world of the living. Hence, as a reflection of the great power he wielded in life, the ruler's last rites became events of national significance, and royal funerals and interments occupied the old Tibetan state for as much as two years. A program for royal funerals found at Dunhuang demonstrates that an elaborate and specialized priesthood was occupied with the many steps royal funerals entailed. It is here, for instance, that we find the term *bön* used to designate precise classes of religious professionals. Much later, Tibetan Buddhism inherited aspects of the ancient concern to preserve intact the remains of the Tsenpo, and the final mummification and entombment of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–82), in particular, may be regarded in some respects as a revival of more ancient Tibetan funeral rites enshrining, through the enduring presence of the ruler's bodily remains, the divine monarchical power.

Though the influence of Buddhism led the later Bön religion to eschew, for the most part, live sacrifice, there can be no doubt but that sacrificial rites did figure prominently among the requirements of the early royal priesthood. Evidence of this may be found in the rituals performed in connection with solemn acts of state, such as the taking of oaths and completion of treaty negotiations. Chinese participants in diplomatic relations with the Tibetans did not fail to notice, for instance, that Tibetan ministers, in addition to their contribution to Buddhist services to solemnize agreements, separately undertook oaths sworn in blood. The depiction of sacrificial scenes in the ancient petroglyphs must be recalled, as well, in this connection. A Buddhist text of the early eighteenth century, in its imaginative reconstruction of sacrifices undertaken on behalf of the ancient Tibetan kings, may be drawing in part on older sources when it describes the dramatic rites performed by the Bön – here referring once again to the sacrificial priests – at the monastery of Samyé:

The king, queens, ministers, and the court arrived and looked about. In the center, the nine learned Bön were seated in a row. To their right and left were the rows of the nine sorcerers and others. There were many Bön of the Shen lineage, each bearing a knife, who were called “servants of worship.” There were many called “cleansing Bön,” who carried volumes of water in golden vessels and bathed the deer and the other sacrificial animals. Some so-called “black Bön” scattered various grains. The ones called “petitioning Bön” circulated many requests and responses among gods and demons. The Shen-lineage Bön, saying “great-horned stag,” beheaded the stag and offered it in worship. Similarly, they beheaded and offered up

three thousand yak, rams and goats. Likewise, they dismembered the doe and offered her up. Calling three thousand yak-cows, sheep, and nanny-goats her “female helpers,” they flayed their limbs until they died and so offered them in worship. By the same token, they slaughtered horses, oxen, hybrid cattle, mules, dogs, birds, and pigs in many different ways, until Samyé was filled with the stench of burnt hair, and they did worship with various meats. There were then those called “butcher Bön,” who divided up all the carcasses. The “distributor Bön” were those who distributed the meat to all who were present and the “accountant Bön” kept a tally.<sup>13</sup>

Though perhaps fanciful in its details, there are aspects of this account that nevertheless ring true. The old petroglyphs depicting sacrificial scenes seem to show elaborate arrangements of ritual vessels, suggesting sacrificial performances on a grand scale. There is no reason to doubt that in early Tibet, as in most societies in which sacrifice is central to religious practice, the abundance of offerings was valued, so that there were large numbers of sacrificial victims, particularly when major rites were performed on behalf of the state. The special, sacral role of the stag persists down to the present time, where, in an interesting inversion, it is the character of the stag that sacrifices the substitutional effigy in Tibetan sacred dance (*cham*). Finally, the distribution of meat according to a careful tally, requiring that the portions correspond to rank and status, persisted in the meat-distribution rituals during the Tibetan New Year, as witnessed by Richardson at the Potala, in the court of the Dalai Lama.

A further feature of religious life that appears surely to stem from the archaic Tibetan matrix is the important role of spirit-mediumship (*lhabab*). This is a diverse domain, including the activities of local shaman-like practitioners who channel village ghosts and demons as well as the mediums possessed by the great protective divinities of the Tibetan state. The mediums themselves may also be persons of varied status – men or women, monks or laymen – though those channeling the highest protectors are generally monks whose peculiar vocation requires that they themselves be subject to numerous regulations. Given the considerable scope of Tibetan spirit-mediumship, it is not surprising to find a measure of competition among its practitioners, some mediums and the deities they channel being condemned as impure or degenerate by others. Thus we find on occasion contemporary authorities arguing that the channeling of the high protective divinities represents the true archaic Tibetan form of mediumship, while communication with common ghosts and the like is taken to be evidence of later corruption. Anthropological evidence throughout the Himalayan area suggests, however, that diversity, as well as competition, has always been present in the regional context of

spirit-mediumship. Moreover, it seems historically more likely that the emergence of the state oracles was the product of a process of refinement and selection, whereby certain forms of mediumship were elevated to the status of high religious art, rather than the opposite.

Among Western interpreters of these phenomena, there has been ongoing debate regarding the application of the designation of "shaman" to Tibetan spirit-mediums, and whether or not, therefore, they should be studied in relation to non-Tibetan forms of shamanism elsewhere in Inner Asia. Disregarding here the details of these discussions, which often turn primarily on the definition of "shaman," we may note that the key point of commonality is the function of the spirit-medium, or shaman, as the tangible, embodied point of communication between the human world and the world of "gods and demons" (*lhandré*), to use the Tibetan expression. As such, spirit-mediumship may cooperate with, but is sometimes notably antagonistic to, such alternative forms of communication with the invisible world as astrology and other rationalized divination techniques that may in principle be practiced by anyone trained to do so. (In Chapter 5 some of the implications of this tension, in connection with the selection of the Dalai Lamas, will become clear.) At this juncture, however, we may just note that direct communication with the beyond, by means of human mediums, appears to have been an essential element in the archaic religious life of Tibet.

If it remains uncertain, therefore, whether or to what degree the historical Bön religion corresponds to a Tibetan pre-Buddhist, autochthonous religion, there can nevertheless be little doubt but that important elements of the ancient religious matrix have persisted, for one finds elements of it everywhere. Though Buddhism sought to regulate and to rationalize this ubiquitous religious habitat, it was never able to dispense with it. Much the same can be said for organized Bön, which appropriated Buddhist strategies of systematization, but in so doing left the ground largely intact.

# The Tsenpo's Imperial Dominion

Central Eurasia, a vast, inclement expanse of steppe, desert, and mountain, emerged in early antiquity as a cauldron of empire, from which successive waves of conquering peoples arose and invaded the neighboring lands, whether in East Asia, the Middle East, or Europe. Events in the landlocked interior of the continent thus regularly imperiled surrounding populations until, in time, efforts to control the region became the “Great Game” in the affairs of the major Asian empires of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – Manchu China, Czarist Russia, and British India. A millennium earlier Tibet had taken its place among the players in this perennial struggle for preeminence in Inner Asia, rivaling Tang China in the region from the early seventh through mid-ninth centuries.

Documented Tibetan history begins with events just preceding the rise of the Tibetan empire in the first decades of the seventh century. During the period of its dominance in Inner Asia, the empire gave birth to many of the enduring features of Tibetan civilization, including the standard form of the written Tibetan language and the beginnings of the Tibetan Buddhist religion. Its memory would be a continuing presence in later Tibetan history, too, for successive Tibetan governments – above all that founded by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century – consciously emulated precedents believed to have originated under the empire, while popular religious movements frequently drew their inspiration from an idealized vision of the empire as a divinely ordained Buddhist monarchy. Even today, peoples in many parts of the Tibetan world and along its periphery trace their origins or attribute signal events in local histories to the old Tibetan empire. Thus, for instance, the Tamang people of Nepal sometimes interpret their ethnonym as referring to the imperial Tibetan cavalry (*tamak*) sent to secure the empire's southern frontiers, while

the people of Bhutan honor the Tsechu temple in Paro as one of the geomantic centers established to protect Tibet's boundaries during the reign of Songtsen Gampo in the mid-seventh century. Elsewhere, in regions as widely separated as Pari (modern Tianzhu) in China's Gansu Province and Ladakh in far northwestern India, recollections of the empire similarly serve to ground a deep and abiding cultural affinity to Tibet. Though the empire itself collapsed during the ninth century, its afterglow has been sufficiently forceful so as to have engendered an empire of the imagination, to which Tibetans and often their close neighbors as well have sustained ties of allegiance. In a sense, post-imperial Tibet would come to substitute the spiritual potency of its Buddhist traditions for the political and military supremacy it formerly enjoyed, thereby ensuring a continuing Tibetan role in the affairs of China and Inner Asia down to modern times.

## The Rise of the Tibetan Empire

The traditions surveyed in the preceding chapter showed prehistoric Tibet to have been broken into many competing powers, some of which came to be thought of as small kingdoms or principalities. As the legend of Drigum Tsenpo reveals, the line of kings that emerged in the valley of Yarlung, claiming descent from Nyaktri Tsenpo, began early on to assert authority throughout large parts of central and southeastern Tibet, thereby setting in motion the process of conquest whereby their descendants would come to control much of the Tibetan plateau before turning their energies to the subjugation of neighboring lands. The formal designation of these rulers was Tsenpo, a term that served as the exclusive title of the Tibetan monarch, and early on they appear to have also adopted the dynastic label Pugyel, "king of Pu," perhaps reflecting the dynasty's distant origins in Powo in southeastern Tibet. The transition of the Yarlung kings from local chieftains to Inner Asian emperors marks Tibet's entry onto the historical stage.

The ascendancy of the Pugyel dynasty began sometime before 600, when Takbu Nyazi, the Yarlung ruler, became locked in conflict with Takkyawo, Lord of Zingpo, whose fiefdom was close to the region of modern Lhasa. The *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, which is our major source for these legendary events and represents the standpoint of the Yarlung princes, describes Takkyawo as a thoroughly evil tyrant, doing all within his power to thwart the counsel of the good:



Perverse in all ways, he sided only with death. The evil he treated as good, and the good as evil. He refused to listen to those who were wise and intimate, offering excellent counsel. But he eagerly attended to the words of seditionists and liars.<sup>1</sup>

The lesser lords of central Tibet began to ally themselves with one or another of the disputants, until Takbu Nyazi was convinced that he had the force to march against the Zingpo Lord. Before he could launch his attack, however, he passed away and his alliance was dispersed, leaving his rival free to aggrandize his sphere of power in central Tibet.

The feud was inherited by Takbu's son, Namri Löntsen. Receiving the sworn fealty of his own brother and five other lords, he assembled an army with 10,000 under his direct command. The combined force laid waste to the fortress of his enemy; the Lord of Zingpo was killed and his allies forced to flee. Central Tibet, including territories as far east as Kongpo, was now united as a single kingdom, its fiefs brought directly under the Tsenpo's sway, or granted by him as rewards to those whose fealty he enjoyed. As other local rulers decided to throw in their lot with the new hegemon, there appears to have been some expansion of the realm to the west in Tsang, possibly even as far as the kingdom of Zhangzhung in the area around Mt. Kailash. (We have seen in the preceding chapter that the sacred mountain had mythological associations with the Tsenpo traced back as far as the legendary Drigum, though this may well have been retrospective.)

The Tsenpo was by no means an absolute monarch, however, but ruled as *primus inter pares*, assured of his station just so long as his vassals maintained their support. A system of matrimonial alliances played an important role here, for the clans that provided brides to the ruler enjoyed symbolic seniority inasmuch as they became the king's parents-in-law, while the king in principle thereby gained their loyalty. The title *zhanglön*, literally the "minister who is a maternal uncle" (that is, father-in-law of the ruler and hence potentially the maternal grandfather of his successor), which is found as a designation of many of the high-ranking nobles of the Tibetan empire and in later times became also the name of a particular, personal protective divinity, reflects this delicate balance of political and familial interest. The complex ties between the Tsenpo and the clans related to him through matrimony or sworn fealty thus rendered the Tibetan monarchical system profoundly unstable, liable to be upset whenever the vassal lords saw their own interests best served apart from, or in opposition to, their commitments to the Tsenpo. The structural problem that this entailed would never be fully resolved so long

as the Puyel dynasty held sway, and indeed would regularly reappear in altered form throughout subsequent Tibetan history. By the second decade of the seventh century Namri Löntsen's newly conquered kingdom was therefore being torn apart by the centrifugal force of dissident vassals, and in about 618 the king himself was assassinated by poison, leaving his 13-year-old son as his heir. Later tradition would recall, however, that, before it weakened, Namri Löntsen's reign brought new cultural ties to the east, whereby Chinese traditions of medicine and divination were first introduced to Tibet. The occurrence of such contacts cannot be ruled out, for the history of the Chinese Sui dynasty (581–618) does record the reception of a Tibetan embassy at court in 608.

Though the process of expansion was thus clearly under way in the time of his father, it was during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (c. 605–50) that imperial conquest began in earnest. Tibetan histories written from the twelfth century on tend to attribute considerable longevity to this monarch and culture-hero, granting him eighty years or more as befits the great impact of his career. But the record preserved in the earliest available documents, the Dunhuang manuscripts and the annals of China's Tang dynasty, suggest on the contrary a much shorter span. (Some have suggested, in fact, an even shorter chronology than that adopted here, dating Namri Löntsen's assassination to about 629 and Songtsen's birth to c. 617).

Following the assassination of his father, the young king's ministers swiftly moved to regain control of those parts of the country that had been lost during Namri Löntsen's last years and also to gain new adherents. The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* relates that in this they were at pains to avoid the costs of battle, where subterfuge might more efficiently yield the desired result. Thus Nyang Mangpojë Zhangnang advised against bringing an army to attack the Sumpa, a nomadic or seminomadic people living to the northeast of Tibet, who had been among Namri's rebellious feudatories. Instead he offered protection for their flocks, wherefore, in the words of the *Chronicle*, "all their households were naturally captured as subjects."<sup>2</sup> With the Tsenpo now able to stand on his own once again, his campaigns in the northeast turned to an Altaic people, the Azha (called Tuyuhun in Chinese), living in what is today Qinghai.

During the same period the conquest of the kingdom of Zhangzhung, in the western part of the Tibetan plateau, was achieved through a combination of deviousness and military force. Songtsen's sister was given in marriage to the ruler of Zhangzhung, Ligmigya, thereby forming an alliance between the two realms. The Tibetan queen, Semakar, however, seems to have been marginalized by the Zhangzhung ruler and this set

her scheming, though Songtsen is recorded as having at first desired that she reconcile herself with her husband. In the event, the impasse in her marriage corresponded to deteriorating relations between the two kingdoms, throughout which the queen remained loyal to her brother. As hostilities became imminent, it was the intelligence provided by queen Semakar that signalled the moment for attack, whereupon Songtsen's armies slaughtered the Zhangzhung king and annihilated his strongholds. With the conquest of Zhangzhung, much of the Tibetan plateau was subject to unified rule for the first time, and the resources and manpower that thereby became available to the Tsenpo set in motion the growth of Tibet's empire during the decades that followed. For the later annalists of the Bön religion, however, the defeat of Ligmigya marked the tragic end of the hallowed center of their religion in Zhangzhung. Ironically, owing to an ancient error in the filing of documents, they attributed these events to the reign of Tri Songdetsen (r. 755-97) and not to Songtsen Gampo.

During the mid-630s the Chinese entered into conflict with the Azha, or Tuyuhun, whom they defeated. The result, however, was to eliminate the Azha in their role as an effective buffer and thereby to set the stage for China's direct confrontation with the Tibetans. The annals of the Tang dynasty record their first official contact with Songtsen's expanding Tibetan empire in the year 634, that is, at about the same time as the war with the Tuyuhun. Following the Chinese victory, Songtsen first sought to avoid conflict by proposing a marriage alliance, as he had done in Zhangzhung, but the Tang court rejected the prospect of sending a princess to wed the Tibetan king. In response to this affront, Songtsen himself attacked and defeated the Tuyuhun in 638, and, continuing his onward assault, began to harass Chinese territory soon after. By the winter of 640 the Chinese, in a newly conciliatory spirit, received the Tibetan minister Gar Tongtsen, who returned to Tibet the following spring with the Chinese princess of Wencheng as bride for his master. Gar's sojourn in China came to be a popular topic for later Tibetan literature, where his resolve to surmount the challenges put to him in order to win the princess serve as famous examples of wit and endurance. In one story, for instance, he is ordered by the Tang emperor to solve the puzzle of passing a thread through an irregularly pierced pearl, and, like Dædelus, the architect of Greek myth, he realizes that the secret is to first tie the thread to a very small ant that, once inserted into the hole, can only move forward until it emerges from the other end. If the Tibetans remembered Gar primarily for his resourcefulness and cunning, however, the Chinese recalled not only his intelligence but even more

his material gifts; he is reported to have arrived at court bearing 5,000 ounces of gold.

The princess of Wencheng was in fact intended to marry not Songtsen, but the crown prince Gungsong Gungtsen, in whose favor Songtsen abdicated in 641 (though his abdication may well have been more symbolic than real). The Chinese annals tell us that, on arriving in Tibet, the princess was horrified by the ubiquitous Tibetan use of red face-paint, a custom which the Tsenpo banned forthwith. (The locution "red-faced barbarians" nevertheless long remained current in Tibetan literature as a humilific designation for the Tibetans themselves.) Sons of noble families were sent to China to study the classics, and Chinese scholars were invited to Tibet to handle official correspondence with the Tang court. Later tradition credits the princess with bringing the first Buddhist sacred image to Tibet, that of the Jowo ("Lord") Shakyamuni, and thus introducing Buddhism to that land. The alliance forged with the Tang dynasty, in all events, seems to have effectively reduced hostility between the two powers for some years.

In 646 Gungsong predeceased his father, who then openly resumed his rule. The princess of Wencheng now became her father-in-law's queen, and Tibetan posterity would always remember her primarily in this role, as the Chinese wife of Songtsen Gampo. During this same period, Tibetan power was felt to the south as well, with the kingdom of Nepal (corresponding to the modern valley of Kathmandu) becoming a Tibetan vassal state. In 648, when a Tang diplomatic mission was stranded in India, the Tibetans dispatched a rescue party that penetrated the lowlands as far south as Tirabhukti (modern Tirhut in northern Bihar). Later histories assert that Songtsen's troops even erected a memorial stele on the banks of the Ganges, a tradition that cannot be dismissed out of hand, for the Chinese mission they aided succeeded in installing a memorial at Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. As his eastern conquests had brought him a Chinese princess to wed, so the histories hold that a Nepalese princess, named Tritsün, or Bhrikuti, also married the Tsenpo. In the light of Tibet's dominance of Nepal, such a marriage would have been a normal aspect of current diplomacy, though Tritsün is so far only known from much later accounts and not at all from the earliest relevant documents.

Though the events involved were much romanticized with the passage of centuries, it is clear that Tibet's rise to empire engendered significant transformations of institutions and of consciousness. Tibetan historians speak of three great cultural contributions that were due to the acts of Songtsen Gampo: the creation of the Tibetan alphabet, the redaction of a



**Figure 9** The Tsenpo Songtsen Gampo, his turban crowned by the buddha Amita-bha, with the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara and prince Gungsong Gungtsen behind him, Potala Palace, Lhasa, 2002.

law code, and the introduction of the Buddhist religion. Empire required bureaucracy, with its demand for the maintenance of clear records, so that civil and military administrations were formed. Diplomacy and statecraft could be regularized only on the basis of written documents and sure principles, the latter embodied in the body of known precedent and law. An early statement of the innovations of Songtsen's reign, as recorded in about 800 in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* from Dunhuang, illustrates these points very well:

Formerly Tibet had no writing, but during the lifetime of this emperor the Great Legislation that was the Sacred Authority of Tibet, as well as the rank-order of ministers, the powers of both great and small, the awards in recognition of excellence, the punishments for misdeeds, the regularization, among farmers and herdsman, of pelts, acreage and roadways, the measures of volume and weight, etc. – all of the righteous governance of Tibet emerged during the time of the emperor Tri Songtsen. Because everyone recalled and experienced his beneficence, they called him by the name of “Songtsen the Wise” (Songtsen Gampo).<sup>3</sup>

In later times, accounts of Songtsen Gampo's civilizational enterprise were much elaborated. The monarch came to be regarded as an emanation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who with the collaboration of his Nepalese and Chinese queens introduced Buddhism to his barbarian land. The legends of the emperor and his court came to form a veritable national epic during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, resembling, in terms of their place in cultural history, the stories of Arthur, Guinevere and the knights of the Round Table in the roughly contemporaneous literatures of England and France. According to the traditions we find here, Avalokiteshvara is Tibet's special protector and at the same time the fundamental spiritual principle, called Tujé Chenpo, or Supreme Compassion, pervading the universe as a whole. He is the basis for love and kindness among all living creatures and the divine creative power, who, in his special relation with Tibet, is manifest in the person of Songtsen Gampo.

According to the same traditions, the two foreign brides of the king, the princess of Wencheng of China and Princess Tritsün of Nepal, were the emanations of goddesses, who brought with them, as part of their dowries, sacred images of the Buddha Shakyamuni. The arrival of these statues in Tibet and their installation in the Jokhang and Ramoche temples of Lhasa that were specially built to house them marks the inception of Buddhism among the Tibetans overall. Over and against these central themes in the tale of the royal trinity, the military and political history of the empire appears as a matter of secondary importance, of interest only as a backdrop to the religious epic. The image said to have been brought by the princess of Wencheng, known as the Jowo or "Lord," and the Jokhang temple constructed for it in Lhasa would become Tibet's greatest center of pilgrimage, which virtually all Tibetans aspire to visit. Tibet's ancient ruler and his court are still present today before their eyes in the temple's statuary, so that text and monument together engender a uniform vision of Tibet's imperial past and of its enduring spiritual presence. The reign of Songtsen Gampo is depicted here as the civilizing of savage Tibet, a land iconically represented in this context as an untamed ogress who has been ritually staked down by the Jokhang temple at her heart, and by a system of three concentric squares of geomantically placed temples piercing her limbs. These temples, whose three groups are said to tame the borders, the outer frontiers and the districts, have in some cases become prominent centers of pilgrimage.

The legends of Songtsen Gampo further ascribe the invention of the Tibetan script to a particular minister of the king, Tönmi Sambhota, who was dispatched to Kashmir for this purpose. Grammatical texts attributed

to this same figure (no doubt apocryphally) have for centuries served as the basis for the study of literary Tibetan and are still memorized by students today. In all events, it does appear that the Tibetan script was created, or at least given its characteristic form, close to the time of Songtsen Gampo, and that its model was one or another of the writing systems based on the ancient Indian Brahmi script that were then in use in northern India, Nepal, and the Indianized regions of Central Asia. The earliest available testimony bearing upon this matter, the passage from the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* cited above, does corroborate the relatively early attribution of the Tibetan script's creation to the time of Songtsen Gampo, though adherents of the Bön religion hold that their predecessors introduced the literate arts to Tibet many centuries earlier. No positive evidence supporting this has so far come to light, however, and the most ancient examples of Tibetan writing that are now available to us – the old pillar inscriptions of central Tibet and the Tibetan documents discovered at Dunhuang and elsewhere in Inner Asia – date at their earliest to the eighth century and so appear to corroborate the chronology of the prevalent account.

Though the tale of Songtsen Gampo was thus given the form of an elaborate Buddhist narrative, it is important to recall that certain of the seeds of the story were already present in early records. The period of Songtsen's reign did see the development of Tibetan literacy and the codification of the law, as well as the formation of close cultural ties with China and Nepal. The minister Gar did indeed travel to the Tang court, where he favorably impressed his Chinese hosts and returned with the princess of Wencheng. Perhaps the greatest mystery is whether or not the attribution to Songtsen Gampo of faith in Buddhism really has any basis in fact. Even Tibetan Buddhist historians often prefer to sidestep this issue, insisting that Songtsen's religious commitment was largely confined to the inner court and so kept secret. This is perhaps a polite way of saying that, legend aside, the historical record does not in fact offer a clear demonstration of the support for Buddhism with which he is credited.

Songtsen Gampo's immediate successor was his grandson Manglön Mangtsen (d. 676), in whose name the expansionist campaigns of his grandfather continued, particularly in order to consolidate Tibetan control of the Tuyuhun, while extending Tibetan power in the Tarim Basin and adjacent areas, in what is today China's Xinjiang Province. These territories, the heart of the so-called Silk Road linking China to the West, included wealthy oases controlling a lucrative international trade in silk, porcelain, precious stones, Tibetan musk, and other high-value goods. Tibetan dominance in the region was therefore forcefully resisted by the Tang dynasty. By about 670 the Tibetans, however, had succeeded

in gaining the submission of the Western Turks and had won control of many of the major commercial and strategic centers, including Kashgar and Khotan. The ruins of old Tibetan forts, notably at Miran, still recall the Tibetan conquests in the region.

Despite the continuing, nominal rule of Tibet by a Tsenpo who was the direct successor of the great Songtsen Gampo, the young monarch was vulnerable and real power had effectively passed into the hands of Songtsen's famous and capable minister Gar Tongtsen and his family. It was Gar who undertook the definitive redaction of the Tibetan law code in 655, thus bringing to a conclusion the legislative project that Songtsen had initiated. Our knowledge of the old Tibetan laws is very imperfect, and much further research will be required before the interpretation of the surviving evidence can be considered secure. The documents found at Dunhuang include a number of legal fragments, and certain of the later Tibetan histories treat the topic at length. While some of their indications are surely derived from older records, however, these late sources suffer both from problems in the transmission of more ancient materials, and from a strong inclination to read Buddhist ethical principles back into Songtsen's legislation. This no doubt was due in part to the role Buddhist ethics came to play in the ideology of the Tibetan monarchy itself during the eighth and ninth centuries, after the royal commitment to Buddhism had become explicit and clear. Thus a Dunhuang Buddhist text extols the moral rectitude of the Tibetans in these terms:

Because divine doctrine and human custom were feared,  
 They were honoured and closely adhered to, so that  
 Teachers, parents, relations and friends,  
 The elderly and those of higher station  
 Were gently and respectfully honoured in an unerring manner.  
 Because they had a kindly attitude towards all,  
 They neither stole from nor plundered one other.  
 They avoided lying, sexual license and shamefulness,  
 And were straightforward, reliable, heroic, and greatly disciplined.  
 Though human in body, their customs were divine.  
 In other kingdoms, and among other men,  
 This was unprecedented, and will not come again;  
 Even among the gods this is rare . . .  
 The supreme path of truth, the virtuous doctrine,  
 The ten virtues of the discipline . . .  
 And the royal laws of the king, lord of men,  
 Oral traditions taught by wise ancestors –  
 Where else were these performed as in the customs of Tibet?<sup>4</sup>



Traditions such as these no doubt became the basis for the “sixteen pure human laws” – faith, honor to parents and elders, harmony with associates, etc. – and similar ethical codes that came to be attributed to the monarchy in the later religious historiography.

In contrast to the emphasis on Buddhist morals that we find here, the actual fragments of the old law codes that have come to light reflect primarily the redaction of Tibetan traditional precedents. For instance, one of the Dunhuang texts concerns the legal remedy for death or injury due to dog-bite, often a matter of dispute in a land where people are fond of breeding large and aggressive canines to protect herds and property. The text provides meticulous guidance for the resolution of particular cases, taking up variables including the rank of the victim, the nature of the injuries suffered, whether or not the attack was commanded by the dog's master, and so on. Similar documents that have emerged include laws pertaining to hunting accidents, theft, and injury due to yak-stampede. In all cases, the careful enumeration of the social status of the parties involved, from commoners through the hierarchically ordered grades of the nobles, as recognized in the titles granted by the court, and then up to the royal family itself, reflects the strict stratification of early Tibetan society. Marxist interpreters have argued that we also find evidence here of a society that was evolving from the archaic patterns of a slave-based economy to more advanced forms of feudalism. Though slavery persisted in parts of the Tibetan world down to recent times, they seem nevertheless correct in holding that, during the periods for which we have more or less reliable historical knowledge – that is to say, from the late first millennium on – it seems not to have been the basis for the Tibetan economy overall.

A further aspect of early Tibetan legislation for which some record has survived concerns Tibet's administrative divisions and its civil and military organization. Three “horns” (*ru*) of Tibet were known from early times and represent the perspective of one facing south from central Tibet: the “middle horn” (*uru*) centered on the region of Lhasa, a “left horn” (*yoru*) embraced lands to the east, as far as Kongpo, and the “right horn” (*yeru*) occupied the valley of the Tsangpo and adjacent lands to the immediate west. As the kingdom expanded, a fourth horn, called the “appended horn” (*rulak*), was added to encompass territories in western Tsang, in the vicinity of present-day Lhasé. To the northeast was the land of the Sumpa, which, following its submission to Tibetan rule, was sometimes considered a fifth horn. These large districts were themselves divided into groups of a thousand households (*tongdé*), the basic unit used to determine the military levies. After Zhangzhung was added to

the empire, it was similarly incorporated into the system of organization by "thousands." With the expansion of Tibet into Inner Asia, military administrative centers, called *trom*, which in most cases were fortified towns, were also established. During the mid- and late eighth century the great push of Tibet's armies into Chinese territory under Tri Songdetsen led to the creation of a new colonial office to administer the far north-east, that of the *delön*, or "pacification minister." An elaborate system of relays was also developed in order to maintain communications along the extended lines required by the growing sphere of conquest.

Throughout the second half of the seventh century we find various members of the Gar clan dominating the key civil and military posts of the empire. Tibet was now subject to a period of oligarchic, ministerial rule perhaps resembling the nepotistic regime of the Rana prime ministers who governed Nepal during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The power and influence of the Gar increased further with the death of the monarch Manglön Mangtsen in 676, the year of the birth of his son and heir Düsöng (676–704). The infant king could be considered no more than a mere puppet, best left on the throne because the apparent legitimacy of the monarchy still served the interests of the Gar. Though they exercised the real authority, they enjoyed no recognized right to rule, and their position was in this respect insecure. In the end, the Gar oligarchy was overturned when the Tsenpo Düsöng grew into adulthood, as the Tang dynasty reasserted its power in the Tarim Basin. Gar Tsennyen, held responsible for the loss of Khotan, was denounced and executed in 695. Four years later the long-serving minister Gar Tridring met with a similar fate. The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* attributes a song of celebration to the victorious monarch, recounting his defeat of Gar, that nicely captures a moment of royal arrogance:

The subject has wished himself lord.  
Gar has wished himself lord!  
A frog might as well wish to fly!  
For the subject who seeks to be lord  
Is like water that flows upstream.<sup>5</sup>

In 704 Düsöng traveled to what is today the north of Yunnan, to take direct command of military operations against the kingdom of Nanzhao. The annals record that he died there, perhaps in battle, though the precise circumstances of his death are not mentioned. Tibetan documents of the ninth century remember Düsöng as the founder of a Buddhist temple in Ling in far eastern Tibet. This he may have established when he journeyed to campaign in the southeast during his last year, though it may also have

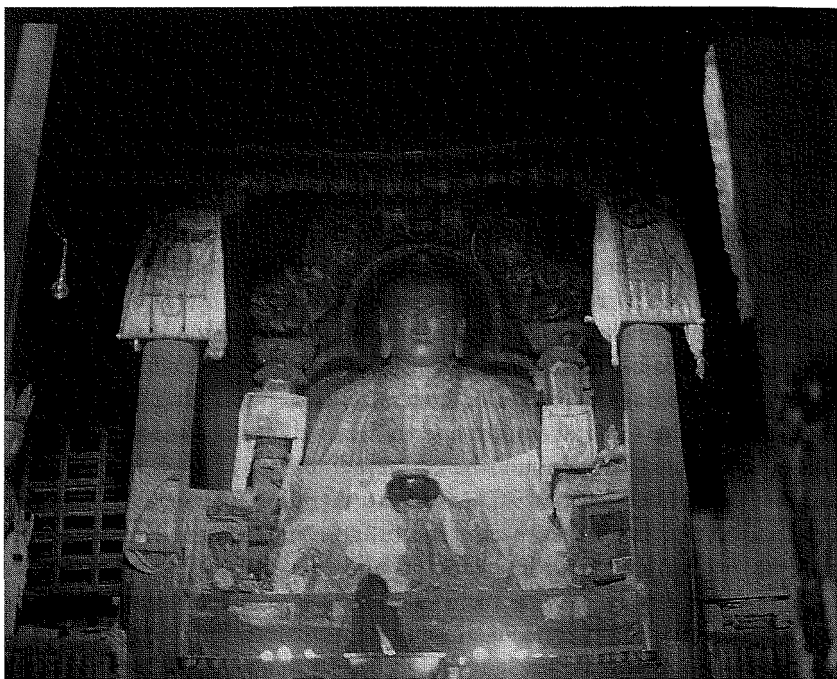
originated as a memorial temple in his honor. Buddhism was already established as a prominent cultural force in Nanzhao, so that the foundation of the temple in Ling perhaps related more clearly to the politics of imperial expansion in the far east than it did to the court's religious affiliations *per se*. A colorful, much later tale also credits Düsong with introducing tea and porcelain to Tibet, although the consumption of tea probably did not become very widespread there before about the twelfth century.

Following Düsong's death, his eldest son, named Lha Belpo, was enthroned, but his reign lasted for only some months. The monarchy once more became a puppet-show, and on this occasion the puppeteer appears to have been the former ruler's own mother, a remarkable, but obscure, figure named Tri Malö. An example of the striking synchronicities between the Tibetan empire and the Tang dynasty, she rose to power during the time of Wu Zetian, the Chinese dowager empress who reigned from 683 until her death in 705 (and who therefore may well have served as a model for her Tibetan contemporary). Some time after her son's passing Tri Malö deposed Lha Belpo and placed his year-old brother, Gyel Tsukru, on the throne in his stead. In this she certainly acted in collusion with certain factions among the ministers. The reasons for the change in succession are unclear, but in one source we find the suggestion that Lha Belpo had been found to be demented.

## Later Monarchs and the Promotion of Buddhism

In 712 the child emperor Gyel Tsukru was given the regnal title Tri Detsuktsen, the designation by which he would be generally known. His long reign lasted until he was deposed by a ministerial coup in 755, another curious coincidence, as this was the time of the An Lushan rebellion in China. The first decades of his rule seem to have been a period of relative stability, followed, toward the end, by a decline in Tibet's military position in Inner Asia together with various troubles in the center, not the least of which was an epidemic of bubonic plague.

While still a child, in 710, the future Tri Detsuktsen was married to the Chinese princess of Jincheng, whose hand was at first intended for that of his father Düsong. Later Tibetan legend reverses the tale and maintains that the princess was to wed Tri Detsuktsen's son Lhawön, who died before the arrival of his betrothed. The princess then married the old emperor, who became known as the "bearded ancestor," Mé Aktsom. In fact, however, the emperor Tri Detsuktsen was a child of six when his teenage bride arrived in Tibet from China. The legendary story



**Figure 10** The central shrine of the Õn Keru temple, founded, according to tradition, by Tri Detsuktsen and the princess of Jincheng, 2002.

of his marriage may have arisen through confusion at some point with the actual circumstances of Songtsen Gampo's union with his son's bride, the princess of Wencheng.

The princess of Jincheng did not travel to Tibet in solitude, but was accompanied by an entire court, including scholars and masters of the arts and sciences. During the three decades of her residence in Tibet, until her death in 739, she appears to have played a major role in promoting Chinese learning, as well as the Buddhist religion, to which she was deeply devoted. Her mission as a transmitter of culture would in later times be conflated with the recollection of her aunt Wencheng (who seems in fact to have been the weaker figure), but aspects of her own legacy were remembered as well. Tibetan translations of Chinese historical classics, now only known in fragmentary form, may date to this period, as do some translations of popular Chinese Buddhist scriptures and perhaps also works on divination and medicine. A famous historical account, the *Testament of Ba*, credits her with introducing the Buddhist funeral service of seven weeks, a ritual period that would become estab-

lished practice in later Tibetan Buddhism and much elaborated in the famous fourteenth-century work known in the West as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Throughout late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the Inner Asian Silk Roads played an important role not only in commerce, but in cultural exchange, and in much of the region Buddhism and elements of Buddhism's Indian cultural background were well established. The dominant languages here were of the Indo-Iranian family and knowledge of Sanskrit was relatively widespread, at least among the educated Buddhist clergy. Tibet's conquests in the Tarim Basin and adjacent areas therefore favored growing Tibetan participation in a generally Indianized, and notably Buddhist, international culture. It is certain that this became an important source for the initial transmission of Buddhist learning to Tibet. In the first instance, however, Tibet's armies had been drawn to the region by the wealth that moved along its trade routes and their continuing presence there could be maintained only through near-constant warfare. Ironically, therefore, war and booty were among the conditions that facilitated the eventual Tibetan adoption of Buddhism. Tibetan expansion toward the west also resulted, during the mid-710s, in Tibet's first contacts with the Arabs, as documented in Arabic, though not Tibetan, sources. In the decades that followed, alliances and enmities frequently shifted, as the three major powers that had designs upon the region – China, Tibet, and the Arabs – struggled to dominate the rich Ferghana valley (now divided among Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan) and neighboring parts of Central Asia. This contest would be brought to an end in 751, when the Arabs decisively defeated the Chinese at the battle of Talas and Ferghana thereby entered the sphere of Islam.

The histories of the important Silk Road state of Khotan, which had come under Tibetan dominion during the 670s, maintain that the Jincheng princess founded a community of Khotanese Buddhist monks in central Tibet, probably the first sangha to be established there. It remained active until an outbreak of plague, which took the life of the princess herself, provoked an anti-Buddhist reaction in 739. Though Tri Detsuktsen seems to have been favorably inclined to Buddhism and is credited with the construction of a number of temples, said to have been the first to be constructed in central Tibet since the time of Songtsen Gampo a century before, he could not restrain the reaction of those factions among the nobility who now opposed the foreign religion. It is said that they even sought to do away with the image of the Jowo that had been brought from China as part of the dowry of the princess of Wencheng.

The definitive adoption of Buddhism as the religion of the Tibetan court is in all cases attributed to Tri Detsuktsen's successor, Tri Songdetsen (742–c. 797). Later histories generally consider him to have been the son of the princess of Jincheng, but this is evidently a pious legend inspired, no doubt, by the strong roles both played in establishing Buddhism in Tibet; though not the Chinese princess's son in fact, Tri Songdetsen became nevertheless her successor in spirit. Placed on the throne as a boy of thirteen following the ministerial rebellion of 755 in which his father, Tri Detsuktsen, was assassinated, Tri Songdetsen was for some years a powerless ward of the ruling lords, who were implacable in their opposition to Buddhism and had banned it altogether. By the time he was twenty, however, he appears to have come into power in his own right, and his ascension corresponds with renewed Tibetan territorial expansion. In 763 the Tibetans even succeeded in briefly occupying the Chinese capital, Chang'an (modern Xi'an), and in installing there a puppet Chinese emperor of their choosing, an uncle of the late princess of Jincheng. Though the Tibetans' control of the Chinese throne lasted a mere fortnight, they continued to dominate territories immediately to the west and north of Chang'an for much of the century that followed.

In the view of the later Tibetan historical tradition, we have seen, the great monarchs of the old Tibetan empire were the emanations of bodhisattvas, whose outstanding achievement was not their conquest of large parts of Central Asia, but the introduction of the civilizing influence of the Buddha's teaching to the barbarous land they ruled. By the twelfth century the story of the Buddhist conquest of Tibet had developed to become an elaborate national epic, explaining the very emergence of Tibet and its inhabitants, and especially the appearance of the Tsenpos, as evidence of Avalokiteshvara's compassionate intercession in the world of ordinary beings. These legendary accounts of the rise of Buddhism in Tibet were no doubt inspired in part by the manner in which the later rulers of the empire came to represent their dynasty's commitment to the foreign religion. An example may be found in the inscription at Kar-chung Temple issued by Tri Songdetsen's son, the Tsenpo Tri Desongtsen (d. 815):

During the time of the magically sagacious and divine emperor, the ancestor Tri Songtsen [Gampo], as an enactment of the Buddha's doctrine, the temple of Rasa (= Lhasa) and others were built, and the shrines of the Three Precious Jewels were established. During the time of the ancestor Tri Düsong, temples were built including Tritsé in Ling, and the shrines of the Three Precious Jewels were established. During the time of the ancestor Tri Detsuktsen, temples were built at Kachu in Trakmar

and at Chingpu, and the shrines of the Three Precious Jewels were established. Then, during the time of [my] father Tri Songdetsen, temples were built in the center and frontiers, including Samyé at Trakmar, and the shrines of the Three Precious Jewels were established. And [now] in [my] time, I, the divine emperor Tri Desongtsen, have built the temple of Kar-chung, among others, so that the shrines of the Three Precious Jewels are established. In these and other ways, the line of the royal family has enacted the Buddha's doctrine, and if this be never destroyed nor abandoned, goods beyond measure will result. But should it be abandoned, destroyed, or neglected, because there will be numberless evils, henceforth, for ever and ever, I shall do just as was written in edicts and pillar inscriptions during the lifetime of my father, the magically sagacious Tsenpo Tri Songdetsen, when the shrines of the Three Precious Jewels were established and the Buddha's doctrine was practiced with the vow of the royal line that it be neither abandoned nor destroyed, and this and such like were sworn by the Tsenpo, father and son, and the royal ministers altogether.<sup>6</sup>

If contemporary scholars have expressed some skepticism about Songtsen Gampo's commitment to Buddhism, the foregoing makes quite clear that his descendants were eager to regard his tolerance of the alien faith as a precedent for their own definite adoption of it, and to formulate official propaganda accordingly. The references to temples founded by the emperors Düsong and Tri Detsuktsen are intended to demonstrate the sustained religious commitment of the monarchy. The moment at which the dynasty's adherence to the faith in fact became fully explicit, however, may be dated only to 762, the year preceding the invasion of the Chinese capital, when the 20-year-old Tri Songdetsen experienced something like a conversion. In edicts later issued concerning the official adoption of the Indian religion, he explains this turn:

After the Tsenpo [my] father passed into heaven, some of the unclerministers had thoughts of rebellion. They destroyed the Buddha's Dharma that had been practiced since the time of [my] father and ancestors. They contended that it was not right to practice [according to] the god and religion of the foreigners to the south in the land of Tibet, and, moreover, they wrote a law forbidding its practice later on. Then, when I, the present Tsenpo, reached my twentieth year, at first there were evil prognostications and omens, and, whatever rites were supposed to be practiced, for many months the prognostications and omens [remained] evil. Thereupon, I abandoned as illegitimate the law that forbade the practice of the Buddha's Dharma, and ordered that worship of the Three Jewels be performed. At that, there was change for the good. Then, as delivered by a spiritual benefactor, I also heard the Dharma. The writings were also

brought before my eyes, whereupon I commanded that the Dharma of the Buddha be promulgated.<sup>7</sup>

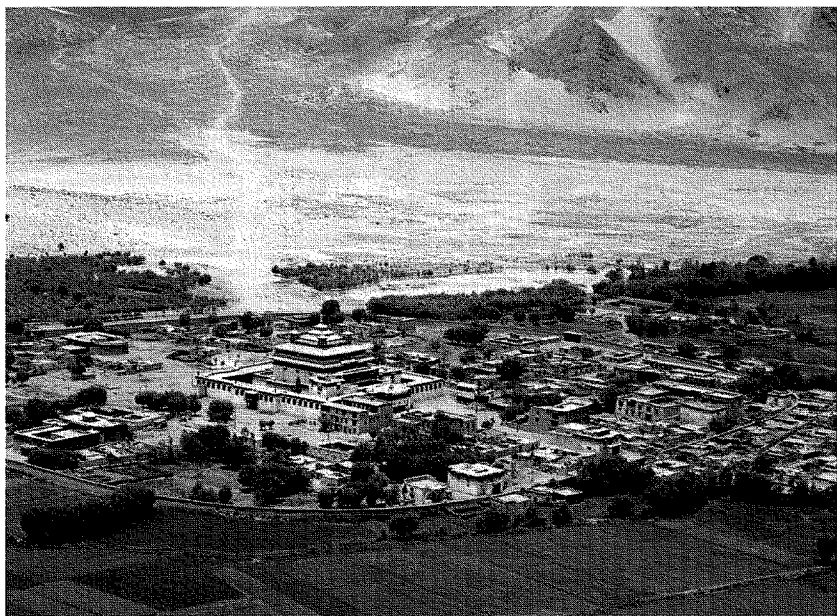
Tri Songdetsen went on to construct Tibet's first Buddhist monastery, Samyé (c. 779), and invited a learned Indian monk, the philosopher Shantarakshita, to ordain the first Tibetan Buddhist monks to be officially recognized as such by the court. (Some Tibetans may have been ordained earlier into the Khotanese sangha established by the princess of Jincheng.) To support the monks and their activities, particular villages and households were delegated the responsibility of supplying fixed amounts of foodstuffs and other necessities, in effect a tax imposed for the maintenance of the religion. As explained in the *Testament of Ba*, referring to the provisions made following the foundation of Samyé,

One hundred fifty households were assigned by the court to be the appanages of the religious community. In each year, the head of the sangha was to receive seventy-five loads of barley, nine sets of robes, 1,100 ounces of butter, a horse, four bales of paper, three measures of ink, and salt as needed. The twenty-five hermits of Chimpu were each granted fifty-five loads of barley, 800 ounces of butter, a horse, and six sets of robes . . .<sup>8</sup>

Allotments to monastic teachers, students, and those practicing meditation in retreat are similarly enumerated. As the number of monasteries and monks supported by the state increased and the quantities of goods designated for their upkeep were also inflated, the expense of maintaining the religion may have mushroomed to the point of unsustainability, given the considerable outlays also required by the empire's civil and military functions. There is some reason to believe that this in fact occurred during the reign of Relpachen (815–38).

The foundation of Samyé is said to have involved the intercession of Padmasambhava, a renowned tantric adept from Uddiyana to the northwest of India, whose services were required to quell the hostile spirits and divinities of Tibet, and to win their allegiance to Buddhism. Together the king Tri Songdetsen, the monk Shantarakshita, and the adept Padmasambhava came to be popularly revered as the trinity of the Tibetan conversion and so represent three of the major constituents of the Tibetan religious world: patron, monk, and tantric adept. Among them, Padmasambhava remains so obscure to historical research that it has even been proposed that he was an entirely mythical construction who in fact never lived. Though this extreme conclusion seems, in the light of the slim evidence that does exist, to be without merit, it does underscore that here, once again, the religious view of the past cannot be





**Figure 11** The monastery of Samyé, with its three-storey central temple representing Mt. Meru surrounded by the four continents and the world-system's outer retaining wall, as seen from Mt. Hepo, 1990.

readily reconciled with the demands of critical history. The tales of Padmasambhava's compassionate but wrathful intercession in the Tibetan world were elaborated in epic narratives that were revealed as "treasures" (*terma*) from the twelfth century onward, many centuries after the events that inspired them. These legends, however, came to play so great a role in Tibetan historical consciousness that they merit at least brief summarization here.

It is related that, after Shantarakshita had determined that the demonic disruption of the construction work at Samyé Monastery could be dispelled only by the occult powers of Padmasambhava, a royal mission was sent to Nepal to extend an invitation to him. Through his clairvoyance, however, he anticipated the envoys' arrival and so met them at the border, where he scattered to the winds the gold-dust they offered to him. As he advanced through Tibet, he was confronted by the fierce local divinities, who wished to obstruct his progress. Engaging them in magical combat, he converted them to become sworn protectors of Buddhism. On reaching central Tibet, Padmasambhava's charisma so overwhelmed the Tsenpo Tri Songdetsen that he, together with leading members of



**Figure 12** Padmasambhava as represented in a modern image at the “Temple of the Hat” (*Uru zhé lhakhang*) in the valley of Drigung, 2002.

the royal entourage, soon became devoted disciples. A lady of the court, Yeshé Tsogyel, was taken as Padmasambhava's consort and in the developed legends she herself is divinized, becoming the spiritual mother of the Tibetan people. For his part, Padmasambhava worked wonders so as to turn deserts into rich, irrigated fields. By marking the limits of Samyé's outer periphery with his ritual dance, he quelled the spirits that had obstructed the monastery's construction, whereupon a protective wall was erected following his steps. The temple was built and consecrated, and soon became an outstanding center of Buddhist learning.

Padmasambhava, however, by gaining the favor of the king, became an object of jealousy among certain factions of the aristocracy and these now plotted against him. The local divinities, too, although bound by oath to him, in some cases grew restive. With circumstances no longer propitious for his continued sojourn in Tibet, he traveled to the southern island of Chamara, where he will dwell as an immortal until the end of the present æon. Prior to his departure from Tibet, however, accompanied by Yeshé Tsogyal, he traveled over every inch of the Tibetan plateau, everywhere concealing spiritual treasures (*terma*) intended for particular needs in the

future. These treasures – images, ritual objects, and, above all, texts (for instance the celebrated *Testament of Pema* and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*) – would be rediscovered by his own Tibetan disciples, perpetually reincarnating as “treasure-revealers” (*tertön*). Their continuing activity is a sign of the Precious Guru (*Guru Rinpoché*) Padmasambhava's special love for the Tibetan people, a love that may also be activated when the devotee summons him through prayer from his fortress on the isle of Chamara.

The legends of Tri Songdetsen's conversion emphasize the marvellous tantric attainments of Padmasambhava as the key to Buddhism's success, though this is not at all the trend in the earliest documentation. Just what, then, was the appeal of Buddhism to the Tibetan imperial court? The great efforts made to establish Buddhist learning in the empire emphatically reflect the high value attributed to monastic, clerical Buddhism. With its trained scholars and scribes, its language sciences and methods of translation, its libraries and catalogues, its systematization of reasoning and debate, we can imagine that the Buddhist monastic academy provided medieval Tibet with an ideal model of organized knowledge. In a sprawling empire in which the management of information must have been felt as an ever more pressing concern, part of the attraction of Buddhism stemmed from its particular mastery over the arts of the written word, its mastery of reason. So long as Tibet had remained a relatively restricted domain, whose subjects held a common family of sacred powers in reverence and were subservient to the direct power of their chieftain, there was no need to seek a source of authority beyond what Tibetan tradition itself had to offer. The foundation of a universal state, however, ruling many diverse peoples and in active contact with many more, necessitated a framework of universal law, which Buddhism was able to supply. The legislative value of Buddhism was, therefore, disclosed in the course of Tibet's expansion into the world.

In this context, Buddhism had an important feature favoring it that the indigenous Tibetan royal cult did not: Buddhists, in effect, spoke an international language. Given the peculiar position of eighth-century Tibet, Buddhism would have been the most prominent cultural system known throughout the surrounding nations. Though Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam were all active in Central Asia, none of them made any appreciable impact on Tibetan consciousness at this time, though the first two were certainly to some extent known. The important presence of Buddhism in India and Nepal, China, and the Silk Road states, however, may well have contributed to an aura of universality. The significance of this became evident when the Tibetan monarchs

began to adopt Buddhist symbols and conventions for the exercise of royal authority; for Buddhism facilitated the symbolic expression of imperial power in a manner that could be understood not only within Tibet, but among subject populations and in neighboring realms. That something along these lines occurred is most clearly in evidence in connection with the esoteric cult of the cosmic Buddha Vairochana, whose icon is known to have been installed at places associated with royal authority throughout central Tibet and in the far eastern portions of the empire.

The translation of Buddhist canonical scriptures, undertaken by committees including both Tibetan monks and foreign Buddhist scholars, figured prominently among the monastic activities sponsored by the monarchy, and the scope of Tibetan translation activity, continuing under royal patronage into the mid-ninth century, grew to enormous proportions. In both quantitative and qualitative terms the achievement of the Tibetan translators must be ranked among the cultural monuments of the medieval world and the hundreds of texts translated into Tibetan by the imperial translation committees may be counted among the finest achievements of the art of translation in any place or time. The Tibetan translation canon, organized during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries into the complementary collections of the *Kangyur* ("translated scriptures") and *Tengyur* ("translated commentaries") and comprising over 300 large volumes in all, preserves numerous Indian and Chinese texts now otherwise lost. The availability of this very substantial corpus of translated literature profoundly influenced Tibetan thought and writing in all spheres, a topic that we shall have occasion to revisit in later chapters.

To avoid foreign loan-words, the approach adopted by the Tibetan translation committees was to forge new expressions in Tibetan as needed. Thus for the Sanskrit word *buddha*, the Tibetans coined *sang-gyé*, literally meaning "awakened and fully blossomed," basing their understanding of the term on explanations found in Indian Buddhist treatises. Similarly, Sanskrit *arhat* became Tibetan *drachompa*, "slayer of enemies" (the "enemies" here being ignorance and the passions), on the basis of a popular Indian folk etymology. Of course, the translation of the difficult literature of Indian Buddhism required much more than just a vocabulary; the grammar, syntax, and idiom of the original texts were closely studied to arrive at forms of expression that best approximated their meaning. In order to replicate the nuances of Sanskrit in Tibetan, it was therefore necessary to create a great many new forms of usage in Tibetan itself. The result, ultimately, was to enrich the growing Tibetan literary language, to create within it a medium for the exact expression of ideas in a wide range of fields of learning.

The decision to adopt Buddhism perhaps also led the ruler to withdraw support from the priests of the old religion, generally known today as Bön. Later sources, both Buddhist and Bönpo, concur that there was an active suppression of Bön at this time and that the Bönpo priesthood was effectively forced to the frontiers in exile. As a Buddhist historian recounts it,

The sovereign ordered the Bönpo to observe the true doctrine, but except for a few they disobeyed and transformed many [Buddhist] scriptures into Bön [scriptures]. When the king heard of this he had most of the Bönpo decapitated, but Guru Rinpoche said that the gods and demons of Tibet liked Bön and so allowed oracles and astrology, propitiation of divinities, and rites which summon wealth to remain as they were. He subdued all the others and banished those Bönpo from the realm to the frontiers, along with their tambourines for drums, *shang* [a type of small gong] for instruments, fox-skin caps for hats, "Phajo" ["papa"] for a name, and donkeys for transport.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this, however, there is sufficient evidence of the continuing practice in court circles of rites tied to the old religion so that we may conclude such reports as these to be the products of pious exaggeration.

During the 780s, and perhaps earlier, Tri Songdetsen's armies consolidated their conquest of Dunhuang, the major Silk Road entrepôt and center of Chinese Buddhism. A famed Chinese Chan Buddhist master, named Moheyan, was invited to central Tibet, where he attracted a following that included members of the royal family. The Chan teaching, however, was regarded by some as controversial, for they saw in Moheyan's rhetoric of immediate enlightenment a challenge to the rational, step-by-step approach of Indian Buddhist Mahayana that was being promoted at Samyé with royal favor. As a result, the Chinese teacher became involved in a debate or discussion at Samyé with Shantarakshita's disciple, the philosopher Kamalashila. Documents describing the opposing perspectives of the two factions differ as to just who emerged victorious, and their debate may well have been in effect a ritual performance that ended in polite accolades for both sides. Nevertheless, later historians revile Moheyan as representing an irrational doctrine of mystical intuition and regard the Indian Kamalashila's emphasis upon the gradual cultivation of the virtues of a bodhisattva as the enduring paradigm to be emulated by Tibetan Buddhists. Though they insist that Tri Songdetsen actually banned the Chan teaching, the evidence suggests that, on the contrary, it continued to thrive in parts of the Tibetan empire, perhaps even with some measure of imperial support.

The Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang continued for roughly three-quarters of a century, leaving an important legacy in Tibetan cultural history. One result was the preservation there of numerous Tibetan manuscripts, whose discovery in 1907 provides our richest source of Tibetan documentation for the history and culture of the late first millennium. Among these documents one finds a brief account of the life of a Tibetan master of Chan, who was active in the region of Amdo during the early ninth century and whose career reveals something of the international character of Tibetan Buddhism at this time:

The monk Puk Yeshé Wangpo renounced the world during the time of the ancestral king [Tri Songdetsen]. He studied the doctrine in seminary and then, relying upon the transmissions and precepts of his spiritual benefactor and upon his own experiential cultivation, he entered into retreat. Having meditated for more than fifty years, he became confident. . . . In accord with the transmissions and precepts of his spiritual benefactor and with his own meditations, he juxtaposed [his understanding] with the sources, Indian, Chinese, and Tibetan.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar vein, the Dunhuang documents record the activities of his contemporary, the prolific translator Gö Chödrup (or Facheng, as he was known in Chinese), who was a noted master of both Chinese and Sanskrit, besides his native Tibetan. Thanks to the broad learning of monks like these, the Buddhism of the empire was unmistakably cosmopolitan in nature.

Despite the many successes of Tri Songdetsen's reign, which achieved Tibetan expansion at the expense of Tang China and witnessed the beginnings of what would become the international culture of Tibetan Buddhism, this great sovereign was unable to ensure a smooth succession to the throne. He may have abdicated in about 797, but there then followed a bizarre series of events, obscuring the governance of Tibet (at least to our present historical vision) until 804, when his younger son Tri Desongtsen was installed as Tsenpo.

Tri Songdetsen's eldest son and first successor, Muné Tsenpo, is recalled in later sources as a devout Buddhist layman, who established an important cycle of religious festivals at the main temples and monasteries of central Tibet that is still observed at present: the worship service of the Vinaya at Lhasa, that of the Abhidharma at Tramdruk (near Tsetang), and those of the Sutras and Manifest Enlightenment at Samyé. A quaint legend tells us that he thrice sought to equalize the differences among his rich and poor subjects, but that each time, before the year was out, the rich became once more rich, while the poor lapsed back into habit-

ual poverty. (Contemporary Tibetans sometimes say that this early experiment with communism had them convinced early on that Mao's revolution would arrive at much the same end.) In all events, Muné Tsenpo's efforts to create a Buddhist utopia are said to have ended when he was poisoned to death by his own mother, Tsepongza, an aristocrat who favored the old religion over Buddhism. No evidence, it must be stressed, of these tales is to be found in pre-twelfth-century documents. Nevertheless, in the *Testament of Wa*, a work that may date to the eleventh century and certainly incorporates earlier materials, we read an interesting account of a debate between Buddhist and Bönpo priests as to who among them should perform the last rites for Tri Songdetsen. It is Muné Tsenpo who presides over the dispute and decides its outcome in favor of the Buddhists.

Muné Tsenpo was to have been succeeded by his brother Muruk Tsenpo, but the latter is said to have been banished owing to his murder of the son of a noble. Although some of the ministers sought to lift the ban in order to permit him to assume the throne, those associated with his victim's clan were still vengeful and so had him assassinated before he could be crowned. Whether true or not, the story nicely illustrates the dependence of the Tibetan monarch upon the consent of the peers. Following this debacle, the succession passed to the youngest brother, Mutik Tsenpo, who was designated Tsenpo under the regnal title Tri Desongtsen (r. 804–15). The historical record, at this point, becomes relatively clear once again.

Interestingly, there is little evidence that the years of instability at the center had any direct impact upon the conduct of the affairs of Tibet's Inner Asian empire. Here ongoing struggle was the rule and military operations were in the hands of the local commanders. The most important of the colonial administrators, such as the *délön* in the north-eastern territories, no doubt functioned as imperial viceroys, who depended little on the central court for the immediate governance of their domains. The Tsenpo gave them legitimacy and perhaps there was little more that they really required.

Under Tri Songdetsen's greatest successors, Tri Desongtsen and Tri Relpachen (or Tri Tsukdetsen, r. 815–38), Buddhism continued to flourish with ever-increasing royal patronage. The education of the rulers was entrusted to the clergy and high-ranking monks were rewarded by the court with ministerial appointments and the stewardship of important estates. The continuation of the Karchung inscription, whose preamble was cited earlier, reveals the monarch's unambiguous religious commitment, together with some of its entailments for government:

The Tsenpo and his descendants, from the time they are little, until they act as lords of the realm, shall be appointed a spiritual benefactor from among the *bhikshus*, who will teach them the doctrine until they have mastered it; and thus the gate through which all Tibet learns and practices the doctrine will not be closed. At no time will the gate through which the Tibetan subjects, from the nobles on down, enter into liberation be shut, so that those with faith may enter into liberation. Among them, according to capability, Lineage Heirs of the Transcendent Lord will always be appointed, and those who act as Lineage Heirs shall do all that is enjoined in the teaching, beginning with [turning] the wheel of the doctrine [that is, preaching]. Demonstrating the deeds and powers enjoined by the wheel of the doctrine, they will be appointed to act as spiritual benefactors.

Those who have come forth [as monks] will be treated as objects of worship, as they have been by us, father and son. In the palace of the Tsenpo, the shrines of the Three Precious Jewels are established, and worship [of them] is never abandoned, nor restricted . . . In the palace of the Tsenpo and in the realm of Tibet, there will be no absence of the Three Precious Jewels, nor means to abandon them whatever. And so, as has been appropriate throughout the generations of ancestors and descendants, the properties assigned to support the Three Precious Jewels are to be neither diminished nor destroyed. This is made a principle, authorized in accordance with registration in the record of divine and royal estates. Henceforth, in every generation, the Tsenpo, father and son, shall swear to do just this. That we shall not renege on that oath, nor shall we change it, we pray be witnessed by all supramundane and mundane gods and spirits. Thus the Tsenpo and all the lord's ministers do swear to this oath.<sup>11</sup>

The extensive translation activity that had been begun under Tri Songdetsen continued, too, under his successors, and efforts to standardize the translations and their terminology were pursued by both Tri Desongtsen and Relpachen. Despite its beginnings as an artificially contrived idiom, the language of Buddhist scriptural translation, with only small modifications, became the basis of the classical Tibetan literary language as it has been employed down to the present day. The close relationship between the political and religious dimensions of Tibetan imperial authority, and their connection to questions of language, may be seen in the preamble to the *Two Fascicle Lexicon*, a bilingual glossary of Buddhist terminology that was prepared by order of the throne:

In the horse year (814) the Emperor Tri Desongtsen dwelt in the Önchango palace in Kyi. The old armies of east and west had been rotated and the brigands quelled. The messengers of the Karluk offered homage. The Great Ministers Zhang Trizur Ramshag, Mangjé Lhalö and others brought much tribute from the territories, and offered most of the camels, horses



and cattle to His Majesty. As a follow-up to the awards that he granted to each according to rank from *zhanglön* down, he gave his command that the Bactrian preceptors Acharya Jinamitra, Surendrabodhi, Shilendrabo-dhi, Danashila and Bodhimitra, and the Tibetan preceptors Ratnarakshita and Dharmatashila, and those who had become master translators, including Jñanasena, Jayarakshita, Mañjushrivarma and Ratnendrashila, should write a catalogue of the Tibetan translations and coinages deriving from the Sanskrit of the Great and Lesser Vehicles, saying, "Make it fit to be learned by all, so that they never depart from those textual traditions."<sup>12</sup>

With the acts and edicts of Tri Desongtsen, it is clear that Buddhism had by now become fully integral to the Tibetan polity and its diplomacy. The empire, like all empires, extended and secured its frontiers through aggression and filled its coffers with plunder and the harvest of rigorous taxation. Nevertheless, it had made of itself a holy empire, whose patronage of the Buddhist religion brought to it an ethos of learning and ethical refinement that to some degree leavened the harsh means whereby it had been won.

## The Empire's Implosion

Tibet had begun to seize control of much of what is today Xinjiang during the mid- and late seventh century and by stages came to hold sway over several of the important stations of the Silk Road, including the city-state of Khotan. By the late eighth century Dunhuang and neighboring territories in the Gansu Corridor, where trade routes converged before entering China proper, had fallen to Tibet. The Tibetans were thus planted between Tang-dynasty China and whatever powers to the west China might have been politically or commercially engaged with, whether Arab, Iranian, Turk, or other. Throughout the second decade of the ninth century events in the region were punctuated by shifting alliances and warfare among the Tibetans, Uighur Turks, and Chinese. During this period, the Uighur empire repeatedly petitioned the Tang court for a princess to marry the Uighur khan and thereby to seal an alliance between the two empires. The request was granted toward the end of the decade, and was quickly interpreted by the Tibetans – no doubt correctly – as ratifying a strategic partnership whose aim was primarily to force the Tibetans out of the Gansu corridor by exerting pressure from both east and west simultaneously. The Tibetan response was fast and furious, and the "pacified West" and adjacent areas were soon plunged into intensive warfare. Beginning in 821, a series of treaties between China and Tibet,

and between Tibet and the Uighurs, were negotiated, aiming primarily to stabilize and reaffirm the integrity of the frontiers, and to restore harmonious relations between the Tibetan and Tang courts. The treaty of 821–2 is especially well known due to its preservation in the bilingual “uncle–nephew pillar inscription” (*ön-zhang doring*) in Lhasa, which emphasizes the quasi-familial rapport that had over the generations been ceremonially formed between the ruling houses of China and Tibet. Among the terms of the accord, it states,

Tibet and China will henceforth preserve the territories and boundaries as established at present. Everything to the east [of the frontier] is the land of greater China, while all to the west is the land of greater Tibet. There is to be no hostility transgressing that frontier, nor are armies to be led there.<sup>13</sup>

The wars that had preceded this peace had been mercilessly fought, inflicting great hardships and numerous casualties upon the contested regions of Gansu. The documents discovered at Dunhuang reveal that the Tibetan leadership was sufficiently appalled to construct a memorial temple, called the “Temple of the Treaty Edict,” which was dedicated with a special service of contrition. In the surviving texts the prayers offered as part of this service explicitly refer to the Tibetan leaders: the confession is performed in order to expiate the sins of all beings beginning with “the Lord of Tibet, his ministers and entourage.”<sup>14</sup> The significance of this is underscored elsewhere in the prayers, above all in those offered by the Pacification Minister (*delön*), where the merit of edifying the temple is called upon to purify the sins of battle, particularly the sins accruing from the massacre that accompanied the sack of the city of Khartsen (Ch. Liangzhou).

Despite uncertainties surrounding many points of detail, these events would be generally remembered in post-imperial Tibetan historiography, which would recall that a temple was built as an act of contrition at this time. The Fifth Dalai Lama discusses this history in his famous *Chronicle*, and it may be seen accordingly illustrated in the murals of the Potala Palace, where one finds the frontier wars of the early ninth century as rendered by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century artists, as well as a painting of the pillar engraved with the copy of the “uncle–nephew pillar inscription” that was said to have been erected at the frontier between the two empires. The latter panel makes a visual allusion to the famous metaphor comparing the Chinese emperor and the Tibetan Tsenpo to the sun and moon, together holding dominion over all under heaven. This image had its origin in the treaty inscription of 821–2 itself, where it is written that the newly established peace between China and Tibet shall

be such that "the report of its fame will embrace all that is touched by sun or moon."<sup>15</sup> The planting of a treaty-pillar at the frontier, moreover, seems confirmed by a passage in the Dunhuang prayers of contrition mentioned above:

Having established Great Tibet, China and the Uighur, in an age of happiness in each of their respective countries, the Chinese and Uighur requested that there be a governmental peace council, and, as if among men of a single household, a treaty for a common peace with the powers of China and the Uighur was made in the auspicious land of the Turquoise Grove at Dega, the peace-council plain. Thereupon, as a sign of its truth, so that the limits of government would be perpetually unshaken and firm, and forever trusted by the many, it was inscribed upon a stone pillar.<sup>16</sup>

The conduct of these wars had no doubt been costly and, as the terms of the treaties seem to suggest, they marked the end of the era of Tibetan expansion in Inner Asia. The acquisition of new sources of revenue was thus curtailed. At the same time Relpachen is generally credited with increasing the amount of religious expenditure, providing more generous state allotments to the clergy, according to rank. He is also remembered for having enacted harsh measures to ensure that there be universal public respect for Buddhism:

In the reign of the sovereign Tri Relpachen, the religious law became extremely severe . . . Those who looked askance, or pointed threateningly, at the monastic communities had their eyes gouged out, hands cut off, and so forth. Many were thus punished.<sup>17</sup>

This, however, seems a characteristic exaggeration of later legend. Not that punishments in Tibet were not harsh; mutilation of criminals was still practiced in the twentieth century, so there is no reason to suppose that it was not during the eighth. However, as the "uncle-nephew pillar inscription" itself demonstrates, rites to seal the treaty described there were in fact performed in accord with the conventions of the old religion with the Tsenpo's support, and these involved oaths sworn in blood.<sup>18</sup> Given this, the disavowal of Buddhism by itself was not likely to have been an offense. It is, nevertheless, plausible that behavior deemed abusive toward the monks was liable to strict sanction. In all events, Relpachen's religious policy seems at the least to have contributed to fiscal crisis, by awarding generous grants to the monasteries at a time when economic restraint was what was required.

According to the traditional accounts, the fall of the Tibetan empire was due to the apostasy of the king Üdumten, better known to posterity

as Lang Darma, "Darma the Ox." He is first said to have eliminated his brother, the monarch Tri Relpachen, in a *coup d'état* in 838, with the aid of factions favoring a return to the old religion. To ensure the success of their plot, the conspirators first forced the king to banish his own elder brother, the devout Buddhist Tsangma, and they denounced the monk-minister Trenka Pelgi Yönten as the secret lover of one of the queens, Chokroza. With the court plunged into disarray owing to these rumors, the lady took her own life, and the minister and king were assassinated soon after. (In later times, the vengeful ghost of the wrongly accused monk would be considered the cause of much trouble in central Tibet.) The usurper is said then to have turned against Buddhism itself, persecuting the monks and closing the monasteries. As the Sakyapa master Sonam Tsemo, writing in 1167, relates it,

[Relpachen] had a younger brother, called Lang Darma, whose mind came to despise the Buddha's teaching owing to the force of unvirtue practiced in earlier lifetimes. He debased the status of the Precious Jewels, and caused the teaching to decline. But even then the temples stood, and some embers of the teaching remained, so that the bodhisattva named Pelgyi Dorjé killed the sinful king and then flew off miraculously to Khotan.<sup>19</sup>

The tale of Lhalung Pelgi Dorjé's assassination of Lang Darma is among the most popular of Tibetan legends and, whether or not it is based upon fact, it is certain that the presumed assassin was a historical personage who for a time held the rank of head of the Tibetan Buddhist sangha. It is said that he disguised himself in the attire of a Bönpo sorcerer, with black cape and riding a black steed, who came before the king to dance in his honor. Drawing a bow and arrow from beneath his robes, he slew the apostate monarch and then fled, but the search parties sent to pursue him could find no trace of a black rider. For his cloak was reversible and his white mount had been dyed with soot. In making his escape he had plunged into the river, washing the horse clean and at the same time reversing his cloak. A black rider, therefore, murdered the king, but it was a white knight who rode away in his stead.

Despite this, the earliest available sources by no means establish that the persecution of Buddhism by Lang Darma, a crucial event for later Tibetan historical consciousness, ever in fact occurred. Several scholars have now argued that little more than a reduction of patronage may have been at stake, and there is some evidence suggesting that Lang Darma himself was initially a Buddhist king, who enjoyed the good wishes of the clergy. It seems possible that the persecution, despite its great importance in later thought, was in essence a withdrawal of funding, no doubt due to

a poor current-accounts balance rather than to anti-Buddhist sentiment, that came to be very much exaggerated in its retellings.

One may note, however, that the change in policy toward Buddhism – whether it entailed an actual persecution or merely a withdrawal of patronage – offers one more remarkable example of the synchronicity between events in Tibet and in Tang China. For a critique was mounted during the mid-ninth century of the official favor that had been granted to Buddhism by the Tang court and this culminated in 845 with a persecution during which thousands of monasteries were closed and their monks forced to return to lay life. The main objections to the Buddhist institutions had been their role in removing men from eligibility to military conscription and from tax obligations, together with the withdrawal from circulation of the considerable wealth that the monasteries had come to control. Given this history we can by no means exclude the possibility that, as in China, there was a real persecution of Buddhist establishments in Tibet. (Let us recall in this context that it is generally agreed that Tibetan lay Buddhist adepts were mostly left untouched by Lang Darma's persecution, which is said to have been directed solely at the monastic institutions.)

Regardless of the veracity of the traditions concerning the persecution, a fundamental question remains: how ought we to understand the collapse of a power that had successfully ruled much of Inner Asia for two centuries? For if religious dispute was the key issue, it seems unlikely that this alone would have undermined a state that was in other respects thriving. In all probability, however, it was no longer prosperous, so that the major culprit was no doubt the economy. The Tibetan empire, like other ancient and medieval imperial regimes, grew rich through a process of expansion, consuming the available surplus in newly conquered territories, and using that surplus to reward its court, administration, and armies, and thereby to fund further conquest. The maintenance of a positive balance in the treasury depended upon the appropriation of new territories to supplement the exploitation of an insufficient stock of available resources. One result was that, when the pace of expansion slowed and eventually ground to a halt, as it did in the wake of the treaties of 821–3, the imperial coffers must have been gradually emptied. Luxury spending – and this included patronage of the non-productive activities of monasteries, translation projects, etc. – was curtailed, and officers paid with IOUs became restless. Insolvency, we may speculate, was the real basis for the Tibetan empire's fall.

Though Tibetan histories sometimes represent Lang Darma's assassination as bringing an abrupt end to the empire he ruled, the decline

began in earnest only after some years had passed and then progressed in a piecemeal fashion over a period of several decades. Here we must recall that regicide had been a regular occurrence throughout the history of the dynasty without ever having threatened its end. One traditional history even devotes an entire chapter to the violent deaths of kings and princes.<sup>20</sup> On this occasion, however, the northeastern province of the empire broke away before a decade had passed, and the Chinese were therefore at last able to reassert their control of the Gansu corridor. In the center, Darma's son Ösung, who had been enthroned as an infant, appears to have remained at least nominally in power, though rebellions soon began to erupt. Ösung, notably, remained a Buddhist and continued to find means to patronize the construction of modest temples in central Tibet. One of these, the small shrine of Jasa not far from the dynasty's original home in Yarlung, survived until the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. It housed an important image of the Buddha Vairochana, confirming the continuity of royal cult even after Lang Darma's reign.

As the empire crumbled, central Tibet was wracked by a series of uprisings. These began in about 869, according to traditional accounts, and swept away the last vestiges of unified monarchal rule. The restless ghost of Relpachen's minister, Pelgi Yönten, was held to have been one of the major causes of the agitation. The memory of these events was summarized by the Fifth Dalai Lama:

As for the rebellions, they began like the flight of a single bird in the sky, which then arouses many other birds to gather until their numbers cause harm. So it was that at first there was an uprising in Kham. The reason for this was that the minister Trenka Pelgi Yönten, who though guiltless had been punished, was reborn as an evil spirit and instigated many venomous demons who then drove men mad. As Khutön explains it in his treatise, it was after these rebellions that the royal mausoleums were burglarized and destroyed.<sup>21</sup>

In the wake of this disintegration of authority, we find the clans that had enjoyed ministerial rank under the empire dominating particular regions of the country. In Tsang, in the region of Lhatsé, Dro and Chokro come to the fore. In Nyemo, to the west of Lhasa, Nyang and Nang seize power, while farther north, in Penyül, the Ma clan holds sway. Yarlung, the original seat of the empire, is now governed by Chim and Nyak, and Lhodrak, to the south, is controlled by Nyiwa and Shüpu. This process of balkanization appears to embrace all parts of late ninth century Tibet about which some knowledge remains. Nevertheless, soon afterwards we find a number of local rulers all claiming descent from the dynasty and

all retaining the old imperial title of Tsenpo (or its variant form, *tsépo*). The claim was perhaps legitimate in some cases, as we shall see in the following chapter, but it seems equally plausible that in the post-imperial competition to secure regional domination, strongmen aspiring to kingship were not above inventing royal genealogies for themselves.

The end of the Tibetan empire, therefore, was not a sudden event, but a process of progressive disintegration that continued for a half-century or more. Many of the local potentates who during the tenth century ruled various parts of Tibet seem to have regarded themselves as successors to the old monarchy and to have maintained at least some attenuated allegiance to its traditions, for instance in continuing to patronize Buddhism so far as their resources allowed. A Dunhuang manuscript of the mid- or late tenth century thus speaks of an Indian Buddhist visitor to the courts of "all the Tsenpos" and seems altogether unaware that any great rupture had taken place at all.<sup>22</sup>

The Tibetan empire created a unique civilizational sphere, geographically embracing the Tibetan plateau, but also extending beyond it. Within this great realm it succeeded in establishing Tibetan as *lingua franca*, while instituting a legal and moral order focusing upon the sacralized monarchy of the Tsenpo and the primacy of the Buddhist religion. With the empire's collapse the actual political sway of the remaining central Tibetan powers was reduced to that of limited, local authority, but the imperial aura was never wholly dispelled. In the wake of the Tibetan empire, therefore, Tibet was left with a political domain in fragments, but with an imaginal polity that nevertheless embraced the whole broken realm.

# Fragmentation and Hegemonic Power

The long period from the mid-ninth-century collapse of the Tibetan empire down to the formation of the government of the Fifth Dalai Lama some seven centuries later began with political fragmentation and civil conflict, giving way to the reemergence of more or less durable regimes that succeeded in dominating large parts of the country from the thirteenth century onwards. The first of these, the Sakyapa hegemony of the late thirteenth–mid-fourteenth century, rose to power through the interventions of China's Mongol rulers, who governed the eastern portions of an empire that at its peak stretched from Poland to the Pacific. The period of Mongol–Sakyapa rule therefore represents the first instance of sustained foreign engagement in Tibetan affairs, though during the three centuries that followed, corresponding roughly to the Ming dynasty in China (1368–1644), Tibet remained effectively independent, if plagued by endemic civil strife.

Although Tibet's imperial glories were a thing of the past during the age discussed in this chapter, a cultural renaissance beginning toward the end of the tenth century brought new vigor to Tibetan religion and philosophy, as well as to art, literature, and medicine, which achieved much of their classical expression during the period discussed here. The renewed patronage of religious culture was at first particularly noteworthy in the kingdom of Gugé in western Tibet, which rose to prominence in the late tenth century. Owing to the initiative and the prestige of Tibet's increasingly powerful Buddhist leadership, it was during this same period of political disunity that Tibetan Buddhism established an international presence in Inner Asian culture generally, eventually playing a key role in the formation of Tibet's relations – cultural, political, and economic – with China, Mongolia, and neighboring lands. Tibetan religious leaders now often acted in a diplomatic as well as reli-



gious capacity, and the framework for interaction with foreign rulers came to be thought of as a “priest–patron” relationship, a model that seems first to have emerged when Tibetan Buddhist teachers gained the support of the Western Xia dynasty in northwestern China during the twelfth century.

## Dynastic Successors and the Kingdom of Gugé

Traditional Tibetan accounts often accentuate the rapidity and thoroughness of the empire’s collapse following Lang Darma. They depict the period of some four centuries until the formation of the Sakyapa hegemony in the thirteenth century as a “time of fragmentation” (*silbü dü*), during which the rise of the kingdom of Gugé, corresponding roughly to the territory of the old Zhangzhung kingdom in western Tibet, provides one of the bright spots illuminating an otherwise dark age in Tibetan political history. The century or so intervening between the persecution of Buddhism attributed to Lang Darma and the tenth-century Buddhist revival was, in particular, held to be a period of cultural eclipse, when learning and letters were all but unknown.

Nevertheless, although it is true that Tibet was politically fragmented from the late ninth century until the late thirteenth, a variety of polities that considered themselves successors to the old monarchy did attempt to maintain elements of its religious and cultural commitments. The continuity of the old royal line and of its patronage of Buddhism is in evidence in one of the earliest surviving historical narratives concerning the period in question, the Sakyapa master Sonam Tsemo’s *Introduction to the Doctrine* written in 1167. He summarizes the history of the post-imperial decline of monastic Buddhism and its revival during the early tenth century:

The son of king [Lang Darma] was called Tri Namdé Ösung, who divided the kingdom with his younger brother, Yumten. During their lifetimes, three *bhikshus* named Tsang Rapsel, Yo Gejung, and Mar Shakyamuni dwelt in the wilderness retreat of Dentik, in the valley of the Yellow River in the realm of Domé [in modern Qinghai]. At that time, in that very region, there appeared one who, though born into a Bönpo family, was a bodhisattva of devoted conduct and he was named Gongpasel. Gaining faith in the Buddha’s teaching, he was fully ordained by the three *bhikshus*, together with the Chinese monks Keng-wang, Gim-phag and Da-po. In these and other ways, the teaching spread somewhat in the realm of Domé.<sup>1</sup>

Chinese records of the Song dynasty confirm for us that Tibetans inhabiting the areas surrounding the upper reaches of the Yellow River were indeed devoted adherents of Buddhism during the tenth century. The role played by the Chinese monks in Gongpasel's ordination no doubt reflects the social-historical fact that, as the study of the Dunhuang documents has also shown, Tibetan-speaking Buddhist communities in and around Tibet's far northeastern frontiers were not solely made up of ethnic Tibetans, but included ethnic Chinese and others as well. From the central Tibetan perspective, however, the important part of the story was less the apparently flourishing state of Tibetan Buddhist culture along the Sino-Tibetan marches than it was the role this played in subsequently fostering the revival of Buddhist institutions in Tibet's central districts. Sonam Tsemo's account thus continues:

During the life of King Ösung's son Tri Pelkortsan, Menlung and eight other temples in tranquil places were built. It was during this time that two men of Tsang and two men of Ü traveled to Domé where they received their vows . . . Because of them, the teaching returned to Ü and Tsang, where each built a temple and caused it to flourish.<sup>2</sup>

As this shows, the old royal commitment to Buddhism had by no means disappeared. What had been lost was the continuous transmission of the Vinaya, the code of monastic discipline and the basis for ordination in the Buddhist order. The men who journeyed from central Tibet and Tsang would have received not just their vows when they traveled to Domé, but also substantial donations. Their return to central Tibet is taken as marking the beginning of the "later dispensation of the teaching" (*tenpa chidar*) in contrast with the "prior dispensation" (*ngadar*) of the eighth and ninth centuries.

Tibetans in the far northeast, close to trade routes linking China with Inner Asia and places further west, were relatively prosperous and could afford to be generous patrons, as Chinese sources suggest. The largesse of Buddhist donors in the Gansu corridor and neighboring regions, moreover, was not restricted by the ethnicity of either sponsors or those sponsored, for the Buddhist culture of the Silk Road was, as we have seen earlier, thoroughly cosmopolitan. Thus, a late tenth century Dunhuang Tibetan manuscript describes Devaputra, an Indian teacher who passed through Suzhou, to the east of Dunhuang, as having been "greatly honored with worship from the lord of that land, the two sections of the sangha, the company of yogins bearing rosaries, and all the patrons of Suzhou."<sup>3</sup> The revival of Tibetan monasticism, therefore, reflects not just the themes that are stressed in the traditional tale – the persecution of

Buddhism and the renewed motivation of spiritual persons some time later – but transformations in trade and the economy as well.

In the preceding chapter we saw that the breakdown of the old empire was in part due to its inability to continue territorial growth and the economic deficit that resulted. For Tibet, like other ancient and medieval empires, used the proceeds of conquest to pay for its armies, administration, and luxuries (including Buddhist monasteries and massive translation projects), so that in the absence of ongoing expansion it became necessary to reduce these large outlays. The short-term solution was no doubt to impose a heavy tax burden on the empire's existing territories, in an effort to maintain the level of income to which the state had grown accustomed, but at some point the available surplus would have been diminished. The outer provinces were then in effect left to fend for themselves, and under the pressure of aggressive neighbors fell out of the Tsenpo's realm. This is precisely what seems to have occurred in the Dunhuang region, for instance, where local forces cast off Tibetan rule in 848, while the contiguous parts of Tibet's far northeast became effectively independent as well.

Wealth in Tibet was based in the first instance upon the accumulation of a surplus of relatively durable goods and the liberation of labor that surplus production entailed. The staple commodities included barley and other grains produced by cultivators; dried meat, butter, hides, and wool from the nomads; and a variety of forest and mineral products, including some high-value items such as musk, which even in early medieval times was in demand as far away as Western Europe for the manufacture of perfumes. The hagiography of the eleventh-century saint Dzeng, for instance, tells us that, in order to acquire provisions with which to live as a disciple of his teacher Bagom, he

went to sell one pot of ale . . . and get payment for it, but instead he received a nun's robe. He divided up the woollen patches of which it was made, sold them and collected ale for offerings, *torma* [cakes made of barley flour and used as religious offerings], five measures of barley, and a meat carcass.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, given conditions of relative prosperity, the most essential goods were sufficiently plentiful to support his discipleship without the need to devote much time and effort to making a living. In later times, too, an agricultural surplus was often available. The observations of European visitors to Tibet during the early twentieth century indicate that in better-off districts grain accumulated for as much as a century served as insurance against poor harvests.

Given the availability of adequate sustenance and possibilities for trade, the labor freed from basic food production found outlets chiefly in commerce, in military service, in professional and semi-professional begging, and in religious and cultural activities. The tenth-century Tibetan revival of monasticism no doubt reflects in part an economic recovery in central Tibet following the disruptions that accompanied the empire's collapse. However, absent the rise of a new imperial power, military service may have played a less prominent role in generating employment for available labor; monasticism and trade (and often the two together) now became the major vehicles for the absorption and reinvestment of Tibet's natural and human capital. (We may note, in addition, that militant, armed monastic communities were by no means unknown.) The activities of commerce and religion tended to complement one another in traditional Buddhist societies, for the profit gained through trade could be directly converted into the symbolic wealth of religious merit by supporting monastic communities, while monasteries, as relatively stable institutions and centers of learning, provided clerical skills and basic banking facilities, in addition to the prestige value that attached to them.

The circulation of monks seeking teachings, engaging in missionary activities, and raising funds for their monasteries thus went hand in hand with the growth of trade. The strong partnership between Buddhist monastics and merchants had been part of the character of the religion from its very foundations, when the Buddha received the support of such princes of early Indian commerce as Anathapindada, and Buddhism's later international success, particularly in the trade-dependent city-states of the Silk Road, such as Khotan, continued to reflect this. Buddhist ethical order, with its emphasis on scrupulous attention to merits and demerits (the former often quantified precisely in terms of donations of cash and kind to the monasteries), tended to favor the rationalization of human activity in terms that were congenial to commercial interests. A late reflection of this may be seen in the nineteenth-century autobiography of Shabkar, who reports that, after his public teachings in western Tibet,

Food, wealth and riches rained down on me: Dorjé Wangchuk of Limi offered 50 *zho* of gold. The rich lady of Lhongö offered 15 *zho* of gold. [1 *zho* = roughly 1 gram.] The rich man of Log-pa, the rich man of Gyashang, the military commander of Kyitang, and the other rich men of Purang offered 15, 20 or 30 *zho* of gold each; and those who were without still offered 2 or 3 *zho* of gold each, or whatever clothing, jewelry, wealth or objects they could afford. Just the gold I was offered came to a whole horseload altogether. Moreover, I received 30 *tamkas* [large coins] of gold;

100 big and small silver amulet boxes; 5 silver mandalas, large and small; 2 silver lamps; 3 trays for offering-cakes; 80 pearl and coral earrings; a bag full of turquoise, coral, and amber headresses; 43 new silk and flannel robes; 10 old ones; 25 good horses; and 2 mules. Also, innumerable persons offered silver *tamkas* and ingots, woolen blankets, cotton cloth, and ceremonial scarves.<sup>5</sup>

What is remarkable here is not just the quantity involved, but the author's interest in quantification, in bearing witness in concrete terms to the precise measure of the merit earned by his generous devotees.

The revival of Tibetan monasticism, therefore, as was achieved by the newly ordained monks who had returned to central Tibet from Domé during the mid-tenth century, can be taken as a sign of a general economic recovery and the renewal of profitable exchange. It was not long before western Tibet, too, with its links to Kashmir to the west and Nepal and central India to the south and east (connections that were no doubt reinforced by pilgrimage routes leading to Mt. Kailash), as well as its relative proximity to the Silk Road further north, saw similar developments through which cultural vigor and economic vitality could again reinforce one another.

During this same period it is not surprising, therefore, to find new mutations of Tibet's power structure, whereby princely households sought to make good on claims to royal blood, while not neglecting to seek other sources of justification wherever these would bolster their authority. The two sons of King Pelkortsén, mentioned above, both migrated west, apparently forced from their central Tibetan domain by rival princes, some of whom also claimed descent from Lang Darma. The eldest of Pelkortsén's sons, Tri Trashi Tsekpapel, came to the western part of Tsang province, known as Latö, while his younger brother, Kyidé Nyimagön, moved to the far western area of Ngari, where he established the line that would dominate there and in adjacent regions for generations. His adoption of the principle of divided inheritance, however, did much to limit the success of his dynasty, for his legacy to his sons – Det-sukgön, Trashigön and Pelgigön – was not a unified kingdom but three separate principalities. His elder sibling, Tri Trashi Tsekpapel, also produced three heirs, named Peldé, Ödé, and Kyidé.

At the same time a similar process of mini-state formation was occurring in central Tibet. The royal genealogies of the period speak of numerous princely households descended from a second son of Lang Darma, called Yumten, and these were the families held responsible for the exile of Ösung's descendants, the sons of Pelkortsén. A difficult problem in Tibetan historiography emerges in this context, too convoluted to be treated with

much clarity in the summary discussion given here, but meriting a brief outline nevertheless.

The evidence surrounding Prince Yumten is by all accounts vague and inconsistent. His name (which means "mother-dependent") inspired fanciful explanations in traditional Tibetan sources, but it can also be seen as the result of scribal error in the transcription of Lang Darma's own proper regnal title, Üdumten. Hence it has been proposed that no such person in fact ever lived, that Yumten was merely a fiction. Nevertheless, the Chinese annals do speak of Lang Darma's infant son, usually identified with Ösung, as having been placed on the throne with the support of his mother's clan, so that perhaps one individual has been split into two owing to a confusion. Against this, the genealogical record reaches back to Yumten so often that others have argued that indeed there must have been such a person, for without him many of the princely genealogies of tenth- to twelfth-century central Tibet simply collapse. Even if this were so, however, it would not be the only time in Tibetan history that assertive families made claims to nobility by attaching themselves to royal ancestors with whom they in fact had no real genealogical connection, or who may not have ever existed. The very proliferation of "Yumten lineages" speaks perhaps to the convenience of just such a fiction. It has been suggested, too, that the figure called Yumten was perhaps a real but illegitimate son of Lang Darma, whatever the origins of the name by which he is but dimly remembered. In all probability, only the appearance of new evidence will permit us to decide the case once and for all. It may be noted, however, that among the families that claimed to have sprung from the Yumten line, the princes ruling the area of Samyé Monastery, in particular Tsalana Yeshé Gyeltsen and his descendants, became particularly prominent in the central Tibetan revival of Buddhism from the late tenth century on.

We return now to the line of Kyidé Nyimagön, who had settled in Ngari. Of his three sons, the eldest, Pelgigön, inherited the region called Maryül, that is, Ladakh, and is considered the founder of its first dynasty. The Ladakhi kingdom persisted thereafter as an independent realm until the Dogra invasion of 1842 united it with what is today the Indian province of Jammu and Kashmir. The youngest son, Detsukgön, established the royal line of Gungtang in Mangyül, near what is today western Nepal, where a dynasty flourished through the beginning of the seventeenth century, when it was swept away by the political turmoil that then engulfed all of Tibet. Finally, the second son, Trashigön, founded what would henceforth be known as the kingdom of Gugé, a realm that soon came to play a major role in the Buddhist revival movement. Two

figures above all others are considered in later tradition to have paradigmatically represented these developments: Trashigön's son, the religious king of Gugé, Yeshé-ö (c. 959–1036); and the great translator Rinchen Zangpo (958–1055). Sonam Tsemo's relation describes their contributions as follows:

From the time of Lang Darma's son Ösung down to Trashigön, though temples and volumes of texts continued to exist in this Snowy Realm, there nevertheless arose much fraudulence, because oral instruction had declined. What was practiced was but a poor reflection of the Buddha's teaching. Then, in order to make the teaching expansive and pure once again, a bodhisattva with the power of compassion and aspiration was born as the son of King Trashigön, and he was named Tri Pel Song-ngé. His brother, who was also an aspirant, was named Tri Pel Khordé. That bodhisattva, Song-ngé, became a monk, receiving the name Yeshé-ö, as had been prophesied in the sutras . . . He built the glorious temple of Toling and caused twenty-one clear-witted youths, including the venerable Rinchen Zangpo, to study the Sanskrit language. Having invited Indian scholars as well, they translated previously untranslated doctrinal works together with Rinchen Zangpo, they corrected those that had already been translated, and thus they expanded the teaching.<sup>6</sup>

In effect, Gugé's rulers sought to reinstitute the Tibetan empire within their own domains, and to do this they emulated the excellence of the empire's monarchs in the symbolic terms afforded by religion: they founded temples and sponsored the translation of Buddhist scriptures. A relatively clear reference to the symbolic codes of the old empire may be found in their devotion to the cult of the cosmic buddha Vairochana, whose image was the centerpiece of many of the temples they established, for Vairochana had been an object of special devotion for Tri Songdetsen and his descendants, who created shrines dedicated to this buddha in many places throughout the length and breadth of their far-flung domains. Yeshé-ö and his successors helped to catalyze a renewal of scriptural translation activity, inviting noted Indian scholars to Toling to collaborate there with Rinchen Zangpo and others. In addition to reviving in this way the legacy of Tibetan imperial Buddhism, Yeshé-ö affirmed his personal religious commitment to the highest degree by entering the sangha following the fulfillment of his obligation to his line, for he had earlier married and produced an heir. In virtue of his princely and priestly personæ, he is remembered as the very ideal of the royal monk. He is credited with a strong commitment to traditional Buddhist ethics and was critical of what he regarded as the abuses and excesses of tantrism as

this was then practiced in Tibet. His views on these matters are reflected in the surviving polemical poem attributed to his pen:

The preceptors and mantrins [tantric priests] who dwell in the villages  
 Have no connection with the three vehicles [of orthodox Buddhism],  
 But say, "we are of the greater vehicle."  
 This resembles the beggar saying, "I'm king."  
 To assert the greater vehicle while lacking magnanimity  
 Is to be an ass dressed up in a lion's skin.  
 Even sublime Maitreya, the Buddha's regent,  
 Who has abandoned both subject and object, and fulfilled the two great  
     accumulations [of wisdom and merit],  
 Has not yet attained omniscience,  
 So how can persons of this degenerate age imagine themselves more  
     exalted?<sup>7</sup>

Like Yeshé-ö, the translator Rinchen Zangpo is the subject of considerable later mythologization. According to the account given above, he was one of twenty-one youths selected by Yeshé-ö to be schooled as a Buddhist monk in Kashmir, so as to promote the revival of pure Indian Buddhist traditions in Tibet. In fact, it appears more likely that he journeyed to Kashmir on his own, following his ordination and early education in Tibet, and that his association with the king began only after he had established for himself a reputation as a learned master of Buddhism. In his activity as a translator, Rinchen Zangpo was particularly famed for his promotion of the Yogatantras, esoteric Buddhist texts that emphasized ritual virtuosity. His achievements, however, were diverse, and included translations of key Indian medical works, which crucially influenced the subsequent development of Tibetan medicine. An additional, important aspect of his legacy was his great contribution to Tibetan traditions of painting and sculpture. By encouraging, and finding support for, the activities of Kashmiri artisans in western Tibet, Rinchen Zangpo ultimately facilitated the assimilation by Tibetan artists of important elements of the exquisitely refined Kashmiri technique and style in both painting and sculpture. The role of Kashmiri art in the formation of Tibetan artistic canons has become one of the prominent themes of recent research in the field of Tibetan art history, focusing upon western Tibetan sites associated with the great translator, such as Tabo Monastery in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, which was founded by Yeshé-ö in about 996.

If Buddhism offered a symbolic matrix guiding the formation of Gugé's civilization, and the participation in trade networks joining South



and Central Asia provided a basis for the economic vitality of the region, political relations with neighboring peoples were sometimes troubled, nevertheless. Yeshé-ö is widely reported to have died a captive of the Karluk, a Turkic people who had long engaged in empire-building to the west and northwest of Tibet, but the versions of the tale of his captivity are not by any means consistent with one another. Some sources report that, although a monk, he took up arms and was captured in the course of a campaign against the Karluk, who offered to return him to his people in exchange for a ransom of his weight in gold. However, he urged his heirs to refuse this, saying that their treasure would be better spent inviting the famous Bengali Buddhist master Atisha to Tibet than rescuing an old man with few years left. Other versions of the story maintain that Atisha himself had earlier turned down Yeshé-ö's invitation to visit Gugé, whereupon the royal monk embarked on a fund-raising mission so as to offer him a more lavish enticement. He was captured in the course of these efforts, but insisted that the available treasure not be squandered for his ransom. Atisha, hearing the tale of Yeshé-ö's tragic demise, was inspired by this to travel to Gugé.

In all of these cases, however, the tale appears to be apocryphal. A relatively early biography of Rinchen Zangpo states that the royal monk succumbed to illness. Available evidence suggests that it was one of Yeshé-ö's successors, Ödé (d. 1037), who in fact died at Karluk hands, so that one may surmise that it was this event that formed the basis for the later fictive elaborations of Yeshé-ö's passing. Yeshé-ö, in any event, seems to have died some years before Atisha's reputation became well known in Tibet. The legends thus contrived to link two outstanding figures in the Tibetan Buddhist revival who were not otherwise associated with one another.

Despite these and many other uncertainties surrounding the precise historical details, all sources concur that Gugé's relations with the Karluk were hostile from about the early eleventh century on. One factor contributing to this tension was no doubt religious difference, for the Karluk had by this time embraced Islam and, toward the end of the tenth century, they had been instrumental in annihilating the ancient Buddhist centers of Khotan, the important Silk Road entrepôt that had long enjoyed close commercial and cultural relations with western Tibet. As the tale of Yeshé-ö's ransom suggests, Gugé's potent neighbors were eager to claim some part of the wealth that the Tibetan kingdom had begun to amass. That Gugé remained a strictly local power, unable to marshall the forces needed to dominate more than a small part of the Tibetan plateau, was no doubt due in part to this sustained pressure from the west, together

with the results of the practice of divided inheritance, which had reduced the patrimony in earlier generations of the western Tibetan royal line.

As Yeshé-ö's two sons followed their father in taking the robe, under the Sanskrit ordination names Devaraja and Nagaraja, the line of succession passed to his younger brother, Tri Pel Khordé in Sonam Tsemo's account, though more generally known as Khorré. He in turn had three sons, of whom the youngest, Lhadé, inherited the throne. The latter, too, had three sons: Ödé, who was his direct successor, and Trashî-ö and Yongsongdé, both of whom became monks and were given the names Jangchup-ö and Zhiwa-ö, respectively. These two princely renunciates assumed major roles in the Tibetan sangha, the first sponsoring Atisha's journey to Tibet in 1042, and the second becoming an important translator of Sanskrit Buddhist texts. In later generations the royal family of Gugé remained strongly committed to monastic Buddhism, with the result that in some generations it was necessary for the succession to proceed from uncle to nephew, instead of father to son, a pattern that came to characterize many of the noble houses that became strongly tied to particular religious orders in this period. According to some Tibetan historians, moreover, the Malla dynasty that, beginning in the twelfth century, ruled western Nepal (from Jumla, known in Tibetan as Yatsé) and parts of western Tibet, stemmed from the Gugé lineage as well, though this seems surely to have been a genealogical artifice.

The Gugé kingdom would persist as a distinct principality down to 1630, when it was conquered by the kingdom of Ladakh. Before it fell, Gugé was the site of a Portuguese Catholic mission, in the writings of whose priests one finds a final reflection of the kingdom's ancient ways. One of their number, Antonio d'Andrade, set down these comments following his first visit to Gugé in 1624:

The inhabitants are for the most part very welcoming, courageous, devoted to war, for which they train themselves continually, and above all very pious and inclined to the things of Our Lord. They recite certain prayers, principally during the morning at dawn. All without exception, men as well as women and children, wear large reliquaries of silver, gold, and copper; what serves as relics within them being certain papers on which are written the sacred words of their scriptures, furnished by their lamas, for whom they have great respect; and they wear these relics not around the neck, but slung across the shoulder. They dress in fine woollen cloth, have hats like those of our soldiers, and tunics cut differently from those of Hindustan. They all wear well-made boots of very good leather. . . . It seems that they are very gentle people and it is rare that one hears coarse language, even among the laity. They have houses of stone similar to our churches, but very clean and painted on the ceiling as well as

the walls. As for their persons and habits, they are not at all clean. Nevertheless, in general, concerning their churches, they keep them extremely clean. The images there are of gold. We saw one at Chaparangue [Tsaparang, the Gugé capital] which is seated with raised hands: she represents a woman of whom they say that she is the Mother of God.<sup>8</sup>

Not long after the visits of Andrade and his colleagues, the armies of the Mongol chieftain Güshri Khan invaded Gugé in the course of their conquest of Tibet in 1642, though Ladakh nevertheless succeeded almost immediately in reasserting its control of the region. By 1685, however, Gugé was incorporated definitively within the Tibetan state. The last male heir of the Gugé royal line, Lozang Pema Trashidé (1676–1743), moved to Lhasa in 1692, where he spent the remainder of his life as an honored aristocrat.

## The Buddhist Renaissance

We have so far followed traditional Tibetan historiography in emphasizing the “later dispensation” of Buddhism in western Tibet, but the revival was in fact a pan-Tibetan phenomenon, accompanying the formation of relatively prosperous local regimes participating in revitalized economic activity. In continuing his summary account, Sonam Tsemo reflects both the leadership of the Gugé kings and the diversity of contemporary religious activity:

Yeshé-ö's brother maintained the rule of the kingdom, but also built the Khachar temple. His son, king Lhadé, sponsored the translation of many true doctrinal works. The latter's son was the venerable Jangchup-ö, who invited the Indian preceptor Dipamkara (Atisha) and others [to Tibet]. This was during the latter part of the translator Rinchen Zangpo's life . . .

During that same period, in the four horns [of central Tibet and Tsang], without being encouraged by the order of religious kings, and owing to the force of previous aspirations, the Indian preceptor Smritijñāna and others arrived in large numbers, and they promulgated and expanded the teaching. . . . So it was that in this realm of snows, kings and ministers who were bodhisattvas, and panditas and translators who were extremely exalted and great persons, ensured that the Dharma was neither fraudulent nor a fanciful invention.<sup>9</sup>

The confluence of several conditions was at work in this period to encourage numbers of Indian Buddhist teachers to view Tibet as a promising mission field. By the early second millennium, Buddhism in India

was in a phase of decline. Social and political transformations within India were no doubt partly responsible, with the result that sources of patronage for Buddhist institutions became scarce. At the same time, the invasion of large parts of northern India by Turkic adherents of Islam brought peril to both Hindu and Buddhist centers, and major temples and monasteries were plundered by the invaders. Under these circumstances, Tibet, then in a period of relative prosperity and devoutly Buddhist, must have appeared materially and spiritually to offer prospects for enterprising pandits and gurus that were no longer readily available in India itself. At the same time, Tibetan pilgrims visiting India, often carrying quantities of gold as donations, were increasingly received as worthy seekers. In the early twelfth century it was even possible for one Tibetan Buddhist monk, the Tangut translator Tsami Sanggyé Drakpa, to serve for a time as abbot of Bodh Gaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment and Buddhism's most hallowed center of pilgrimage.

When Atisha (982–1054) accepted the royal invitation of Jangchup-ö to proceed from his monastery of Vikramashila in Bihar to Gugé, in 1042, the Tibetan revival of Buddhism had been an ongoing concern for nearly a century and Toling, where he stayed for three years, had been founded almost five decades before he arrived. Although later tradition tends to represent Yeshé-ö, Rinchen Zangpo, and Atisha as together promoting the western Tibetan Buddhist revival, it is important to note, as Sonam Tsemo was well aware, that this was an illusion, fostered in part by Rinchen Zangpo's very long life – he lived for almost a century and was already in his late eighties when Atisha reached Tibet. Though Tibetan accounts of this period sometimes give the mistaken impression that Atisha's mission coincided with the beginnings of the Tibetan Buddhist renaissance, Atisha in fact contributed to a process that had already long been under way. His efforts flourished as they did in large measure because the Tibetans, eager for the new influx of Indian learning, by this time had formed a relatively sophisticated and refined Buddhist community of their own, and so were not only receptive, but also well prepared for his teaching. It was the royal monk Jangchup-ö who encouraged Atisha to write what would become his best known work, the *Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment*, a brief but comprehensive guide to the spiritual discipline of Mahayana Buddhism.

The particular religious traditions stemming from Rinchen Zangpo and Atisha, though there seems to have been no disharmony between them, differed somewhat in their overall orientation, as is amusingly suggested in a famous tale:



**Figure 13** Atisha receiving the homage of his disciple Ngok Lekpé Sherap, as depicted in a mural at the temple of Nyetang Drölma, the site of Atisha's death in 1054, 1985.

When the translator Rinchen Zangpo invited Atisha to the temple of Toling in Gugé, Atisha, when entering the lowest of the three storeys, which housed the deities of the exoteric tantras, performed prostrations while reciting hymns that were in accord with the appropriate rites. Similarly, on the middle storey, which housed the deities of the yoga tantras, and on the uppermost storey, which housed the deities of the unsurpassed yoga tantras, he performed his prostrations while reciting hymns that accorded with the rites of the respective deities. It occurred to the translator Rinchen Zangpo that he was indeed a great scholar.

Atisha then asked the translator, "How do you meditate on these deities?"

"We meditate progressively, beginning with the lowest of the shrines," he responded.

"You need to get to the heart of it!"

"Would it be more meritorious to teach?"

"Better you should abandon the deliberations of this life!"

"Then is it more meritorious to study and to meditate?"

"Better you should abandon the deliberations of this life!"<sup>10</sup>

As this suggests, though Rinchen Zangpo was renowned for his ritual mastery and learning, Atisha's unyielding insistence on the ethical basis

of Buddhist practice was his principal legacy to the evolving religious life of Tibet.

Atisha had at first agreed to spend only three years in Gugé before returning to India. But political conflict in Nepal is said to have prevented his timely departure and so instead he accepted the invitation of central Tibetan disciples to proceed from Gugé to central Tibet. The narrations of his mission there, which would last until his death at Nyetang in 1054, have a legendary character, which may well reflect his charismatic impact upon his disciples. Atisha appears in these accounts as an enthusiastic, generous, and saintly teacher, austere but at the same time humorous and good natured, learned but more concerned with the quality of practice than with scholarship per se. His example as much as his teaching thus came to play a central role in the formation of later Tibetan Buddhist ideals.

Atisha did not set out to create a new Tibetan Buddhist order. Unlike many of his Tibetan predecessors and contemporaries, including Yeshé-ö, he was not associated with polemical attacks upon earlier Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The several anecdotes concerning his encounters with representatives of the older lines of teaching generally depict him as responding favorably to them, offering encouragement and never censure. Even if these tales are in part fictitious, the fact that no one particularly cared to refute them, and that they are found in mainstream sources, at least demonstrates that they conform to a widely accepted image of Atisha. Despite this, however, an order was established that represented primarily Atisha's lineage, the Kadampa. *Ka-dam*, meaning "scripture and precept," is explained as referring to the acceptance of the Buddhist canon, or Tripitaka, as the authoritative textual corpus and of the practical precepts of the Mahayana traditions as the appropriate basis for the religious life. This designation may have originally expressed a general religious orientation, but it came to be applied specifically to the adherents of Atisha's tradition, especially those in the line of his disciple Dromtön Gyelwé Jungné (1004–64), an eastern Tibetan layman, who founded the monastery of Reting to the north of Lhasa in 1057. An anecdote concerning Dromtön shows him repeating his master Atisha's concern to emphasize the ethical substance of religious practice over and above its forms:

At Reting, a reverend monk was performing circumambulations, when Dromtön asked him, "The reverend takes heart at practicing circumambulation, but would it not be more delightful to practice the doctrine?"

The reverend thought, "Perhaps it would be more valuable to recite a sutra of the Mahayana."

He recited a sutra in the garden court, at which Dromtön once more asked, "You take heart at reciting the doctrine, but would it not be more delightful to practice it?"

Again, the reverend thought, "This is a sign that, instead of recitation, it would be more valuable to meditate." So, leaving off his recitations he sat on his mattress with his eyes half-closed, at which the teacher asked, "You also take heart at meditation, but would it not be more delightful to practice the doctrine?"

Because he no longer knew what to do, he asked, "Honored benefactor, what sort of doctrine should I practice?"

Dromtön repeated the words of Atisha, "Reverend! Cast this life from your thoughts! cast this life from your thoughts!"<sup>11</sup>

The Kadampa came to be distinguished by their ascetic and moral rigor in the pursuit of the bodhisattva's path. In some branches of the tradition, this resulted in an extreme emphasis on spiritual cultivation in isolated retreat, so that the Kadampa were occasionally ridiculed as saintly, but foolish, hermits. At the same time, however, Atisha's mastery of Buddhist textual learning inspired some of his followers to stress study as well, owing to which scholarly branches of the Kadampa arose whose teachers played a key role in the development of formal monastic education. Of particular importance in this respect was the foundation in 1071 or 1073 by Ngok Loden Sherap, the nephew of Atisha's direct disciple Ngok Lekpé Sherap, of the college of Sangpu, which became particularly renowned for its excellence in the study of logic and debate. During the next three centuries the legacy of the Kadampa was very great in this respect and came to form part of the common inheritance of all Tibetan Buddhist orders. Throughout this period, and even long after, almost all figures of note spent at least part of their education at Sangpu.

Despite the reticence towards tantrism evinced by certain of Atisha's Tibetan disciples and patrons – a reaction to reports that some masters were encouraging Tibetans to participate in orgies and blood sacrifice – it was precisely during this same period that massive new efforts to translate and transmit Indian Buddhist tantric traditions began. This renewed transmission of esoteric lore reflects important changes within Indian tantrism itself, roughly a shift to systems emphasizing internal yoga above external ritual. These new systems were often strongly eroticized, at least in their symbolism, but frequently in their practice as well. Ritual violence, including on occasion sacrificial slaughter and sorcery, whether symbolic or real, added to the transgressive reputation of the tantric teachings. Within the circles of Indian tantric adepts active at this time, many claimed to possess particularly efficacious means for the

swift attainment of spiritual powers of various kinds, including and culminating in full enlightenment. The Tibetan adherents of these teachers laid claim to the authoritative transmission of this esoteric knowledge in Tibet, so that the mastery of tantrism came to play a special role in authenticating new sources of power, prestige, and authority. The Tibetan term for the spiritual guru, *lama*, thus came to be invested with the connotations of transcendental charisma and virtuosity.

Though the age of the new tantric translations is generally said to have begun with Rinchen Zangpo, it is one of his junior contemporaries who is regarded as the first great proponent of the most esoteric of the new tantric teachings. These were the so-called “unsurpassed yoga tantras” (Skt. *anuttarayogatantra*), particularly in their feminine aspect that is conventionally referred to as “Mother Tantra” (from Tib. *magyü*, an abbreviation for *neljormagyü*, “Yogini Tantra”). Drokmi Shakya Yeshe (993–c. 1064) was, like many others who entered the sangha in Tibet during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, ordained and first educated within monastic traditions stemming from the late tenth-century monastic revival. His own teachers, however, decided to sponsor his continuing studies in Nepal and India, reflecting, perhaps, an growing interest within the senior Tibetan sangha in the renewal of direct links with the still active Buddhist monasteries and lineages of the subcontinent. After a period of residence in Nepal, spent honing his linguistic skills, Drokmi set off for Vikramashila Monastery in the Pala kingdom of northeastern India, where he remained for eighteen years.

In later life Drokmi established his own monastic center and translation academy at Nyugulung. It was here, for instance, that the renowned translator Marpa (1012–96) would receive his early training. Through several sources we know that Drokmi acquired a reputation for having an insatiable appetite for donations of gold from his disciples and adherents, ostensibly to fund lavish gifts for his Indian teachers. We may note in this connection that the Indian pandits and adepts who took on Tibetan disciples or visited Tibet at this time were sometimes accused in Tibet of being motivated merely by hunger for gold, always much prized on the subcontinent. If the argument advanced earlier, concerning the revitalization of capital flow in Tibet during this period is credible – and some reports mention specifically new finds of Tibetan gold – it would appear plausible that this new economic power would indeed have impacted in unanticipated ways upon both the material and spiritual economies of Nepal and northern India.

The great expansion of Buddhist activity in Tibet during the eleventh century was thus fostered to varying degrees by the growth of the estab-



lished Tibetan monastic communities, by surviving claimants to the old dynastic line, and by the devoted efforts of individual Tibetan scholars, monks, and meditators. In many parts of the country, moreover, a strong role was also assumed by local aristocratic or otherwise powerful households, some tracing their line back to the ministerial clans of the imperial period that had seized regional power during the period of the dynasty's fall, some more recent upstarts. There can be no better example of the mutually supportative alliances that were sometimes forged between such clans and the new trends in Buddhism than that of the Khön family of Sakya, which down to the present day has represented for many Tibetans an exceptional integration of princely estate and spiritual dominion.

The Khön first rose to prominence during the time of Tri Songdetsen, in the eighth century, when one of their number, Khön Lüwangpo, figured among the seven aspirants who were first admitted into the sangha at Samyé. His brother is said to have become a lay disciple of Padmasambhava, whose descendants continuously maintained a tantric ritual tradition according to the "old translation school" (*ngagyur nyingma*). The shift of the allegiance of the Khön, from the old-school traditions handed down within their family, to the new tantric teachings now being introduced into Tibet from India, presents an intriguing glimpse into the dynamics of eleventh-century religious life. It is said that the family scion, Khönrok, an adept of Padmasambhava's teachings, beheld a performance of sacred dance in the marketplace, with the dancers attired as tantric goddesses, wearing masks, wigs, and bone ornaments. Seeing what ought to have been a solemn religious performance, reserved for the *initiati*, vulgarized and made into a public spectacle, he felt that tantric practice by means of these rites could no longer be efficacious. Accordingly he advised his younger brother, Khön Könchok Gyelpo (1034–1102), to abandon the old traditions in favor of the tantras that were recently being introduced from India, in whose lineages the vows of secrecy were still rightly maintained. It appears that monopolization of a powerful trade secret was regarded as offering a market advantage that mere possession of a product already released into the public domain lacked. In all events, Khön Könchok Gyelpo soon became a disciple of the translator Drokmi. In 1071 he went on to establish the temple of Sakya, henceforth the family seat and later also the seat of the Sakyapa monastic order.

In the generations following Könchok Gyelpo, the Khön produced a succession of masters of great importance for the entire later history of Tibetan Buddhism. Known as the "five superiors" (*gongma nga*), they achieved a reputation for excellence and refinement in both academic study and contemplative practice that has few, if any, rivals among the

great familial religious lineages. And, as will be seen below, with Sakya's accession to hegemonic power during the period of the Mongolian domination of Tibet in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they attained an exemplary status among Tibetan Buddhists generally.

The first of the five was Könchok Gyelpo's own son, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo (1092–1158), who did much to foster the distinctive character of the Sakya tradition, in the first instance that of an aristocratic household that patronized Buddhism generally, valued the refinement of learning, and maintained a special proficiency in tantric ritual and yoga. As Sachen's father passed away when he was just in his eleventh year, he was entrusted to the tutelage of masters who ensured that he was fully trained in the traditions stemming from Drokmi, his father's master. Sachen himself had four sons, of whom the first died while still a young man in the course of studies in India. The fourth would maintain the genealogical line of the family and is most renowned as the father of the great Sakya Pandita. The middle two sons, Sonam Tsemo (1142–82) and Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216), while remaining laymen, specialized in the family's religious and ritual traditions, became prolific and excellent writers in these areas, and so came to be regarded as the second and third of the five superiors. We have already encountered Sonam Tsemo as the author of the historical account with which we began this chapter. His relatively short life may have limited to some degree his immediate influence, but his brother Drakpa Gyeltsen would become the main tutor of his nephew, the fourth of the superiors, Sakya Pandita (1182–1251), to whom we shall shortly return.

While the Khön offer an outstanding example of the formation of aristocratic Buddhist households, they were by no means alone. The Che clan, for instance, was associated with the important temple of Zhalu, which one of their members, Chetsün Sherap Jungné, had founded in 1027. And as we shall see later in respect to the Kagyü orders, the formation of strong bonds between religious communities and locally powerful clans was very much the rule. Buddhism had come to serve the dominant classes as a marker of status, a token of their excellence and worth. But at the same time Buddhism provided the major framework for education, and brought to the educational process its own values of ethical, intellectual, and aesthetic refinement. If the nobles had an interest in Buddhism, therefore, it was at least in part because Buddhist institutions were endowed with the capacity to shape, preserve, and transmit much of what was held to be noble. At the same time religious orders, once established, had an interest in their own material prosperity, further encouraging close ties with the highest social strata. The confluence of

interests that was involved here ensured that the ostensible value system of Tibet was thoroughly dominated by Buddhism, while Buddhist establishments themselves tended to be entirely dependent upon, and so firmly allied with, centers of political and material power. As would emerge in the course of the system's development, the sponsorship of a monastic community guaranteed for the patron the services of numbers of men, some of whom possessed clerical and other useful skills, while others were prepared to take up arms and fight on behalf of those who owned their loyalty.

Tantric Buddhism, in particular, was readily harmonized with feudal institutions. The lama was revered as a lord, to whom devoted disciples pledged even body and life. The formal vows of allegiance (*damtsik*, Skt. *samaya*) that this entailed paralleled sworn fealty. When lama and lord were actually united in the same person, as was increasingly the case from the eleventh century on, the hierarchy in effect became charged with spiritual power so brilliant that the dynamics of the underlying worldly power were often altogether obscured. Though this may appear to contemporary sensibilities as involving relations that were so strongly asymmetrical as to invite certain abuse, it must not be forgotten that, for those acting within this system, the relations that sustained it were often felt and lived as ennobling; through one's proven fidelity to one's lord and lama, one's own human worth was demonstrated, one's place in the order of things assured.

If upstart nobility provided one model of the newly formed nexus between religion and worldly status in Tibet, another may be seen in the lives of the numerous free agents who achieved prominence in the revived transmission of Indian Buddhist teachings to Tibet. Khön Könchok Gyelpo's master, Drokmi, well exemplifies the type, though perhaps not so well as does one of the latter's own students, Marpa Chöki Lodrö (1012–96), the translator from Lhodrak.

Marpa, by all accounts, was a rambunctious youth, whose family found it impossible to keep control of him. Attempting to find a channel for his abundant energies they sent him to study translation under Drokmi, who succeeded in giving his young charge both something of an education and a goal in life. The relationship between Drokmi and Marpa, however, was undone by Marpa's reaction to the enormous fees that Drokmi demanded for his instruction. Though it is clear that Drokmi's exactions scandalized his contemporaries, Marpa was no doubt motivated to set out for India not only to save on tuition, but also to emulate his teacher's example. To ensure his own success in the competition for patronage and authority in eleventh-century Tibet, he would need to

found a lineage of his own, representing the most up-to-date developments in Indian Buddhist spiritual technologies. Drokmi's instruction in the translation of Sanskrit had provided him with the essential skills required in order to achieve this. On the strength of this background, Marpa began a series of journeys to India during which, in contrast to many of the earlier Tibetan translator-pilgrims, who pursued their studies in the monastic colleges, he entered the world of India's tantric adepts, who inhabited forest hermitages, graveyards, and pilgrimage centers, outside of the mainstream monastic confines. Marpa would be famed for introducing to Tibet on this basis the esoteric instructions of the "great perfected" (*mahasiddha*) masters Naropa and Maitripa, though there is some doubt as to whether or not he actually met the former in person. In all events, the tantric teachings associated with these figures as transmitted by Marpa became key elements throughout much of later Tibetan Buddhism. The eager disciples who entered his following were for the most part, like Marpa himself, lay adepts who belonged to prominent local families, further evidence that mastery of tantric ritual had become an important symbolic element in the establishment of social authority and prestige.

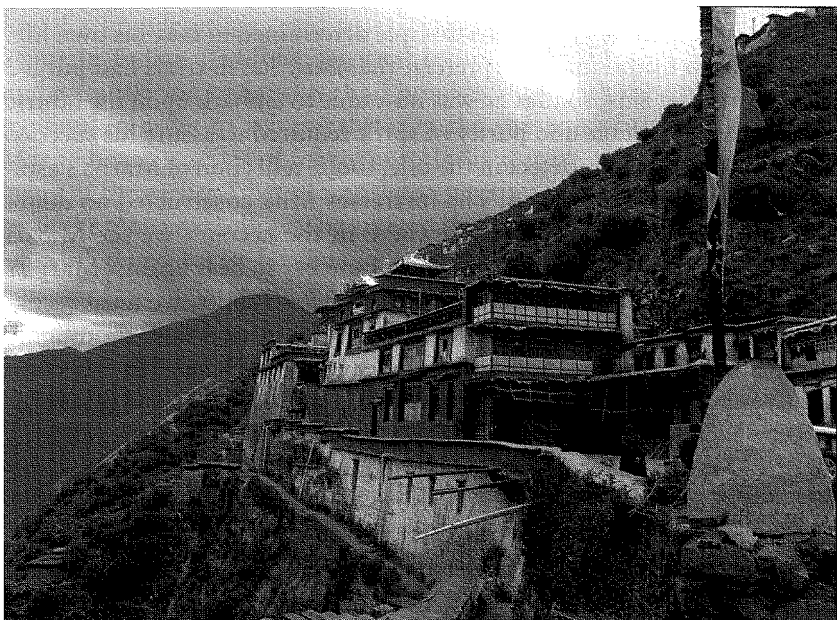
Marpa's reputation, however, also reached the ears of a destitute young man called Mila (1040–1123), who had gotten himself mixed up in sorcery, which he had used to murderously avenge himself against the family of his paternal uncle. The latter had seized Mila's inheritance, and reduced his mother to the condition of a serf, following Mila's father's death. From the uncle's point of view, no doubt, all of his late brother's possessions rightfully belonged to a single family estate – the common Tibetan tension between the integrity of the patrimony and its division among brothers is evident in the tale. In all events, Mila, having decimated his uncle's family and property, came to reflect on the evil karma he had amassed through his practice of the black arts and so sought a lama to guide him to freedom. His search eventually led him to Marpa, who accepted him, but treated him mercilessly:

He was ordered to construct three fortresses, but in each case, when the work was half done, he was dressed down and had to destroy them, returning the earth to the bed from which it had been dug up and likewise the stones. His back, broken by the effort, was covered with a festering sore. But even though he showed this to the lama, he received only further abuse. At last, Marpa gave him the instructions and vows of the Buddhist refuge, saying, "All that's common religion. If you want the uncommon instructions of the tantras, you'll need to do more of the same."<sup>12</sup>

Marpa relented only after his disciple determined to take his own life. According to traditional interpreters, the many harsh trials had purged Mila of his past sins, so that he was now able to embark upon the tantric path with the courage and purity of spirit required to assure his success. Nevertheless, one may detect in the tale, too, a reflection of Marpa's aspirations as a local strongman. The fortresses Mila constructed no doubt had a defensive purpose, and elsewhere in the account we see Marpa commanding Mila to bring his powers of sorcery to bear against Marpa's own enemies and those of his senior disciples. In short, we must recognize that new religious developments during the period were thoroughly imbricated in economic and political struggle and change. In this competitive climate, and under the influence of esoteric beliefs and practices, sorcery became something of an obsession. Even Marpa's son and heir, Darma Dodé, is said to have been killed in this way by a rival, Ra Lot-sawa, who was famed for his expertise in the black arts.

For his part, Mila lived out his life as a hermit with no apparent attachment to worldly power and station. He was now known as Milarepa, "Mila the cotton-clad," due to the characteristic garb chosen to emphasize his mastery of *tummo*, a psychophysical technique increasing bodily warmth, even during the depths of the Tibetan winter, and he was renowned for his accomplishments as an adept, for his purity and saintliness, and for his songs, in virtue of which he is considered the greatest of Tibetan religious poets. The many disciples who were attracted to him – men and women drawn from all classes of Tibetan society – mostly emulated his lifestyle, and took over the designation of *repa*, "cotton-clad," as a common sobriquet. One of his foremost disciples, however, was a strict Kadampa monk, who had formerly been a lay doctor and had renounced the world following his young wife's tragic death. Gampopa Sonam Rinchen (1079–1153), the "doctor from Dakpo" (Dakpo Lharjé), would be regarded as the founder of the monastic order following Marpa's and Milarepa's tradition, the Dakpo Kagyü, or "lineage of the oral instructions of Dakpo." The tendency for originally lay tantric lineages to merge with or be absorbed by monastic orders came to be very widespread and perhaps represented the beginnings of a growing monastic challenge to lay leadership, whose eventual outcome was the transformation of Tibet itself into an ecclesiastical state.

The Kagyü order, and the many suborders that stemmed from it, enjoyed tremendous success, dominating religious as well as political affairs in many places for centuries. Its major branches are usually referred to as the "four great Kagyü orders" (*kagyü che-zhi*), founded by Gampopa's immediate disciples. Among them, Pakmodrupa Dorjé



**Figure 14** The monastery of Drigung-til, founded by the Kagyü master Kyopa Jiktensumgön in 1179, 1990.

Gyelpo's (1110–70) leading disciples went on to found eight “lesser” orders (*chung-gyé*). (The terms “great” and “lesser” refer here solely to their relative proximity to Gampopa.) The first Karmapa hierarchy, Düsum Khyenpa (1110–93), is numbered among the four “greats,” while Drigung Kyopa Jiktensumgön (1143–1217) was prominent among the founders of the eight “lesser” orders. Another of the four “greats,” Zhang Yudrakpa (1122–93), was a charismatic and controversial figure whose monks became organized for a time as a military fraternity, dominating much of central Tibet. Among the eight “lesser” is also counted Lingjé Repa Pema Dorjé (1128–88), whose disciple Tsangpa Gyaré (1161–1211) founded the Drukpa Kagyüpa order, which in turn gave rise to several major suborders of its own. The Drukpa established itself during the seventeenth century as the religion of the state in Bhutan, a position it retains at the present time. The Kagyü teachings of Marpa have also been very widely transmitted among the non-Kagyü orders, notably among the Gelukpa, to which the Dalai Lamas adhere.

The proliferation of the Dakpo Kagyü orders was accompanied in some instances by the formation of close ties between a given aristo-

cratic household and the particular branch of the tradition it sponsored. In such cases the specific order in question often came to predominate in the region controlled by its patrons. Thus, for example, the Yazang Kagyü order was associated with the family of Lhabukchen in Yarlung, while the Pakmodrupa, with their main monastic center to the east of Yarlung at Densatil, came under the aegis of the Lang clan. At Ralung, in southern Tibet, the early Drukpa Kagyü order was sustained by the Gya clan to which their founder Tsangpa Gyaré belonged. At the same time, however, the leading Kagyü monks and adepts often exercised an appeal, and indeed generally proselytized, without familial or geographical restriction. Though the Drigung Kagyü order, for instance, was firmly ensconced in the Drigung valley to the northeast of Lhasa, its founder's message was heard by disciples from all parts of Tibet, so that within the order's first generations its branches were active as far afield as Ladakh in the far west and in the east in parts of Amdo.

One of the outlying lands which felt the impact of religious developments in central Tibet was the Western Xia kingdom (Tib. Minyak), founded by the people sometimes called Tangut during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, with its capital in what is today China's Ningxia Province, to the northeast of Tibet. The Western Xia, which was overthrown by Chinggis Khan in 1227, was culturally intermediary between China and Tibet, and Tibetan Buddhism, in particular, came to play a significant role there. Missionaries from several of the Kagyü orders – Tshelpa, Drigungpa, and Karma Kagyü among them – are all recorded as having taught there, and the exquisite surviving sculptures, paintings, and embroideries in Tibetan style discovered at Western Xia sites offer further testimony to the success they enjoyed. Some of the earliest known printed books in Tibetan have also been discovered among these artifacts. The formal, ceremonial bonds that were established between the Western Xia rulers and their Tibetan Buddhist teachers are sometimes thought to represent the beginnings of the “patron–priest” relationship (*yöñchö*) that was taken over as the basis for religious-cum-diplomatic ties between the Tibetan leadership and the Mongol khans and, still later, the emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The Western Xia may also have more generally mediated Tibetan communication with China during the eleventh through early thirteenth centuries, though there is some evidence, too, of direct links with the Southern Song. Though not adequately studied to date, Song–Tibet relations seem to have hinged largely on trade, the Tibetans acquiring from China silks, high-quality ink, and, above all, tea, the Tibetan consumption of which appears to have become widespread during the twelfth century.

While the renewed infusion of Indian Buddhist teachings during this period gave rise to a proliferation of new sects and schools, the older Bön and Nyingmapa traditions also reasserted themselves in reaction to these developments. This is well reflected in the life of the early twelfth-century master Khyungpo the yogin, the founder of the Shangpa Kagyü, a lineage paralleling that of Marpa, where some of the tensions that were entailed by the conflict of the old and the new are much in evidence:

From the start, since my paternal ancestors were all Bönpo masters, I had a hankering or disposition [for Bönpo teachings]. At age thirteen I studied all the outer and inner Bön teachings with the master Yungdrung-gyel, and became learned in them. An assembly of about seven hundred who possessed ritual skull-cups gathered around me, and I composed many rites, treatises and commentaries, and so caused the Bön teachings to be spread throughout the three provinces of Tibet. I became a Bön scholar and adept, and produced many learned pupils . . .

Though I actually saw many assemblies of deities and my occult powers became unlimited, so that I became an indisputable [master of Bön], nevertheless some doubts arose in my own mind. I thought, "Bön has not been translated by the panditas [of India] or by the undisputed translators [of Tibet.] People say that I am not a man of the Dharma, but that I am a Bönpo. So now, as prophesied by the adept Amogha, I must go to India."<sup>13</sup>

Ritual mastery and learning by themselves, it appears, were no longer sufficient. It was the undisputed possession of Buddhist teachings derived directly from India that now verified one's worth. In this climate, accounts of direct competition between Buddhist and Bönpo masters were legion; the best-known examples include tales of Rinchen Zangpo's struggles with Sanggyé Kargyel and of Milarepa's magical battle with Naro Bönchung atop Mt. Kailash. Despite this, however, some measure of fraternalization was also known, and we find, for instance, in the biography of the eleventh-century Nyingmapa master Zurpoché, descriptions of cooperation and even mutual reverence in his relations with the Bönpo.

Under these conditions the ancient religious lines found a means simultaneously to assimilate new influences and to revive elements of their ancient traditions. Increasingly they proclaimed new revelations in the form of rediscovered "treasures" (*terma*), texts and religious objects said to have been cached by famous teachers in earlier times and now recovered. In the Bön religion this resulted in the redaction of an elaborate canonical literature mirroring in some respects the Buddhist canon, while also reflecting indigenous tradition. Shenchen Luga (996–1037) was par-



ticularly famed among the early Bönpo "treasure-revealers" (*tertön*). Among the Nyingmapa the concealment of the treasures was generally attributed to Padmasambhava. By means of their recovery, Nyangrel Nyima Özer (1124–96) and his successors elaborated a significant body of historical and legendary literature that exerted a very considerable influence on the later development of both historiography and religious thought. It is in the revealed literature of this age that the memory of the Tibetan empire of the seventh to ninth centuries is transformed to become a national religious myth in which the emperor Songtsen Gampo figures as the worldly presence of the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara, and his Chinese and Nepalese brides the maternal goddess Tara. Padmasambhava himself is now transfigured to become the "Precious Guru" (*Guru Rinpoché*) of the Tibetan people overall. His legend is the subject of one of Nyangrel's most famous treasures, the *Copper Island Biography*, and came to be much amplified in the fourteenth-century revelations of Orgyen Lingpa, the *Testament of Pema* and the *Collection of Five Testaments*. Another famous example of the *terma* literature is the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the book of "liberation by hearing in the intermediate state" (*Bardo Thödröl*). This work, also dating to the fourteenth century, reflects the ancient Tibetan religious concern for the safe passage of the deceased.

Connected with the cycle of death and rebirth, too, was a singular innovation that was first well formed within the Karma and Drigung Kagyü lineages, but eventually spread throughout the various religious orders. This was Tibet's unique form of ecclesiastical succession, in which a child is identified as the reborn emanational embodiment (*trülku*) and legal heir of a deceased master. Informal recognitions of particular rebirths had occurred from at least the eleventh century, and perhaps even earlier, but what was new here was the notion that a formal procedure following the decease of a religious hierarch or saint would permit the sure location of his infant successor, and that this individual would then be entitled to the rights and properties of his predecessor. The monastic orders gradually embraced this form of transmission, no doubt because it freed them from dependence upon familial inheritance in the lines to which their orders were bound. Not surprisingly, the tension between the rights of families and those of monastic establishments emerged as a major source of contestation in Tibetan history. As the monasticization of lay tantric lineages had weakened familial prerogative, so the rise of the institution of the *trülku* would further the process.

## Mongols and Tibetan Buddhists

During the early thirteenth century much of Eurasia was subject to devastating upheavals brought about by Mongol conquest, which had begun with the rise of Chinggis Khan (1167?–1227). By the end of the third decade of the century a gigantic pincer surrounded Tibet, extending to the west from Persia and Transoxonia, through what had formerly been the Uighur empire in what is now Chinese Turkestan to the north, to the lands of the Western Xia on Tibet's northeastern frontiers, and including the large parts of China itself that had by now been vanquished. In some sources it is reported that prophecies began to appear warning of an impending Mongol attack on Tibet. These proved true when in 1239 an army commanded by Dorta the Black swept into central Tibet, sacking the monastery of Reting.

Owing to connections formed with the Western Xia, and perhaps Uighur Buddhists as well, Tibetan contacts with the Mongols may have already begun by this time. Some sources even mention meetings of Tibetan lamas with Chinggis Khan, while elsewhere we find reference to emissaries sent by the Khan to the religious leaders of Tibet, though the veracity of these accounts is open to doubt. What is clear is that by the time Dorta entered Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism had begun to arouse some interest in sections of the Mongol nobility, and that the Tibetans, for their part, knew enough of the Mongols to be afraid. The reputation of Sakya Pandita, at the time perhaps the most celebrated Tibetan ecclesiastical leader, reached the Mongol ruler Kötan (or Godan) not long after this and in 1244 the latter summoned him to the court.

Sakya Pandita (the "pandit from Sakya"), whose proper name was Künga Gyeltsen, was born the son of Pelchen Öpo, the eldest son of the first of the five Sakya superiors, Sachen Künga Nyingpo, in 1182. He was accordingly educated in the familial tradition under the tutelage of his uncle, Drakpa Gyeltsen. During his mid-teens he came to be regarded as a master of this legacy and, advised by his uncle, left Sakya to continue his studies under various teachers of the major Indian Buddhist philosophical and doctrinal trends, concentrating in particular upon epistemology and dialectical thought.

In 1204 the Kashmiri master Shakyashribhadra arrived in Tibet accompanied by an entourage of Indian scholars. Sakya Pandita was one of a number of up-and-coming Tibetan clerics who were inspired by this opportunity to learn directly from knowledgeable Indians and he invited one of them, Sugatashri, to return with him to Sakya. For a period of three years (1205–07) he applied himself to mastering Sanskrit grammar

and other aspects of Indian linguistic and literary learning, a training that would lend a notably "Indological" perspective to his scholarship in later years. In 1208 he again met Shakyashribhadra and received the full monastic ordination of a *bhikshu* from him, an event that is held to mark the inception of the Sakyapa as a properly monastic order. For the next five years he continued to study a broad range of Buddhist textual traditions under Shakyashribhadra and his companions. Following the death of his uncle Drakpa Gyeltsen in 1216, Sakya Pandita came to be recognized as the leading successor within the religious tradition of Sakya.

After receiving Kötan's summons in 1244, Sakya Pandita undertook the long journey to Liangzhou (in modern Gansu), bringing with him his young nephews, Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (1235–80) and Chakna Dorjé (1239–67). The party arrived in 1246 and met the Mongol leader early the following year. Sakya Pandita spent his remaining days among the Mongols, and passed away in Liangzhou in 1251. Besides the fame he has enjoyed among subsequent generations of Tibetans, the Mongolian peoples also honor him as one of the first Buddhist masters to introduce them to the faith that in later times they adopted.

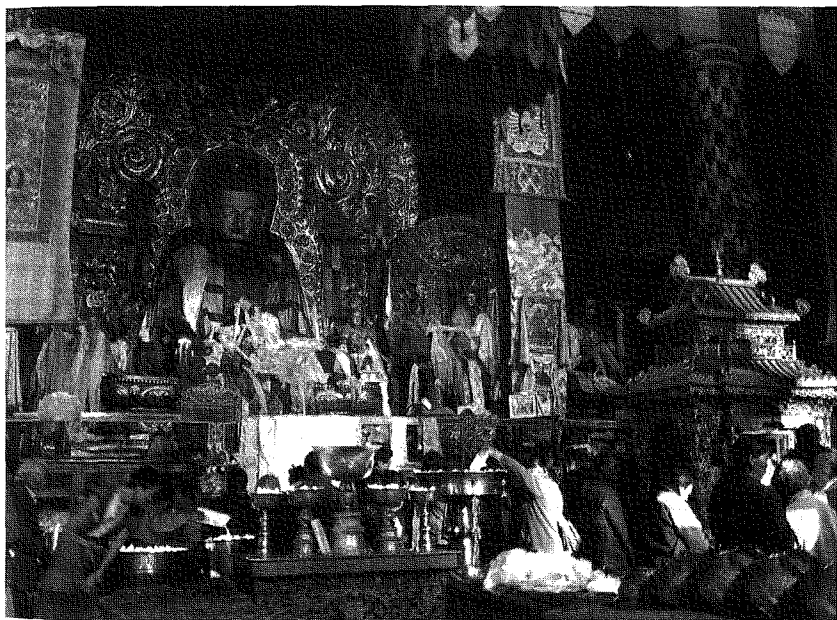
Tibetan historians have elaborated the history of Sakya Pandita's involvement with the Mongols in ways that, as recent scholarship suggests, greatly simplify the actual course of events. According to the traditional accounts, the Sakya hegemony which ruled Tibet for a century began almost immediately with Sakya Pandita's visit to Kötan. In this the historians have been influenced by the text of a letter attributed to Sakya Pandita, explaining to the Tibetans the benefits of submission to the Mongol authorities. This document, however, is now generally thought to be pseudepigraphical, written in the light of the circumstances that evolved after Sakya Pandita's passing. The actual Mongol alliance with the Sakyapa, through which the latter became the effective rulers of Tibet, was not consolidated for more than a decade after his death. Following an assault on Tibet by Möngke Khan in 1252, which perhaps may be taken as marking the definitive incorporation of Tibet into the Mongol empire, hierarchs of the various Tibetan Buddhist orders were eager to establish favorable relationships with their new lords. All the leading members of the Mongol royal family were now courted by representatives of the major religious factions of Tibet: Möngke by the Drigungpa, Hülegü by the Pakmodrupa and Yazangpa, Arigh Böke by the Taklungpa, and Khubilai by the Tselpa, according to some sources, all of them receiving substantial grants rivalling the favor shown by Kötan to Sakya.

Nevertheless, Sakya Pandita's visit did establish a precedent of

sorts, and it led, too, to some factions of the Mongol court insisting upon Sakyapa authority in Tibetan religious affairs, even if the temporal dimensions of the relationship were not yet fully formed. Moreover, and perhaps most important for the future, it meant that Sakya Pandita's two young nephews, Pakpa and his brother Chakna, who accompanied him, spent their formative years among the Mongols. The former would become the Tibetan preceptor of Khubilai Khan (1215–94), and in 1264 was elevated to the religious and secular leadership of Tibet. This occurred when, as the offering bestowed by the Khan on the occasion of his receiving formal tantric initiation, he granted to Pakpa lordship over the thirteen myriarchies of central Tibet and Tsang, together with western Tibet, Amdo, and Kham. As the preeminent Tibetan clergyman in the eastern Mongol empire, which in 1271 adopted the Chinese dynastic title Yuan, Pakpa would be instrumental in the formation of the Mongol–Sakyapa alliance.

Pakpa's service to Khubilai Khan included the creation of a new writing system for the Mongolian language. Though this was employed for some time in edicts and administrative documents, it proved too cumbersome for ordinary use and survived primarily as an ornamental script reserved exclusively for Tibetan and Mongolian official seals. He also conferred tantric initiation on the emperor, thereby symbolically anointing him as a Chakravartin, a "wheel-turner," or universal monarch. This served as an important precedent for the later ceremonial relations of Tibetan hierarchs with China's rulers. Despite his exalted station, however, Pakpa's surviving letters to members of the Mongol aristocracy sometimes also reveal him in the role of a simple Buddhist priest, seeking to offer good counsel to those who placed their faith in him. The following is from a message of condolence sent to Pundari, a noblewoman who had recently been widowed. It offers a rare example of the positive valuation of marriage on the part of a Tibetan man of the cloth:

When one like your late husband, the prince, a bodhisattva, has passed into peace, so that there is reason for mental distress, you must recollect such themes as the teachings of karma and of impermanence. For it is exceedingly profound that a connection has been formed between you as consorts, in an especially exalted condition of birth. The service to the emperor and the benefit to many beings that has thus been accomplished has therefore had a special purpose. This cannot have come about owing solely to the chance occurrences of this lifetime, but rather, in the past, having performed many fundamental virtues in common, a special prayer was made with mutually aspiring spirits. That it is how it must have been.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 15** The Great Temple (*Lhakhang Chenmo*) of Sakya, constructed during the late thirteenth century with the support of the Mongol court, and containing, in the form of its statuary, the reliquaries of the Sakyapa masters and hierarchs, 2002.

At the same time, other religious orders besides the Sakyapa continued to seek and to receive the patronage of the Mongol lords. Karma Pakshi (1204/6–83), the head of the Karma Kagyü order, traveled to the imperial camp of Möngke Khan at Shira Ordo (the “Yellow Horde”) in 1256 to participate in debates that involved Chinese Taoists, Nestorian Christians, and possibly Western Catholics as well. In his autobiography he reports with approval an imperial edict “directing all to adhere to the vows of their own religions,” though he also asserts that he succeeded in converting the royal household to Buddhism.<sup>15</sup> Although Karma Pakshi’s own relations with Khubilai Khan, in particular, were later uncertain, the Mongols continued to invite famous teachers of differing traditions to visit the court. Their religious motivations were no doubt diverse, but certainly involved a sincere interest in personal salvation as well as a keen desire to rule with the cooperation of the religious factions that enjoyed the loyalty of important populations within the empire. In addition, the Mongols believed generally in the ability of famed saints and adepts to win the favor of spiritual powers of various kinds. The histories of the Nyingmapa order, for instance, depict Khubilai Khan as fascinated by

sorcery and arcane rites of longevity. The emperor is even held to have exempted the Nyingmapa tantric adepts collectively from taxation and military service as a reward for the "water of life" one of their number is said to have discovered and sent to him. Whatever the veracity of such reports, they reflect the impression, among segments of the Tibetan clergy, of the real nature of Mongol interest in their religion.

Though, with the elevation of Pakpa by Khubilai Khan, the Sakyapa had emerged as the chief agents of Mongol rule in Tibet, the Drigungpa, at the same time, nevertheless maintained their relations with Hülegü Khan, the Mongol ruler of Persia. They requested and were granted military assistance against the Sakyapa in 1285. In 1287, however, the latter retaliated by asking Khubilai to send an army to Tibet, which razed the Drigung monastery to the ground in 1290, thereby putting an end, for a time, to the competition for power in which its leadership had been engaged.

Sakyapa authority had at its apex three supreme officers, two ecclesiastical and one secular. These were the abbot of the Sakya monastery (*densa chenpo*), the imperial preceptor (Ch. *dishi*, transcribed in Tibetan as *tishri*), and the "great lord" (*pönchen*), who headed the temporal administration. Twenty successive *pönchen* are named in the course of the Mongol-Sakyapa regime. The Mongol imperial government further introduced a cumbersome hierarchy of commanders, together with systems of taxation and postal relay. The grades of officers mentioned in Tibetan sources included myriarchs (*tripön*), chiliarchs (*tongpön*), district governors (*dzongpön*), and a range of lesser officials, down to and including the stewards, secretaries, treasurers, and stable managers who were charged with day-to-day affairs.

The basis for administration in central Tibet and Tsang was the region's division into thirteen myriarchies, which, though there are slightly differing lists, are usually given as: South Latö, North Latö, Gurmo, Chumik, Shang, and Zhalu in Tsang; and Gyama, Drigung, Tselpa, Tangpoche, Pakmodru, and Yazang in the center. Yamdrok was the thirteenth, at the boundary between Tsang and Ü. Here, as elsewhere in China, the Mongols sought to regulate taxation by means of a census of households, which had been ordered by Möngke Khan after the invasion of 1252, but carried out under Khubilai in 1268. The basic household unit for census purposes was taken to consist of a nuclear family: parents, son and daughter, plus a servant and maid, making six persons in all. Similar stereotypical enumerations of livestock and farmland completed the picture of the ideal Tibetan family of the day. Though obviously the details must not be taken too seriously, the results do allow us to form an approximate idea of populations during the mid-thirteenth

century. In all, roughly 40,000 such households were counted within the thirteen myriarchies, or about 240,000 inhabitants in all. If we consider that pastoral populations seem not to have been included, and that, as in all places and times, some would have wished to avoid being counted, we may estimate the real population to have been slightly higher. A figure upwards of 300,000 would perhaps be not far from the mark.

On reviewing the histories of Sakya, one cannot help but be impressed by the extreme fragility of the ruling household. The frequent deaths of the leading male family members, beginning with Chakna, while they were still relatively young – whether due to natural causes or, as was often suspected, to poisoning – had the result that the continuity of the line itself was endangered. In addition, these same figures owed their prestige, both in Tibet and among the Mongols, to Sakya's reputation as a seat of learning and virtuosity in esoteric ritual. The sons of the Khön were therefore obliged to undertake a long apprenticeship in order to live up to the standards of their forebears. The pressures were intensified by growing competition among rival lines of the Khön clan itself; failure either to maintain the family's religious traditions or to reproduce could only result in the diminution of the particular line to which one belonged. Intense internecine conflict became endemic among the Khön, lending perhaps a certain justice to their name, meaning "strife." At the same time, it must be stressed that similar destabilizing patterns seem to have plagued many of the noble houses of the period.

In the case of Sakya, the first great family crisis occurred two generations following the time of Pakpa, whose brother Chakna Dorjé had died at the age of twenty-eight, leaving just one infant son, Dharmapalarakshita (1268–87). The latter, too, produced just one son, Ratnabhadra, who died in infancy, not long after his father's passing at the age of nineteen. One of Pakpa's nephews, Zangpopel (1262–1324), later known as Daknyi Chenpo ("mahatma"), who had received some instruction from his uncle as a child, was living in China in exile, having been slandered before the emperor, Khubilai, as illegitimate. In 1297, at the behest of the *pönchen* and other nobles, he was reinstated at court, where he was rehabilitated and essentially ordered to fructify. Because, however, it was unseemly for one of only mediocre learning and manners to come to the helm of so dignified a line as the Khön, he was first obliged to undergo an apprenticeship of ten years in the Sakya temple. Following this, at the age of forty-five, he took six wives and amply fulfilled imperial expectations. At the time of his death, eleven of his thirteen sons were alive, and the problem was no longer the family's extinction, but rather to resolve the conflicts among so many heirs. The second son, Künga Lodrö

Gyeltsen (1299–1327), who at the time was imperial preceptor, was charged with adjudication and settled matters by dividing the family into four branches, called “hieratic residences” (*labrang*). This solution, however, would lead to much future contestation, and so played a direct role in the downfall of the Sakya regime in 1350.

Despite these temporal complications, it was during the period of the Mongol–Sakyapa hegemony, with Sakya Pandita’s example in the background, that Tibetan Buddhist scholastic philosophy came into flower. The many famous and influential figures active at this time included the Kadampa scholiast Rikpé Reldri (1237–1305), the Tantric masters Butön Rinchen-drup (1290–1364) and Dölpopa Sherab Gyeltsen (1292–1361), the redactor of the Great Perfection (*dzokchen*) meditation system, Longchen Rabjampa (1308–63), and a grandson of Daknyi Chenpo Zangpopel, the writer, scholar, and ruler Lama Dampa Sonam Gyeltsen (1312–75). (Rikpé Reldri and Butön, it may be noted, were also famous for their roles in the redaction of the Tibetan Buddhist canon.) Members of non-Sakyapa orders who prominently maintained relations with the later Mongol emperors included Chim Jamyang, a disciple of Rikpé Reldri, from the renowned monastic college of Nartang, who became an imperial chaplain under Buyantu (r. 1311–20), and Karma Pakshi’s successor, Karmapa III Rangjung Dorjé (1284–1339), who was patronized by the last Yuan emperor Toghon Temür (r. in China 1333–68 and in Mongolia until his death in 1370). At the same time, with flourishing patronage, Tibetan religious painting and sculpture became exquisitely refined. The ethos of excellence in both art and learning that found its paradigms in the religious leadership of the early fourteenth century came to define, in many respects, the later high culture of Tibet.

## Successive Hegemonies

The political history of Tibet from the end of Sakyapa rule (1350) until the establishment of the Ganden Palace government of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1642) has been a relatively neglected area of study. Tibetan historical works do survey this period and the biographies of several leading figures are available. It is known, too, that some of the archival records of the dominant regimes during these three centuries are preserved in Lhasa, but these invaluable documents have not yet become accessible. Given the importance of this era for Tibetan political history, as well as for religion, philosophy, literature, art, and law, it may be hoped that future research will devote more attention to its exploration.



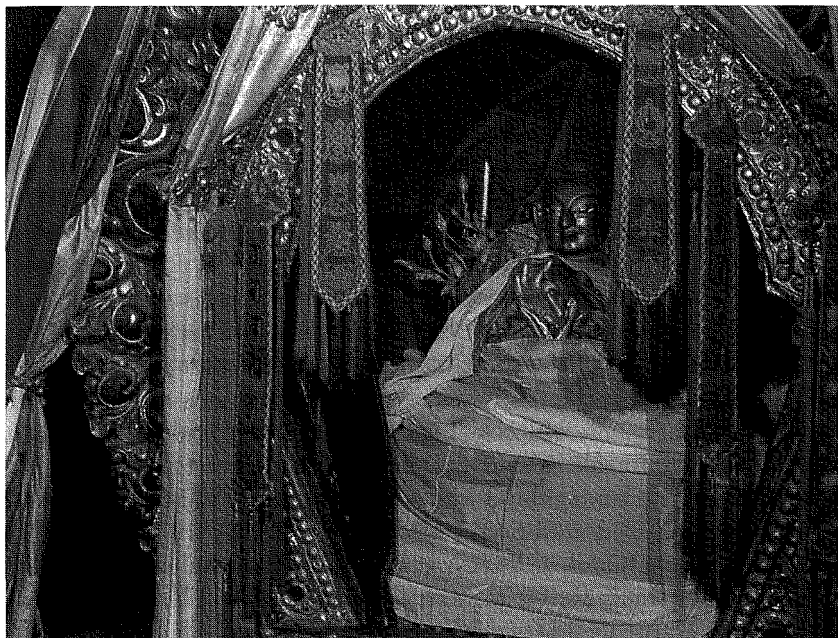
During the mid-fourteenth century, under the leadership of Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen (1302–64) of the Pakmodrupa order, a Kagyüpa offshoot, Tibet saw the end of Sakyapa–Mongol rule. Jangchup Gyeltsen was born into the Lang clan, the major patrons of the Pakmodrupa seat at Densatil, who administered the estates of the order from Neudong, in Yarlung. As was normal for the sons of prominent families during the period, the young Jangchup Gyeltsen was sent to Sakya at the age of fifteen to complete his education, and there entered into the service of Daknyi Chenpo Zangpopel. In addition to the standard religious subjects, he was introduced to the political and military arts through his Sakyapa tutors. In 1322, when just twenty years of age, he was named by the Sakya imperial preceptor Künga Lodrö to head the Pakmodrupa administration and he was confirmed in the office by the Yuan court, receiving an imperial seal. This, however, was by no means an unqualified honor; the Pakmodrupa estates had been severely mismanaged by his predecessor, Gyeltsen-kyap, whose immediate family essentially looted the holdings that had been placed into their care. It was said that by the time Jangchup Gyeltsen arrived, whatever could not be carried off had been broken. The neighboring principalities, for their part, did not fail to take note of this misgovernance and had begun to appropriate the estates bordering their own territories, while keeping the Pakmodrupa afloat with loans. The immediate crisis facing Jangchup Gyeltsen, therefore, was to find the means to recover lost properties and to return the Pakmodrupa holdings to solvency, while at the same time paying off the outstanding debt. The means to achieve this were not evident, and for his first years in office he struggled just to keep matters from deteriorating even further. Jangchup Gyeltsen proved to be an able administrator, however, who understood the necessity of improvements to infrastructure. With the collaboration of like-minded young officials, he organized the renovation of irrigation works and built bridges, and refurbished the forts and palaces under his jurisdiction. The success he achieved eventually transformed the Pakmodrupa estates from their former dilapidated condition to become models for other Tibetan local administrations.

His rivals, the Yazangpa, however, were disinclined to return to the Pakmodrupa the estates they had usurped. Efforts were made to mediate the dispute, but after the Sakyapa leadership accepted possession rather than precedent as the principle of adjudication, Jangchup Gyeltsen refused to abide by what he regarded as an unjust decision. The dispute deteriorated until the parties went to war, the Pakmodrupa at first suffering defeat. Despite this, Jangchup Gyeltsen refused to surrender his office and seals, and there followed a protracted period of conflict, in

which Sakya and most of the thirteen myriarchies became at one time or another embroiled. On one occasion, when captured and imprisoned, Jangchup Gyeltsen famously resorted to burning his imperial seal, thereby depriving his enemies of any possibility of acquiring the legal token required to reassign his office even by force. Through his steadfast refusal to accept defeat and the loyalty he inspired in his allies, he gradually reversed the circumstances, until he succeeded, in 1350, in winning control of all of Tibet. The Sakyapa, preoccupied with their own internecine squabbles, were unable to resist the Pakmodrupa forces any longer. With no alternative but to accept the *de facto* change in Tibetan leadership, the Mongol emperor of China, Toghon Temür, awarded the title of Tai Situ ("chief minister"), with authority to rule all of Tibet, to Jangchup Gyeltsen and his heirs. This took place in 1354 and is taken as marking the formal end of the Sakyapa regime.

Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen sought to apply to Tibet overall the principles that had enabled the Pakmodrupa domain to prosper under his leadership. He enacted a new code of law, which served as the basis for legislation under subsequent Tibetan regimes. Like the old imperial law codes, it was based on strictly hierarchical principles, and it provided guidelines rather than well-formed procedures. A distinct innovation, however, was the institution of a new system of local administration. Centering on a series of newly created forts (*dzong*), whose governors (*dzongpön*) were assigned for terms of three years, this was to be the foundation for all later district administration. (Even at present, the term *dzong* continues to be used with the meaning roughly of "county," equivalent to the Chinese *xian*.) Jangchup Gyeltsen's immediate successors seem for the most part to have inherited his general outlook, promoting peace, relative prosperity, and religion. Following the final fall of the Yuan and the establishment of the Ming dynasty in 1368, China's new rulers continued to extend recognition to the Pakmodrupa regime. Under the long rule of Miwang Drakpa Gyeltsen (r. 1385–1432) Tibet enjoyed particularly propitious times; it was said that an old woman carrying a sack of gold would be perfectly safe traveling anywhere throughout the land.

During this age the religious life of Tibet was still dominated by the Sakyapa and by the proliferation of Kagyüpa suborders, many of which were, like the Pakmodrupa and Sakyapa, closely associated with important aristocratic households. The Kadampa maintained their prominence, while several smaller orders, especially those of the monasteries at Jonang and Zhalu, had achieved considerable renown. Though other lines of teaching – such as Shangpa, Zhijé, and Chö (on which see



**Figure 16** Jé Tsongkhapa as memorialized at his birthplace, Kumbum Monastery, Qinghai, 1985.

Chapter 7) – were also widely transmitted at this time, it is less clear that well-defined monastic orders were formed on their basis. In addition, there were some monasteries – for example Nenyng, not far from Gyantsé – which must be considered as representing unique orders in their own right, and which sometimes enjoyed considerable local influence. A further example along these lines is offered by the monastery of Bodong, near the Yamdrok lake, whose great master Choklé Namgyel (1376–1451) created his own vast synthesis of Buddhist learning comprising over 130 volumes.

The most important development, however, was the emergence, during the fifteenth century, of an altogether new order, the Gandenpa, later best known as Gelukpa, the “Virtuous Ones.” The founder of the Gelukpa was the brilliant scholar and adept Jé Tsongkhapa Lozang Drakpa (1357–1419), who, however, had no apparent intention of creating a new Buddhist order at all. He saw himself, rather, as a custodian and rectifier of received tradition. Born in the Tsongkha district of the far northeastern Tibetan province of Amdo (modern Qinghai), he came to central Tibet as a teenager and pursued rigorous studies with all the foremost luminaries

of the age, including teachers of the Kadampa, Sakyapa, Kagyüpa, Zhälupa, and Jonangpa traditions. His dedication to the Kadampa teaching of the progressive path of the bodhisattva was such that he and his successors often came to be thought of as “new Kadampa” (*Kadam sarma*) and his treatise called *The Great Progression of the Path* is renowned as the definitive expression of this approach. With his Sakyapa teacher and colleague, Remdawa Zhönu Lodrö (1342–1412), he shared a special concern for the interpretation of the Indian master of Madhyamaka philosophy, Chandrakirti, as well as a markedly scholastic approach to tantrism. It was in collaboration with Remdawa that he undertook his celebrated rehearsal of the practice of the monastic code, or Vinaya, in 1402. This was in particular intended to reestablish the propriety of the monks’ comportment, which still suffered from abuses that had grown current under Mongol rule, notably a high incidence of drinking and womanizing even among those who had received full ordination. In sum, by drawing on earlier tradition, Tsongkhapa formulated a novel synthesis of the Indian Buddhist legacy, strongly emphasizing careful textual study and the demands of logic, as well as close adherence to the ethical precepts governing the life of a Buddhist monk.

In 1409 Tsongkhapa, with the patronage of the Pakmodrupa leader Drakpa Gyeltsen, established the major Lhasa festival called the Great Prayer (*mönlam chenmo*), commemorating the Buddha’s manifestation of miracles and performed during the first lunar month of the New Year. Gathering monks and laypersons from the Lhasa region, as well as pilgrims from all parts of Tibet, the festival culminated on the full-moon day with the worship of the Jowo image of the central temple, whose court was filled with abundant offerings, myriad lamps, and gigantic *torma* sculptures in butter. During the same year, once more with Pakmodrupa sponsorship, Tsongkhapa founded, at the site of his hermitage to the east of Lhasa, the monastery of Ganden, from which his order was born.

The Pakmodrupa, though themselves adhering to a branch of the Kagyüpa, evidently did not consider Tsongkhapa as forming a sectarian tradition antagonistic to their own order. The abundant support that they bestowed upon him and his immediate disciples, moreover, indicates that there was a strong confluence of interests between them. Several factors suggest that this was indeed the case. The Pakmodrupa regime was strongly concerned to promote clerical education and is famed for having established the first dialectical colleges within the Kagyüpa orders. Tsongkhapa’s passion for Buddhist learning, with which he inspired countless followers, was therefore shared by the political leadership. The Pakmo-

drupa were also interested in law, and like most Tibetan Buddhists they believed that the law's ideal basis was Buddhist morality. The emphasis in Tsongkhapa's teaching on strict adherence to monastic regulations and to the ethical guidelines of the Mahayana comported well with their desire to reinforce clerical and public mores. In short, Tsongkhapa was a living exemplar of the very values the Pakmodrupa regime sought to uphold. The Prayer Festival, too, which was convened during the crucial phase when the new year began, focused public energy on a common religious enterprise, in which both the supremacy of the sangha and Tibet's past history were honored; for the pageantry at Lhasa's ancient shrines required, among other symbolic gestures, that the lay aristocracy be dressed in costumes representing ancient Tibetan imperial fashion. The festival, therefore, was so contrived as to disclose and to reinscribe in awareness the perennial order governing the Tibetan world.

Tsongkhapa attracted large numbers of talented disciples, who early on began to refer to themselves after the name of the Ganden monastery. This was later replaced by the near-homonym Genden ("virtuous") and this in turn gave way to the synonym Geluk. Because Tsongkhapa had followed the tradition of Butön, the master of Zhalu, in adopting a yellow ceremonial hat in contrast to the red that was widely favored, his successors became known popularly as "yellow hats" (*zhaser*).

Tsongkhapa's followers appear to have shared a strong sense of corporate identity, reflected doctrinally in the writings of his leading students including Gyeltsap-jé Darma Rinchen (1364–1432), Khedrup-jé Gelek Pelzang (1385–1438) and Gendün Drupa (1391–1474), posthumously considered to be the first Dalai Lama. At the same time a large number of new monastic centers, emphasizing adherence to the Vinaya and rigorous programs of study based on the sustained practice of debate, were established to promulgate his teaching. Examples include Drepung (1416) and Sera (1419), both in the immediate vicinity of Lhasa. The former, with as many as 10,000 monks at its height, was, prior to 1959, considered to be the largest monastic community in the world. Ganden, Sera, and Drepung together came to be thought of as a trio, often referred to as the "three seats" (*densa sum*).

Under the later Pakmodrupa regime, the governance of Tibet was to be regularly strained by severe tensions among the leadership, reflecting the reemergence of patterns that were already clearly established during the imperial period. On the one hand, local affairs were entrusted to powerful lords with regional bases, who mostly pursued their own ambitions. Under these circumstances, the nominal ruler of a united Tibet could at best hope to govern as *primus inter pares*. On the other hand,

the ancient rivalry between the central Tibetan regions of Ü and the western Tibetan province of Tsang, a rivalry whose antecedents may be found even in the seventh-century unification of the Tibetan plateau, becomes a determining factor in Tibetan politics once more. This may be seen to have been emerging already in the centrally based Tai Situ's struggles with the Sakyapa, whose seat was in Tsang.

Problems began to surface within the ruling household immediately following the long and prosperous reign of Miwang Drakpa Gyeltsen. Following established custom, the succession was to pass to the late ruler's nephew, Drakpa Jungné, the talented son of Drakpa Gyeltsen's younger brother Sanggyé Gyeltsen. The latter, however, was determined to assume power himself. There ensued a protracted conflict between father and son, each supported by rival factions among the lords. The contest came to a head in the "great tiger year upheaval" (*taklo dezar chenpo*) of 1434. In the end, negotiations among the leadership resolved that Sanggyé Gyeltsen and his advisers were to be granted some additional estates, while the legitimacy of Drakpa Jungné was upheld; in 1440 he was awarded a title in confirmation of this by the Ming court. Nevertheless, relations among the Pakmodrupa leadership had soured, a vulnerability that was soon recognized by those who were inimical to their rule.

Regionally based causes of destabilization were evidently at work in the struggle between the Pakmodrupa and their titular feudaries, the princes of Rinpung. Descended from the Ger clan, and claiming antecedents among figures of ministerial rank under the seventh- and eighth-century Tibetan emperors (and, even further back, among the vassals of the legendary Drigum Tsenpo), Ger Namkha Gyeltsen was granted the estate of Rinpung toward the beginning of the fifteenth century. His son Namkha Gyelpo was confirmed in this in 1416 by the court of the Ming emperor Yongle. As their fortunes rose under the Pakmodrupa, the Rinpungpa came increasingly to rival their masters. In 1435 they forcibly seized Samdrupsé, later Shigatsé, which would emerge as the main center of power in Tsang. As their influence grew they increasingly entered into direct competition with the Pakmodrupa for supremacy, keeping some measure of peace only through a series of marital alliances. By the late 1400s the Pakmodrupa were in fact sharing power with the Rinpungpa, and following the reign of Ngawang Trashi Drakpa (r. 1499–1504) the latter became the dominant party in the relationship, the Pakmodrupa regime continuing to persist as a token of legitimate government.

Among the fifteenth-century princes of Tsang whose relations with

the Pakmodrupa were sometimes similarly strained we must note as well the remarkable ruler of Gyantsé, Raptén Künzang-pak (b. 1389), an outstanding patron of religion and the arts. Under his guidance and sponsorship the great stupa, or Kumbum, of Gyantsé and its surrounding complex of temples were constructed, monuments that are understood both within traditional Tibetan sources and among contemporary art historians to represent the pinnacle of Tibetan artistic creation. The great stupa embodies an entire cosmos and pantheon, whose painted divinities form an infinitely varied tapestry of painstaking design and colorful ornament. Raptén Künzang-pak honored Tsongkhapa's brilliant disciple Khedrup-jé as his foremost spiritual teacher, but he was an impartial prince, whose generous support was extended to all of the Buddhist orders. His Kumbum gives expression to this equanimity, for included within are chapels dedicated to each of the major religious lineages.

Among the major culture heroes of the period, Tangtong Gyelpo (1385–1464) is particularly revered for his contributions to medicine, theater, and engineering, besides his visionary Buddhist teachings. Known as the “builder of iron bridges” (*chakzampa*), he is credited with a network of fifty-eight link-chain suspension bridges, manufactured of an anticorrosive iron he had devised, samples of which are still extant. The *aché lhamo* genre of opera, in which edifying Buddhist tales are brought to life through dramatic recitation, song, and dance, is also said to have been his innovation, and remains prominent among Tibetan theatrical forms today.

## Tibetan Buddhism and the Ming Court

The connection between Tibetan Buddhism and imperial China, that had been formed under China's Mongol rulers during the Yuan dynasty, did not come to an end when that dynasty fell in 1368. The Pakmodrupa rulers, after Tai Situ's authority had been first recognized by the Yuan, continued to receive titles and seals of authority under the Ming (1368–1644). It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the relationship had not changed, for whereas the Mongols had been well able to, and in fact sometimes did, project armed force into Tibet and to play an active role in Tibet's administration, this was not at all true of the Ming. Though directly involved in a few frontier districts with ethnic Tibetan populations, the Ming never engaged directly in Tibetan affairs. The relationship was largely a ceremonial one, which nevertheless brought certain benefits to both sides.

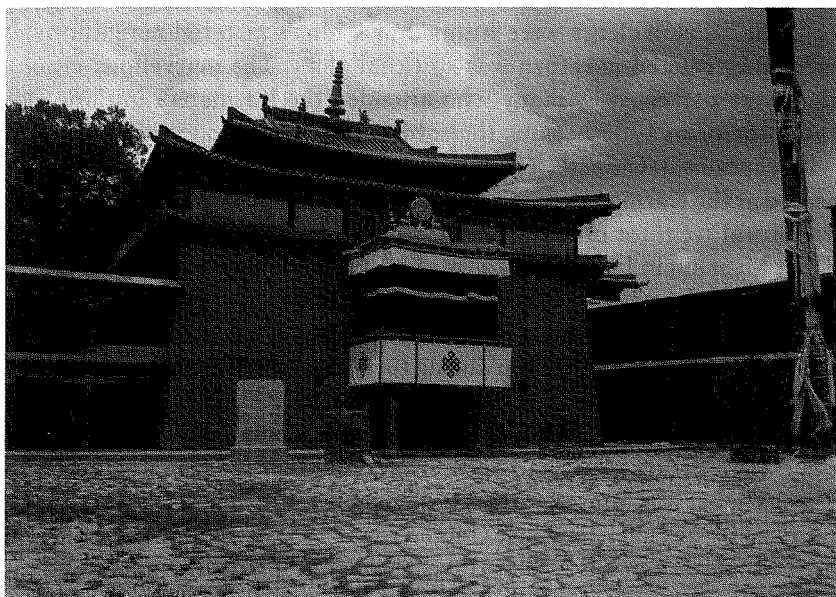
For Tibet's political leadership, the acquisition of Chinese titles and seals was invaluable evidence of recognition, and bolstered authority in Tibet itself. But it was not the source of that authority, as Tai Situ's rise to power made clear. Besides titles, connections with the Chinese court brought valuable gifts – silks, porcelain, and other precious objects – that amounted to real wealth in Tibet. The maintenance and expansion of trade relations, moreover, were in the interests of both China and Tibet. Tibetans from Amdo and Kham were frequently the middlemen here, bringing horses to the Chinese market in exchange for tea to supply the growing Tibetan demand.

The Ming were eager to establish favorable relations with Tibet almost from the moment the new dynasty was established. In a proclamation issued in its second year, 1369, Ming Taizu, the first emperor (r. 1368–98), sent a mission to Tibet carrying this proclamation:

In the past, our emperors and kings, in the rule of China, used virtue so as to guide the people and esteemed peace. Of the four barbarians, not one was untr tranquil. Formerly the *hu* people usurped authority in China. For over a hundred years caps and sandals were in reversed positions. Of all hearts, which did not give rise to anger? In recent years the *hu* rulers lost hold of the government. In the four directions rival lords, like agitated clouds, struggled and people suffered. Thereupon I commanded the generals and led the armies and completely pacified China. The subjects supported me as the lord of all under heaven (i.e. China). The state is called the Great Ming, and the reign title of Hung-wu has been established. I utilize the ways of our former kings and employ peace among the Chinese people. Your Tibetan state is located in the western lands. China is now united, but I am afraid that you have still not heard about this. Therefore this proclamation is sent.<sup>16</sup>

During the same period, a number of Tibetan leaders, including the Pakmodrupa and the fourth Karmapa Rölpe Dorjé (1340–83), sent representatives to Nanjing to formally congratulate China's new dynasty. Although the official histories of the Yuan, written by Confucian court chroniclers under the Ming, regarded Tibetan Buddhism as an abomination, to be associated strictly with the foreign and barbarian Mongols, by and large the Ming emperors did not at all share this perspective. They cultivated close relations with leading Tibetan hierarchs, not only to ensure positive commercial and political ties with regions to the West, but also because they were sometimes convinced, as had been the Mongol rulers before them, that Tibetan Buddhism offered a particularly efficacious spiritual system, guaranteeing both worldly and transcendent benefits.





**Figure 17** The central temple of Zhalu Monastery, whose tile roof is said to have been a gift of the Ming court, 2002.

An example is the relationship between one of the greatest Ming emperors, Yongle (or Zhudi, 1360–1424, whose famous naval expeditions reached the coast of Africa), and the Fifth Karmapa hierarch Dezhin-shekpa (1384–1415). The Lama's arrival at the Chinese court, described by a Tibetan chronicler, is more than worthy of Cecil B. De Mille:

To welcome him there were greeters with numberless ornaments, holding in their hands model palaces of silken fabric, and of gold and turquoise, as well as parasols, banners, and ensigns – all the accoutrements of worship, beyond imagination. There was a white elephant, flanked by two more, making three, all caparisoned with trappings of gold. Three hundred other elephants bore various adornments, and the robed sangha numbered some 50,000, with flowers and various musical instruments in their hands. Led by the nine princes and their retainers, there were a hundred-thousand officers of the court, who were surrounded by 1,200,000 soldiers, some of whom wore armor, some of whom held up canopies, and most of whom were armed with spears, while regiments each of one hundred men held golden mallets, battle-axes, tridents, swords, and so on, and some four thousand held emblems of the sun and moon realized in gold, silver, and silken cloth. And then, at the door of the palace, the Emperor himself came to greet him.<sup>17</sup>

If the Tibetan clergy were stunned by China's material magnificence, what they offered in return was spiritual glory. The marvellous visions that were perceived by many who attended the Karmapa's initiation of the emperor in 1403 became the subject of a sumptuous painted scroll, with captions in Chinese, Tibetan, Arabic, and Mongolian, that was preserved at the Karmapa's monastery at Tsurpu and is currently considered a cultural treasure of the Tibet Autonomous Region, displayed at the Tibet Museum in Lhasa.

Though the Ming dynasty is often regarded as a period of Karma Kagyü dominance, reinforced by the Karmapas' connections with the Chinese court (beginning even during the Yuan dynasty) and by the power in Tibet of lords sympathetic to the Kagyü orders, the Ming emperors were no more exclusive in their allegiance to a single Tibetan school than their Yuan predecessors had been. The founder of the Gelukpa order, Je Tsongkhapa, was himself invited to Beijing in 1409, but declined the invitation. His disciple, Jamchen Chöjé (1354–1435), who would establish Sera Monastery in 1419, later traveled there in his stead and enjoyed an enthusiastic reception at the court, where he was showered with honors and gifts. The Sakyapa were also beneficiaries of imperial largesse. When Künga Trashī visited the Yongle emperor in 1413, for example, he was asked to initiate the monarch into the cult of the chief Sakyapa tutelary divinity, Hevajra, and was awarded the titles "Omniscient Gnostic, King of the Mahayana Doctrine, Most Virtuous in the West, All-Embracing Vajra, Buddha of Vast Light."<sup>18</sup>

Outside of court circles, Ming sponsorship of Tibetan Buddhism is also in evidence throughout the enormous territory constituting the Sino-Tibetan frontiers, from Qinghai and Gansu in the north, and south as far as Yunnan. Examples include grants given to Tibetan monasteries and temples, as well as to Tibetan Buddhist institutions in districts where Tibet was culturally influential, even if the population was not itself Tibetan. In effect, the Ming dynasty was actively promoting Tibetan Buddhism in regions inhabited by the Tu of Qinghai, the Yi of Sichuan, and the Naxi of Yunnan, among others. This was no doubt regarded as an expedient means to contribute to the stabilization of China's often troublesome western frontiers. If the peoples concerned were not about to assimilate themselves fully to Chinese ways any time soon, their embrace of Tibetan Buddhist civilization was perhaps thought to be the next best thing.

# The Rule of the Dalai Lamas

For many, Tibet is embodied in the person of H. H. the Dalai Lama, whom they see as the rightful leader of the Tibetan people overall. The preeminence of the Dalai Lamas, however, dates only to the seventeenth century and was seldom secure. The relative weakness of Tibetan military power and the frequent presence, whether as friend or foe, of foreign armies – Mongol, Manchu, Nepalese, British, and Chinese – meant that for much of this period the Dalai Lamas were dependent upon external agencies either to reinforce, or at least to demur from undermining, their rule. The vagaries of Tibetan internal politics, too, at most times required that their rule be figurative, real authority within Tibet being exercised by a succession of regents and lords.

Our main concerns in this chapter will be the origins of the institution of the Dalai Lama, the establishment of the Central Tibetan Ganden Palace regime of which he was the designated head, and the tangled history of the Tibetan state's relations with Mongolia, China, and the Russian and British empires. Large parts of far eastern Tibet enjoyed virtual if not titular independence during the rule of the Ganden Palace, so that new political and cultural centers emerged in these regions. These developments have continued to influence Tibetan culture and society down to the present day. With the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Tupten Gyatso (1876–1933) and the fall of the Manchu Qing dynasty in China (1911), Tibet achieved a measure of genuine independence as revolutionary change began to sweep through much of Asia, setting the stage for the Tibetan encounter with the modern world.

## Monastics and Monarchs

Inspired by the outstanding example of their master, Jé Tsongkhapa's leading disciples became influential in the religious life of central Tibet

and Tsang during the fifteenth century, while some extended their mission in parts of far eastern Tibet as well. They devoted their considerable energies and talents to the foundation of new monastic communities, several of which would soon emerge as powerful religio-political centers, gathering the patronage and support of leading princes and families. In central Tibet the Pakmodrupa hierarchy was instrumental in this regard, continuing their support for Tsongkhapa's successors as they had for the master himself. Though it is unclear that Tsongkhapa's followers yet partook of a distinct, new, sectarian identity, over and against those of the earlier orders of Tibetan Buddhism, there does seem to have arisen a general sense that they were united as "Gendenpa," for the designation "Gelukpa" was not yet current (though we shall use it here for simplicity's sake). They were, in their own view, the virtuous adherents of the lineage of Ganden monastery, founded by Tsongkhapa, and took their lead from his teaching. There was no exclusivity to their affiliation, however, and in the first generations we find leading Gelukpa who continued to maintain active relations, whether in the course of their studies or as teachers themselves, with members of the Sakyapa, Kadampa, Kagyüpa, or Nyingmapa orders, in some cases years after they had entered Tsongkhapa's tradition. The relative absence of sectarian prejudice at this time is reflected in the pattern of continuing patronage of the early Gelukpa centers by the Pakmodrupa, formally members of the Kagyü order for which their political regime was also named. (Outside of central Tibet the Gelukpa's early patrons were similarly affiliated with a variety of differing Buddhist orders; consider, in this regard, Raptan Künzang-pak, the fifteenth-century ruler of Gyantsé, introduced in the preceding chapter.) The rise of the Dalai Lamas, however, culminating in the foundation of the Ganden Palace, the seat of the Fifth Dalai Lama, as the government of Tibet, occurred in tandem with the emergence of sharp sectarian rivalries. Though these would be retrospectively interpreted in terms of doctrinal opposition – for there were indeed points of intense philosophical disagreement among the followers of the various orders and ongoing debate among them – it is certain that political and economic alignments played the more fundamental role in this regard. It is one of the unfortunate illusions of Tibetan history that religious tension has too often been taken as the cause, rather than as a symptomatic ideological projection, of the underlying fissures that have often afflicted Tibetan society. As a nineteenth-century Gelukpa historian astutely remarked,

The Rinpungpa, in accord with their own perspective, and with firm and unalterable faith, became the worshipful patrons of the Gyelwang Karmapa and his disciples as well as of the glorious Jonangpa. In this, they do

not seem to have been excessively unworthy. And on our side, among the Gelukpa, it is hardly the case that there was never much sectarian bias and hatred to be seen. However, at some point the Gelukpa partisans came to hold up their heads with Mongol support from behind and, as when a master is shaken up by bad servants, neither the Gandenpa [here, the central Tibetan supporters of the Gelukpa], nor the Tsangpa [who followed the Karmapa] could bear up [to what followed].<sup>1</sup>

These words admirably serve to frame our account.

One of Tsongkhapa's notable adherents was Gendün Drupa (1391–1474), founder of the Trashi Lhünpo monastery in 1447, in what is today the city of Shigatsé in Tsang. The presence of a great Gelukpa center in the emerging Tsang capital would have significant political ramifications during the seventeenth century, when the rulers of Tsang came to favor the Gelukpa's rivals – above all, the Karma Kagyü. Under the guidance of Gendün Drupa and his successors – who were chosen primarily for their learning and sanctity, and were awarded the title of *Panchen*, “great pandit” – Trashi Lhünpo rapidly grew to become the foremost Gelukpa establishment in Tsang and a base for the promulgation of the order throughout western Tibet. Though the abbatial succession of Trashi Lhünpo was thus meritocratic, after the passing of Gendün Drupa, a trülku, Gendün Gyatso (1476–1542), was nevertheless recognized as well. As the latter grew to maturity, however, tensions arose between the claims of the two types of succession, abbatial election or incarnation. Gendün Gyatso, though serving for some years as the abbot of Trashi Lhünpo, therefore ultimately abandoned the monastery his predecessor had founded and moved to central Tibet, where he was invited to Drepung. Once installed there, his reputation as a brilliant young teacher quickly grew.

In 1498, subsequent to the expansion of Rinpungpa power in the region of Lhasa, harsh measures were enacted against the main Gelukpa centers at Drepung and Sera, both just outside of the city. Their monks were now forbidden to take part in the Great Prayer Festival marking the Lhasa New Year that had been Tsongkhapa's innovation, and they were ordered to substitute red ceremonial headware for the customary yellow hats of their order. (It is said that they then invented a reversible hat, that could be quickly turned inside out to change from yellow to red, in order to circumvent this regulation.) The festival would henceforth be conducted under the guidance of Karma Kagyü and Sakyapa monks. To reinforce the Karmapa's position in Lhasa, a new monastery of his order was also established there in 1506, though this met with little success and was later torn down by the monks of Sera and Drepung. Though some

Tibetan historians attribute these sectarian developments to the influence of the seventh Karmapa hierarchy, Chödrak Gyatso (1454–1506), who was the Rinpungpas' teacher and was called upon to perform the groundbreaking ceremony of 1506, others maintain that he in fact sought to play a moderating role and that the real sectarian impetus came from the Rinpungpa themselves, possibly encouraged in their prejudice by another of the major Karma Kagyü lamas, the charismatic Zhamar incarnation Chödrak Yeshé (1453–1524).

Although the issue will only be settled through further research, the available evidence does suggest that politics and not doctrine was at the heart of the dispute. For there is little to suggest that sectarian rivalry had by itself grown so sharp prior to the events in question; the great enmity between the Karma Kagyü and the Gelukpa, which would only intensify during the centuries that followed, seems to have been an outcome, rather than the cause, of the events of 1498 and after. By contrast, the political circumstances that would have led the Rinpungpa to suppress the Gelukpa in and around Lhasa are entirely clear: the Gelukpa had come to flourish there thanks to the patronage of Tibet's recognized rulers, the Pakmodrupa, at whose expense the Rinpungpa sought to ascend. To have tried to secure Lhasa without controlling Drepung and Sera would have been to accept the presence in the city's precincts and suburbs of several thousand men prepared to rise up, if called upon, to defend their Pakmodrupa sponsors against Rinpung. The Great Prayer Festival, moreover, by convening those thousands together at one time in the city center, would surely have been a particularly volatile occasion. For reasons quite unconnected with the fine points of Buddhist doctrine and philosophy, therefore, the Rinpungpa found it in their interests to check Gelukpa power in the Lhasa area. Gendün Gyatso, who reestablished Gelukpa leadership at the Great Prayer Festival after the Pakmodrupa had begun to reassert themselves during the first decades of the sixteenth century, discussing these events in his memoirs, notably avoids any direct reference to sectarian antagonism and instead depicts the relevant authority as having rested squarely with the political powers:

After the Rinpungpa estate had become master of the Kyi Valley, where Lhasa is situated, the monks of Sangpu, the Karmapa and others performed the Great Prayer Festival, which had been founded in an ox year (1409), for a period of nineteen years. Then, I offered a petition requesting that, in accord with past tradition, it be again performed by Drepung, and the other [Gelukpa centers]. The supreme ruler, too, accorded his approval. At the Great Prayer Festival of that tiger year (1518) about 1,500 monks arrived from Drepung and almost 300 from Sera. At the miracu-

lous Trülñang Temple of Lhasa, the Jokhang, the teaching was thereby promulgated, and pure prayers were performed for the benefit and happiness of beings.<sup>2</sup>

During the same year of 1518, the "supreme ruler" (*gongma chenpo*) mentioned above, that is, the Pakmodrupa hierarch at Neudong, granted to Gendün Gyatso an estate adjacent to Drepung, called Ganden Podrang, the Ganden Palace. This was to be his seat throughout the remainder of his life and that of his successors as well. With the consolidation of political power under the Fifth Dalai Lama, the name of the estate was taken over as the proper designation of the Central Tibetan government in general, a convention that remained current through to 1959.

Gendün Gyatso's immediate successor, Sonam Gyatso, was born the son of Namgyel Drakpa, a local governor (*depa*) in central Tibet in 1543. At four he was enthroned as his predecessor's trülku in the Ganden Palace at Drepung. He flourished in his studies, so that when he was still in his early twenties he emerged as one of the leading teachers of his day. His fame spread rapidly, reaching even Mongolia, where the powerful chieftain of the Tümed tribe, Altan Khan, had recently adopted Buddhism. In 1577 the khan invited Sonam Gyatso to travel to his realm to teach, an event that proved decisive for the history of the Gelukpa order, and indeed for that of both Mongolia and Tibet in general.

The needs of growing Buddhist monastic institutions had to be met by the ongoing development of the patronage base. At all times this required leading hierarchs to become skillful entrepreneurs, whose far-ranging tours combined missionary activity with ample fund-raising. As we know, the journeys of the great lamas extended beyond Tibet proper, to the Western Xia Kingdom during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, and afterwards to the Mongol empire and especially China. Following the fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the search for imperial patronage was resumed under the Ming. The Karmapa hierarchs were particularly successful in the Ming court, but others undertook missions to Beijing as well, where Tsongkhapa himself was invited. Although he declined, we have seen that one of his disciples, Jamchen Chöjé, traveled to the Chinese capital and was richly honored at court. Sonam Gyatso's acceptance of Altan Khan's invitation, therefore, belonged to a well-established pattern of relations between Tibetan religious leaders and powerful sponsors outside of Tibet.

Following their expulsion from China after the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368, the Mongols seem mostly to have reverted to the traditional life of the steppe and to have returned to their ancestral, shamanistic religion.

During the mid-sixteenth century Altan Khan succeeded in organizing the Tümed militarily, dominating neighboring tribes, harrying northern China, and thereby winning concessions from the Ming dynasty. Mongol imperial ambitions were now reignited, and with this there was a renewed interest in Buddhism, the erstwhile imperial religion. Indeed, Tibetan Buddhist missionaries had been active among the Mongols for some time. Accounts of Altan Khan's initial conversion vary, but one version maintains that he was encouraged by a nephew, Sechen Khungtaiji, a Buddhist who offered these arguments before the khan:

You have taken your revenge on the Chinese who once conquered our city [Beijing] and have established relations with them. You have avenged yourself on the Oirats, who seized Karakorum, and have overcome them and brought them into subjection. But now your years have increased, and you are approaching old age. The wise say that what is necessary for this and the future destiny is the Faith. Now it appears that in the western land of snows [Tibet] there dwells, in corporeal form, the Mighty Seer and Pitiful One, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. Would it not be wonderful if we were to invite him, and re-establish the relations between Church and State as they once existed between the Emperor Khubilai and the lama Pagspa [Pakpa]?<sup>3</sup>

In launching this appeal Khungtaiji was well aware not just of his uncle's personal spiritual needs, but, what was more, of the historical role, reaching back to the Yuan, of the Tibetan Buddhist clergy in conferring spiritual legitimacy to Mongolian sovereignty. The authority of a universal religion was required, as it were, as an imprimatur for the reinception of a Mongol imperium. Just as Pakpa had consecrated Khubilai Khan as a Chakravartin monarch, so, too, Altan Khan would have to be anointed.

Because several of the Tibetan Buddhist orders were engaged in mission work among the Mongols at this time, the reasons for Altan Khan's lighting upon Sonam Gyatso in particular are less than perfectly clear. It does not appear to be the case, for instance, that he was already thought to be an incarnation of Pakpa, as later he would be, prior to his association with Altan Khan. Nor was Altan yet considered the rebirth of Khubilai, a recognition said to have been conferred upon him by Sonam Gyatso according to Mongol works of the seventeenth century. Certainly, the latter was one of the most popular teachers of his day and we cannot underestimate the role that this played: in the world of Inner Asian Buddhism, great lamas were often treated like pop stars in contemporary culture, and once they had achieved celebrity everyone wanted to be part of the game. (In the eighteenth century, for instance, one chronicler



describes the public teaching engagements in Mongolia of the second Jamyang Zhepa, Könchok Jikmé Wangpo (1728–91), as taking place with as many as 100,000 in attendance.<sup>4</sup>) In the present case, we might further speculate that, because the Karmapa, the preeminent Tibetan clerics at the time, had close relations with the Ming court, Altan Khan, in seeking to underscore his autonomy with respect to the Chinese, did not wish to be subject to their priests. Neither is it clear that Sonam Gyatso, when he first accepted the khan's invitation, fully appreciated the implications that this would have for the economic and political position of the growing Gelukpa order.

A touching story is told of Sonam Gyatso's departure from central Tibet. As he rode off from Reting Monastery, the ruler, Trashi Raptan, caught hold of one of his stirrups and began to recite a verse of benediction:

May the glory of the teaching, the Lama, be of firm feet,  
And may the holders of the teaching embrace the whole earth . . .

But before completing the four lines of his composition, he broke down in tears. Sonam Gyatso thereupon leaned over and offered this conclusion:

May the patrons of the teaching be great in power and wealth,  
So that we be blessed by the teaching's perdurance.<sup>5</sup>

His words were later taken to be prophetic.

In 1578 Sonam Gyatso arrived at Altan Khan's camp in Kokonor. Abolishing the sacrificial cult of the traditional Mongol religion, he led the khan and his people to embrace the Gelukpa order of Tibetan Buddhism. It was Altan Khan who created his teacher's renowned title "Dalai Lama," *dalai*, or "ocean" in Mongolian, being a translation of part of the Lama's name, *gyatso*. The title was retroactively awarded to Sonam Gyatso's two predecessors, so that he became not the first but the third Dalai Lama. (Beginning with the second, Gendün Gyatso, and down to the present fourteenth, Tenzin Gyatso, the word for "ocean" has always been included as part of the Dalai Lama's proper name.) For his part, Sonam Gyatso granted to Altan Khan the imperial sobriquet he sought, conferring upon him the title "King of the Dharma, Brahma among the Gods." Their new relationship would fundamentally alter the balance of power in Tibet itself.

For the remaining decade of his life, Sonam Gyatso preached widely in eastern Tibet, traveling to Mongolia in 1584 to continue his mission there as well. He does not seem to have become personally engaged at all

in Mongol tribal rivalries and his disciples included Abadai Khan, the leader of the Khalkha. In 1582 his patron Altan Khan died, and Sonam Gyatso himself passed away while en route to Mongolia in 1588, not long after founding the monastery of Kumbum in Qinghai, at the site of Tsongkhapa's birth. His reincarnation, Yönten Gyatso (1589–1617), was recognized as the son of a Tümed prince, further consolidating the growing relationship between the Mongols and the Gelukpa order. The Gelukpa had now come to stand at the forefront of the Mongolian Buddhist revival.

Though Yönten Gyatso was recognized in infancy among the Mongols, it was not until he was in his fourteenth year, in 1602, that a Tibetan delegation extended its accord and brought him to Tibet to begin his formal monastic training. His chief tutor, Panchen Chöki Gyeltsen (1570–1662), the abbot of Trashi Lhünpo Monastery, would emerge in the course of his long and vigorous career as one of the preeminent Gelukpa leaders of the age. In 1616 the Ming court, acknowledging the importance of the Dalai Lama in Tibeto-Mongol affairs, awarded an imperial title and seal to him, at the same time inviting him to preside at the consecration of a new temple in China. Yönten Gyatso demurred, however, and died soon after, at the age of just twenty-seven. Following his cremation his remains were taken as sacred relics to be installed in shrines in the lands of the Khalkha and Tümed.

Yönten Gyatso's short life marks, in some respect, the coming of age of Mongolian Buddhism. From this time on, Mongol monks and scholars regularly assumed roles of authority among the Tibetan Buddhist leadership, while princes and warlords regarded the maintenance of patronage ties with the clergy as a cornerstone of their rule. Though Buddhist scriptures were translated into the Mongolian language and disseminated in this form, Tibetan henceforth would be the main literary language of learned Mongolian Buddhists, who in their own right made exceptional contributions to many areas of Tibetan Buddhist literature, including history, philosophy, and liturgy.

Not long after the Fourth Dalai Lama's death, in 1618, the moribund Pakmodrupa regime was delivered the *coup de grace*. This came from Karma Tenkyong, the son of the leader of Tsang, Püntsock Namgyel, a descendant of the Zhingshakpa line that had come to dominate western Tibetan politics following their victory over the Rinpungpa in 1565. Like the Rinpungpa, the Tsangpa represented the forces of western in opposition to central Tibet, and similarly, too, this opposition was projected ideologically as a rivalry between the Karma Kagyü and Gelukpa. The consolidation of Tibetan rule under the king of Tsang, therefore, was accompanied by a marked intensification of sectarian strife. Karma Ten-

kyong sought systematically to reduce Gelukpa resources and influences, forcing the conversion or closure of Gelukpa monasteries and seizing their properties. Monks who remained Gelukpa found the scope of activity available to them ever narrowed. In 1617 the armed monks of Sera and Drepung, in alliance with some two thousand Khalkha Mongols, attempted to drive the Tsangpa forces from central Tibet, but they were defeated in this and suffered harsh reprisals: the two monasteries were sacked by the victorious Tsangpa and their inmates exiled for some time to Taklung, north of Lhasa. With the crowning in 1618 of the young tenth Karmapa hierarch, Chöying Dorjé (1605–74), as the spiritual leader of all Tibet, religious consolidation under the leadership of the Karma Kagyü order became the established policy of the Tsangpa regime. Following his father's death in 1620, Karma Tenkyong himself succeeded as Tibet's secular king and promulgated a new code of law, which, however, was based closely on the earlier code of the Pakmodrupa. Its notable innovation was the addition of a lengthy closing article intended to govern Tibetan relations with the surrounding "barbarians" (*lalo*).

The Fifth Dalai Lama Lozang Gyatso (1617–82), known to posterity as the Great Fifth (*Ngapa Chenpo*), was born the son of Düdül Raptén, the governor of Chonggyé, an important seat of the old royal dynasty in Yarlung. Recognized during his infancy by Panchen Chöki Gyeltsen and other Gelukpa leaders as the trülku of the Fourth Dalai Lama, the anti-Gelukpa policies of the Tsangpa regime initially made it impossible for him to be publicly installed as such. It appears that the Tsangpa ruler had been chronically ill and considered that this was due to a curse that had been placed upon him by the Fourth Dalai Lama. For this reason the recognition of a successor was proscribed. It was, however, the Panchen who succeeded in curing the ailing lord, for which his reward was permission to proceed with the Dalai Lama's recognition, though it was still out of the question to install him at his monastic seat at Drepung. At the same time there were rival candidates for investiture as Dalai Lama, one of whom, Drakpa Gyeltsen (1617–54), would have a peculiar legacy of his own in later Tibetan Buddhism.

Though the Panchen was diplomatic and skillful in handling his relations with the Tsangpa regime, in the eyes of many the only recourse available to the Gelukpa and their supporters under the prevailing circumstances was to turn outside of Tibet for aid. Sonam Gyatso's perspicacity in accepting renewed Mongol patronage now began to ripen as a decisive factor in the balance of religio-political power in Tibet, and one of the Dalai Lama's retainers, Sonam Raptén, secretly traveled to Kokonor in 1619 to appeal for aid from the Mongol leaders. Two

thousand Mongolian troops were assembled and entered central Tibet in 1621, where they were joined by the Kyishöpa faction, long-time Gelukpa supporters. They succeeded in driving the Tsangpa forces stationed in central Tibet to seek refuge on Chakpori, a prominent hill in Lhasa, where they besieged them, cutting off access to supplies of food and water. As conditions grew increasingly appalling, a group of ecclesiastical authorities, including the Panchen, arrived to negotiate a settlement. This allowed the Tsangpa forces to escape certain starvation or slaughter, while the Gelukpa, for their part, won the return of some among the monasteries and assets that the Tsangpa had seized. In 1622 the young Dalai Lama was brought to his residence at Drepung to begin his formal education. He proved to be a brilliant student, and besides the Gelukpa doctrinal curriculum, he mastered the full range of arts and sciences, and the teachings of the Sakyapa and Nyingmapa orders, under tutors who included the leading scholars and sages of the day.

In the meantime, Karma Tenkyong regrouped his forces and began to look for allies in far eastern Tibet. The prospect was taken up by the Chahar Mongol chieftain Ligdan Khan (1592–1634), who suddenly died, however, before he could join forces with the Tsangpa. At the same time one of the Khalkha Mongol leaders, Tsoktu Taiji (1581–1637), following his rise to power in Kokonor after being expelled from Mongolia itself, now sought leverage against the opposing Mongol factions and so entered into the pact. The unfolding plan of action appealed also to Dönyö Dorjé, the king of Beri in Kham, an adherent of the Bön religion who avidly wished to be rid of the Gelukpa, a rapidly growing sectarian presence in large parts of far eastern Tibet. With the prospect of annihilation now looming before them, the Gelukpa and their partisans responded by soliciting the intervention of Güshri Khan (1582–1655), the ruler of the Khoshot tribe of the Oirat, the powerful western branch of the Mongols overall.

In 1635, Tsoktu Taiji's son, Arslang, led 10,000 troops into Tibet to fulfill his father's arrangements with Karma Tenkyong. Güshri Khan, however, immediately opened negotiations with Arslang, whereupon the latter, before reaching Lhasa, underwent a change of heart and chose to support the Dalai Lama against his Tsangpa opponents. Far from experiencing a religious conversion, it seems that Arslang simply recognized the superiority of Güshri Khan's forces and so opted for the path of prudence. Nevertheless, the various histories differ in describing the details of these events, and it is held that it was not long before Tsoktu Taiji arranged the assassination of his traitorous son. In all events, Arslang met with the Fifth Dalai Lama in Lhasa in 1636 and at that time for-

mally became his disciple and patron. In 1637 the forces of Tsoktu Taiji were decisively crushed by the Khoshot in Kokonor and Güshri Khan was awarded the title “Upholder of Doctrine, King of the Dharma” (*tendzin chöki gyelpo*) by the Great Fifth.

Dönyö Dorjé, the Beri king, however, still remained an active ally of the Tsangpa. In 1639 Güshri Khan therefore directed his armies to the east, meeting the Beri forces in battle at Markham, where Dönyö Dorjé was killed. The victorious Mongols swept through Kham, ravaging Dergé, Ganze, and other districts, before returning to Kokonor and then quickly descending back into central Tibet in 1641. Karma Tenkyong’s strategic position was now quite hopeless; his territories were soon overrun and he found himself under siege. Though it is clear that he died in the midst of this defeat, the exact circumstances of his death are disputed.

The year 1642 marks the historic reunification of Tibet under a single regime after some two centuries of intermittent civil war. In a famous symbolic gesture, significantly made in Shigatsé, in Tsang, the victorious Güshri Khan offered the thirteen myriarchies that were the basic administrative units of Tibet under the Sakyapa–Mongol regime to his spiritual master, the Great Fifth. With this, the rule of the Ganden Palace as the government of Tibet began. Despite Güshri’s gift, however, neither he nor his descendants ceded all rights and entitlements in the conquered realm. Güshri Khan’s line continued to claim kingship in Tibet until the fall of his descendant Lhazang Khan six decades later.

The Gelukpa, once victorious, proved themselves no more magnanimous than their predecessors had been. The monasteries of rival orders were in many cases forcibly converted and their possessions expropriated. The tenth Karmapa was forced into exile, and the Jonangpa order, which had been close to the Tsangpa kings, was permitted to retain only one nunnery. The incarnation lineage of its leading hierarch, the noted historian Taranatha (1575–1634), was later removed from Tibetan affairs by the *ex post facto* identification of his trülku with a Mongolian Gelukpa master.\* On the political front, the Fifth Dalai Lama and

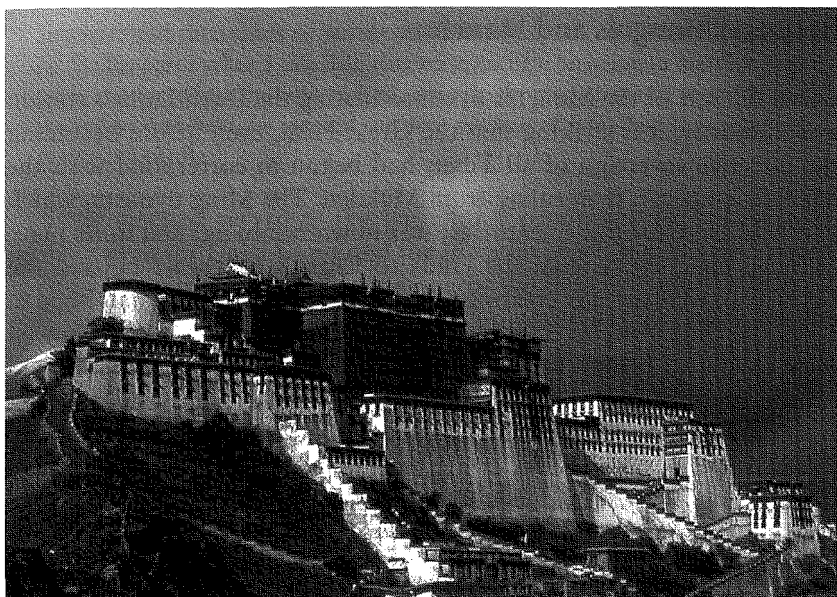
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\* This figure, an artist of great renown named Zanabazar (1635–1723), became the first of the Jebtsundampa incarnations, who were sometimes later regarded as the “Dalai Lamas of the Mongols,” though few of them rose to achieve real authority. The eighth, however, by birth a Tibetan (as all had been since the third, born in 1758), did become the monarch of an autonomous Mongolia following the fall of the Manchu dynasty in China in 1911. After his death in 1924 Mongolia, which had become a communist state in the Soviet orbit in 1921, refused to continue the recognition of the line, though a successor was recognized in Tibet.

his partisans decided that the surviving adherents of the Tsangpa regime were to be systematically annihilated, to eliminate any further possibility of rebellion. The hardships of sustained warfare, moreover, were felt even in regions allied with the victorious parties. The experiences of the Dri-gungpa hierarch Rikdzin Chödrak (1595–1659) during this period, for instance, bear witness to the deeply troubling events that affected central Tibet: in 1641–3 the shortages due to the expropriations and disruptions caused by Mongolian and Tibetan armies, together with the effects of several successive years of hail, resulted in severe famine among the general populace, with many deaths, “the unprecedented evil being such that some women ate the flesh of slain dogs.”<sup>6</sup> Rikdzin Chödrak succoured the people of his district as best he could and in 1645 entered into formal ties with the Fifth Dalai Lama.

For those who subscribe to the myth of an idyllic Tibet, pacified by the Buddha’s compassionate teaching, some of these facts may appear inconvenient. In truth, despite the many remarkable achievements of Tibet’s religious leadership in areas of culture including literature and the arts, philosophy, and spiritual discipline, sustained reflection on the basis of political organization itself was never part of traditional learning. As a result the fundamental structures of Tibetan political life remained much as they had been over the centuries, defined by incessant competition among local strongmen seeking regional dominance. In the political universe thus understood, the essential rule was: to live oneself, one’s enemies must die. Religion, of course, served as an effective ideological mask, assuring warring parties that they embodied unique excellence that their opponents were determined to destroy, and to the extent that the proclaimed values of the religion – values such as learning, compassion, forbearance, and the refinement of personal conduct and judgement – were individually actualized, as indeed they were to varying degrees, this did serve on occasion to leaven harsh actualities; we have seen earlier, for instance, the role of the clergy in negotiating a conclusion to the siege of Chakpori in 1621. Nevertheless, Tibetan Buddhism remained always rooted in the material conditions of life in Tibet. This was to hold true for the Gelukpa, as it had been for the preceding hegemonic regimes. If one can speak of a novel development, and even this had a precedent under Mongol–Sakyapa rule, it was the new dependence of Tibetan factions upon foreign armies. This would have grave consequences for Tibetan independence centuries later, but when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and certain of his close associates at last came to appreciate this clearly, they were already far too late.

The Fifth Dalai Lama forged Tibet’s unique political system, based in



**Figure 18** The Potala (*Tsé Podrang*), whose White Palace was constructed by the Fifth Dalai Lama beginning in 1645. The Red Palace above was begun by Desi Sanggyé Gyatso in 1694. Seen from Chakpori during summer storms, 1985.

principle upon a reciprocal relationship between the religious and secular branches of government (*chösi nyiden*), with the Dalai Lama or his regent directing the affairs of state. This system required that monastic hierarchs and officials be directly involved in most offices of the Tibetan government. The authority of the Great Fifth's regime was given concrete form in the imposing Potala Palace, a great complex of government offices, shrines, and residences. His tutor, the Panchen Lozang Chöki Gyeltsen (1567–1662), a distinguished scholar, rose in prominence at this time as well. Thereafter successive rebirths of the Panchen Lama were recognized at his monastery, Trashi Lhünpo in Shigatsé, where they often wielded considerable political power. As the title was retrospectively applied to his predecessors, Chöki Gyeltsen was considered fourth in the line; the first having been Tsongkhapa's leading disciple Khedrup-jé. (Interestingly, none of those who had earlier borne the abbatial title of Panchen were included among his prior incarnations.) The Panchen Lamas were officially second in rank to, but sometimes actually rivalled, the Dalai Lamas themselves.

## Between Mongols and Manchus

Given the role of the Mongols in consolidating the Dalai Lama's station and authority, it is striking that the Great Fifth, even before becoming the effective sovereign of all Tibet, had begun to correspond with the Manchu emperor, then ruling from Mukden. The Ming dynasty, which had held sway for three centuries, was now crumbling, and in its place Manchu conquerors from the lands to China's northeast beyond the Great Wall were already creating a new dynasty, the Qing. Established in 1636, the Qing completed the overthrow of the Ming dynasty and moved their capital to Beijing in 1644, just two years after Gūshri Khan had consolidated the Dalai Lama's realm. Though the Manchus had close ties with the Eastern Mongols, and had begun to take an interest in Tibetan Buddhism, it is nevertheless clear that the Dalai Lama's desire to nurture relations with the Manchu ruler grew in importance with the latter's ascension within the Chinese world order. As the Karmapa and Pakmodrupa hierarchs had done before him, at the time of the establishment of the Ming, the Great Fifth similarly sent a mission of congratulations to the emperor of the new Chinese dynasty, the 6-year-old Shunzhi (1638–61). Henceforth, though the Tibetans were quite aware of the dynasty's non-Chinese ethnic origins, the Qing monarch would be generally referred to in Tibet as *gyanak gongma*, the emperor of China.

In 1652 the Fifth Dalai Lama set out from Tibet to seal his relationship with the Qing through an imperial audience. Although there had been some discussion of the possibility that the emperor might himself travel to meet him at a point beyond the Great Wall, it was at last decided that the Great Fifth should come all the way to Beijing. In his autobiography he recalled his meeting with Shunzhi as follows:

I entered the outer wall which was raised in front of the Emperor, and progressed gradually. At that time, I arrived at the dividing-line between the seeing and the not-seeing of the seat of the Emperor of the Centre . . . [W]hen I had covered the distance covered by 4 arrow-lengths, I dismounted from my horse. The Emperor descended from his Throne and advanced for a distance of 10 fathoms . . . He seized my hand with his hand. An interpreter was installed and he (the Emperor) enquired after my health . . . I sat on a seat, which was a little lower than the Emperor's Throne and which was situated not far from one fathom's length from the Emperor's Throne. When tea arrived, although he asked me to drink before he did, I submitted that this was not proper, and he granted that we drink at the same time. Such and other showing of (mutual) respect, we did very much. He offered presents such as, chiefly, some strings of coral, amber and sapphire; woollen cloth; molasses; many packets of



incense; and thousands of horse- and sable-skins. . . . [A]lthough the age of the Emperor when I saw him was very young – he being in his 17th year – no matter where he was placed, among peoples of many tongues and countless numbers, he seemed the very pattern of a fearless lion roaming without a bridle.<sup>7</sup>

Their meeting served as the basis for a continuing formal relationship between the Dalai Lama and the Manchu court, but, for the instant, apparently no more. Though the emperor did bestow honorific titles on the Great Fifth, they carried with them no particular authority, besides that which he had already won through his alliance with Gūshri Khan. On the other hand, the court did extend political recognition to the Dalai Lama's prime minister, the *depa* (or *desi*), regarding him as the legitimate successor to the Pakmodrupa rulers who had earlier been granted honors by the Ming. In point of fact, the Fifth Dalai Lama was generally reticent to exercise political authority himself, and had established the office of prime minister to oversee governmental and administrative affairs. The first to hold the office was his loyal steward Sonam Raptan (r. 1642–58), who had been instrumental in securing Mongol support for the Dalai Lama during the period of civil war. In practical terms, however, because Gūshri Khan and his descendants remained the effective power-brokers in Tibet, ongoing tension between the Khoshot leadership and the office of the *desi* soon emerged as a dominant theme in Tibetan political life.

In 1673 the Dalai Lama nominated his young favorite, the 21-year-old Sanggyé Gyatso (1653–1705), to the office of *desi*. The latter declined, on the grounds that he was still inexperienced and had not yet completed his studies. This demurral was accepted, but five years later the Dalai Lama insisted once more and, at the age of 26, Sanggyé Gyatso became the designated ruler of Tibet.

The Great Fifth's choice proved to be among the most talented of Tibetan leaders, but also among the most tragic. Rumors that began to circulate even while the Great Fifth still lived held him to be the Dalai Lama's own son, and these reports gained a certain currency in later writing on Tibetan history. However, it has been convincingly argued that the Dalai Lama had embarked upon his journey to Beijing before Sanggyé Gyatso, who was surely born while the former was abroad, could have been conceived. In all events, the story of Sanggyé Gyatso's paternity appears to have been fostered by factions – and there were many – that resented both the Dalai Lama and the clear favoritism shown to his young protégé.

Sanggyé Gyatso was in many respects an unusual figure among the Tibetan leadership under the Ganden Palace. Educated as a layman and

not a monk, he was nevertheless admitted into the circle of the Fifth Dalai Lama's closest disciples. Though it is clear that he thereby acquired a formidable training in Buddhist ritual and scriptural learning, he specialized from an early age in the secular disciplines – medicine, astronomy, poetics, and history – and his impact in these fields would be spectacular. His collected writings, in fact, constitute an unparalleled encyclopedia of Tibetan scientific traditions that has continued to be regarded as a paradigm down to the present day. As Tibet's highest administrator, his major contributions were to improve and to promote refinements of law, and to raise standards of education in the arts and sciences. He also did much to support the ongoing development and extension of Gelukpa monasticism and, at the same time, the regularization of the estate system. The long-term result of his policies was an extraordinary expansion of the Dalai Lama's domain: whereas in 1694 there were 1,807 monasteries with some 97,528 monks among all of the Tibetan Buddhist orders, by 1733 there would be 3,150 monasteries harboring 342,560 inmates adhering to the Dalai Lama alone.

In addition to his copious talents as a man of learning and administrative skill, Sanggyé Gyatso was politically astute and during the early part of his career, at least, generally proved himself to be an able strategist. Nevertheless, Tibet was prey both to internal, structural weaknesses, and to the machinations of foreign powers. Under the circumstances, it seems remarkable that Sanggyé Gyatso succeeded in governing Tibet for as long as he did, nearly thirty years, though ultimately he too would be undone.

Following the death of the Great Fifth in 1682, Sanggyé Gyatso concealed the great man's passing and let it be known only that the Dalai Lama had retired into prolonged contemplative retreat. Though some have argued that the *desi* may have himself believed his own ruse, this is not really plausible, for at the same time he began the search for a new incarnation. Evidently he recognized that the moral authority of the Dalai Lama had kept Tibet's competing factions and the Mongols at bay, and that during an interregnum his own position would be vulnerable. He sought, therefore, to recognize and to raise in secret the Sixth Dalai Lama, whose installation he would later present as a *fait accompli*.

Tsangyang Gyatso (1683–1706), whom Sanggyé Gyatso identified as the Great Fifth's rebirth, would play a central role in the *desi*'s undoing, while his own short life became one of the most beloved and poignant tales in Tibetan memory. Born to a noble family in Tawang, in what is today Arunachal Pradesh in northeastern India, the Sixth Dalai Lama was brought up and educated in strict seclusion, as directed by the *desi* himself. At the same time the Manchu court of the emperor Kangxi

(r. 1662–1722) was receiving reports of the Great Fifth's "retreat" and, becoming increasingly suspicious that Sanggyé Gyatso was somehow tricking them, began to express impatience with this state of affairs. In 1696, to the surprise of the Tibetan people, the Fifth Dalai Lama's death was finally made public, together with the massive and costly funerary shrine, called *dzamling gyenchik*, the "sole ornament of the world," that Sanggyé Gyatso had constructed within the Potala to house the late leader's mummified corpse. The shock entailed by these events was mitigated only by the celebrations surrounding the installation of the new Dalai Lama, who now moved to Lhasa to continue his education under the *desi*'s own tutelage.

Although he was talented and charismatic, Tsangyang Gyatso proved to have no taste for the life of a monk, and as an adolescent he began to rebel. Refusing ordination, he let his hair grow long and, dressing as a young rake about town, he preferred loose women and strong drink to the rigors of religious life. The popular song lyrics that are attributed to him sometimes express the conflict that arose between the vocation for which he was groomed and his personal inclinations:

If I follow my girlfriend's heart,  
Life's religious wealth will run out;  
But if I adhere to single retreat,  
I'll be running against my girl's heart.<sup>8</sup>

His behavior inevitably began to be seen in some quarters as scandalous, particularly among the Mongols and Manchus. The Tibetans tended to be more tolerant of his excesses, perhaps in part because the tantric ethos of "pure vision" with respect to one revered as a lama had long been normative in Tibetan culture overall. From such a perspective, even the guru's transgressions are regarded as evidence of the "play" of spiritual perfection and so are seldom condemned. However this may have been, it became increasingly clear that Tsangyang Gyatso could not be considered as being at all fit to rule.

The emerging crisis in the Tibetan leadership was intensified by new complications in Tibetan relations with the Mongols. One of Sanggyé Gyatso's comrades from his school days was a Zunghar Mongol prince named Galdan (1644–97), who had been ordained in Tibet as a monk. In 1670, however, he left his robes and returned home following a rebellion against the Zunghar leadership, which he proceeded to suppress ruthlessly. As he eliminated his rivals, first individuals and later whole tribes, culminating in his defeat of the powerful Khalkha Mongol confederacy

(1677), he began to forge a Zunghar state that increasingly vied with the Manchus for supremacy in Inner Asia. In 1697 Galdan was ultimately defeated by the Qing and either died by his own hand, or, according to others, was slain by his own troops, but before that time contact had been resumed between him and his former schoolmate, the *desi*. The latter's immediate interest in pursuing such a relation was to rid himself of one particular group that had been allied to the Khalkha, namely, the Khoshot descendants of Gūshri Khan, who still maintained their power in Kokonor and central Tibet. At the same time, however, he wished to avoid antagonizing the Qing, and even went so far as to memorialize the emperor on Galdan's behalf (1695). In this he was harshly rebuked and seems to have succeeded only in convincing Kangxi that both he and the Sixth Dalai Lama were firmly in the enemy's camp.

In 1700, a new khan, Lhazang, assumed power among the Mongols claiming authority in central Tibet. Ambitious, forceful, and inclined to be rash, Lhazang was determined to consolidate once again the Tibetan conquest of his ancestor Gūshri Khan. Given Sanggyé Gyatso's fall from Manchu imperial favor, his alliance with Lhazang's foes, the Zunghars, and the undignified conduct of the young Dalai Lama, Lhazang believed that in this enterprise he was entirely justified. Nevertheless, at the outset he accepted the principle of joint rule with the *desi*. There was no love lost between them, however, and within two years their mutual enmity led to open conflict. At the Great Prayer Festival of 1703 Lhazang's men began to harass those in Sanggyé Gyatso's service, even murdering some. Taking this to be a declaration of war, Sanggyé Gyatso rallied the Tibetan forces in an effort to drive the khan altogether out of Tibet. After intense battles were waged in the region of Damzhung, a nomadic district to the northwest of Lhasa, representatives of the main monasteries, as well as Lhazang Khan's personal guru, the Jamyang Zhepa (1648–1721) of Amdo, intervened in an effort to reach a negotiated settlement. Under the terms of the peace, Sanggyé Gyatso moved from Lhasa to Gongkar and resigned his office, naming his son Ngawang Rinchen to be the new *desi*. It was well known, however, that Sanggyé Gyatso continued to be the power behind the throne. Hostilities flared up once more in 1705 and the religious leadership, this time with the participation of the Sixth Dalai Lama, once again sought to broker a truce, going so far as to insist that the parties swear to their agreement before the great mausoleum of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

By this point, however, Lhazang Khan had no intention of adhering to a peace. He feigned his departure from Tibet, but then, arriving in the Jangtang district of Nakchukha, turned his army around and, divid-

ing his troops into two divisions, had them descend on central Tibet in a pincer, routing the Tibetan forces. Sanggyé Gyatso himself was apprehended by Mongol soldiers accompanying the khan's Tibetan queen, Tsering Trashī (rumor had it that she had once been one of Sanggyé Gyatso's mistresses), and was promptly beheaded, some say at her command. His son, recognizing the fate that awaited him, fled to China, where he sought the aid of the Kangxi emperor. While this was not forthcoming, for the emperor in fact approved of Lhazang Khan's actions, he was nevertheless taken into the protection of the court.

It was now only a matter of time before the khan would turn his attention to the troublesome Sixth Dalai Lama. The Jesuit missionary Ippolito Desideri, who dwelt in central Tibet during the years 1716–21, summarized the dethronement and death of Tsangyang Gyatso in 1706 as reported to him by persons who had been present as these events took place:

The Grand Lamà of Thibet, at the time when Cinghes-Khang [Lhazang Khan] ruled the Kingdom, was a dissolute youth, addicted to every vice, thoroughly depraved, and quite incorrigible . . . Ignoring the sacred customs of Lamàs and monks in Thibet he began by bestowing care on his hair, then he took to drinking intoxicating liquors, to gambling, and at length no girl or married woman or good-looking person of either sex was safe from his unbridled licentiousness. Cinghes-Khang disapproved of, and could not adapt himself to the stolid folly of his subjects who venerated, loved and applauded the iniquitous Grand Lamà. By wise counsels and then by severe reprimands he tried to cure him of such profligacy. But finding counsels, reprimands, and threats unavailing, the King determined to take violent measures and stamp out an evil which was contaminating the whole Kingdom. Having informed the Emperor of China and obtained his agreement, King Cinghes-Khang, under various pretexts, obliged the Grand Lamà to leave Lhasá and proceed towards China escorted by Tartars and some of his trusted ministers. On the way they presented the King's order for his execution . . . Before the sentence was carried out the Grand Lamà turned to some of his followers and bade them tell his beloved Thibettans not to weep, as he would return to them. On the borders of China he would be born again, and they must search for him there. King Cinghes-Khang then made a monk of a certain age [in fact, his own son Yeshé Gyatso] Grand Lamà and installed him on the throne, but the news of the death of the Grand Lamà aroused intense grief among the Thibettans and implacable hatred against the King, especially among the monks of Thibet. They wished to dethrone him, but for the moment were powerless until they obtained help from outside . . . They attempted to refuse to recognize the new Grand Lamà but were prevented by the King's strict orders and by fear of the Emperor of China who sent ambassadors to see that the Grand Lamà nominated by Cinghes-Khang should

be acknowledged under pain of death. Outwardly all went well; the new Grand Lamà was acclaimed and obeyed, but sedition was rife, and it was determined to get rid of the King and the Grand Lamà whenever an opportunity occurred.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Tsangyang Gyatso died as a captive in Qinghai, perhaps not actually executed but smitten by illness. It was apparently impossible for non-Tibetans to comprehend Tibetan attachment to the Sixth Dalai Lama, a youthful god who graced his subjects by circulating among them as a devotee of drink, song, and love. Following his death, rumors began to circulate that he had escaped his fate, continuing to travel far and wide in the guise of a mendicant teacher who called himself the "lama from Dakpo" (Dakpo Lama). This figure is now generally believed to have been a historical individual, an impostor who late in life dictated, to a Mongolian disciple, his adventures as "Tsangyang Gyatso." Through the disciple's transcription, the story became widely known as the *Secret Biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama*.

The successor of the ill-fated Sixth was the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso (1708–57), whose life spanned the crucial half-century during which the Land of Snows was transformed from the battleground of competing Mongol factions into a protectorate of the Manchu Qing dynasty. This transition provided in some respects a precedent for the modern Chinese assumption that maintaining control of Tibet plays a key role in ensuring the stability of China's western frontiers overall. The varied fortunes of the Seventh Dalai Lama reflected the vulnerability of his office, but also its remarkable symbolic power among the peoples of Inner Asia. It may be said that the institution of the Dalai Lama, given its characteristic religio-political foundations under the leadership of the Great Fifth, assumed its mature form under the Seventh, whose relations with the Manchus set the pattern for Sino-Tibetan affairs throughout the remainder of the Qing dynasty.

Kelzang Gyatso was born in the region of Litang in the eastern province of Kham, during the earth rat year of the twelfth Tibetan calendrical cycle (1708). His father was named Sonam Dargyé and his mother Sonam Chötso. The child's birth was said to have been accompanied by wonders, including the infant's utterance of marvellous words, and a maternal uncle gave him the auspicious name Kelzang Gyatso, the "ocean of good fortune." Sometime later a local monk was possessed by the protective divinity White Lustre, a form of the Dalai Lama's protector, Pehar, who declared that the boy was the rebirth of the teacher "fulfilling to see," a phrase that was taken to refer to the late Dalai Lama. The oracle further

stated that the boy must not remain at home, but should be taken immediately to a monastery.

The report that the Dalai Lama had been reborn in Kham gradually spread throughout far eastern Tibet, whose Tibetan and Mongol leaders welcomed the news. Soon rumors were circulating in central Tibet, too, where Lhazang Khan, who now held the title of "king of Tibet," was displeased by this turn of events, for he had named his own son Yeshé Gyatso as Dalai Lama, an act for which he was generally despised by the Tibetans. Accordingly, once apprised that a competitor had been discovered in Kham, he sent two of his military commanders, a Tibetan and a Mongol, to investigate. Norbu Ngödrub, the Tibetan officer, on learning that the child was considered to be the rebirth of Tsangyang Gyatso, sought to defuse the situation by maintaining that, because Tsangyang Gyatso had been judged (by the Mongols and Manchus at least) not to have been the true Dalai Lama, Kelzang Gyatso posed no threat, as he was therefore not considered to be the emanation of the Dalai Lama at all, but only that of a false pretender. At the same time, however, Norbu Ngödrub recognized that this ruse would serve to protect the boy for only a short time and so he counselled Sonam Dargyé to find a safe refuge. The family fled into the wilderness that very evening, returning home only after Lhazang's emissaries had departed for central Tibet.

In 1714, upon hearing once more that some of Lhazang's men would again be in the vicinity, Sonam Dargyé decided that it would be best to seek a haven for his son in Dergé. Though well received by the prince of Dergé, Tenpa Tsering (1678–1738), it was by no means sure that, should Lhazang decide to send troops there, Dergé would be as safe as was hoped. The Mongol chieftain of Kokonor, Qinqwang ("Prince of the First Order") Baatur Taiji, and others therefore arranged for the boy's passage to Amdo, where at last it was possible for representatives from the great central Tibetan monasteries to examine him. As a result, Kelzang Gyatso was finally recognized officially but in secret as the new Dalai Lama. The Namgyel Dratsang, the personal monastic institution of the Dalai Lamas that had been first founded by the Third Dalai Lama, was now reestablished, and its continuous history until the present is said to date from this time.

When Kelzang Gyatso reached eight years of age the Qing emperor, Kangxi, following the precedents established by his father's relations with the Fifth Dalai Lama, sent representatives of the court so that a combined Chinese–Tibetan–Mongol cavalry could escort the rebirth to Kumbum, the famous monastery near Xining marking the place of Tsongkhapa's birth that had been founded by Sonam Gyatso. It was here

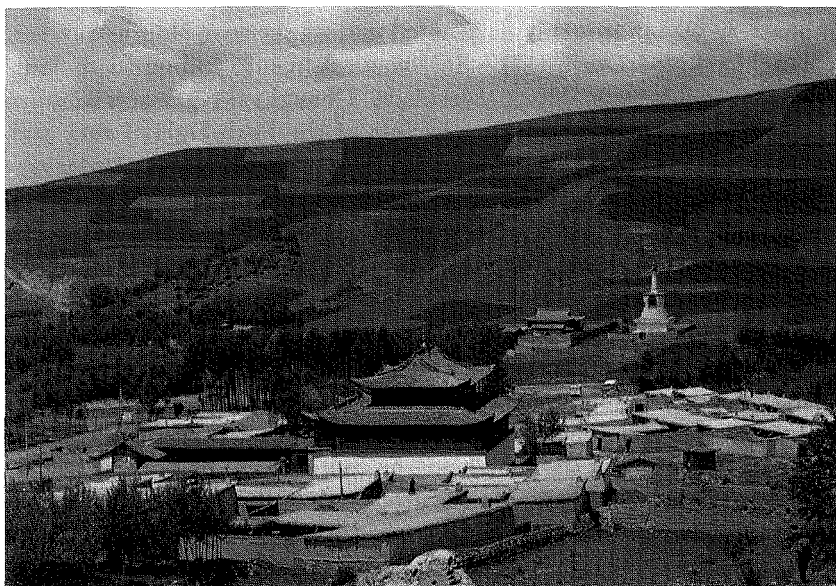
that Kelzang Gyatso was enthroned and an imperial proclamation was publicly read, affirming that "this emanation is the veritable rebirth of the former Dalai Lama . . . As the Omniscient One comes into the world like the sun, which cannot be blocked out with the hand, the lightrays of his compassion and enlightened deeds embrace the whole world, so that the Buddha's teaching expands and increases."<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the emperor continued to affirm the legitimacy of Lhazang Khan's rule, and so, for the time being, central Tibet remained under Lhazang's control. The young Dalai Lama's guardians had no choice but to raise him at Kumbum, where he pursued his studies under a succession of noteworthy tutors. In 1717 the Zunghars invaded central Tibet and Kham and became hated there for their religious persecutions, particularly of the Nyingmapa. Nevertheless, by defeating Lhazang Khan they also deposed his son, the false Dalai Lama Yeshé Gyatso. When the Zunghars began to crumble under the assault of combined Manchu and Tibetan forces in 1720, the time had arrived for Kelzang Gyatso, then thirteen years of age, to claim his throne in Lhasa. The Kangxi emperor favored the move and sent his own fourteenth son, the prince Yinti, to accompany the Dalai Lama, together with leading representatives of Tibetan Buddhism at the Qing court and Manchu, Chinese, and Mongol military leaders. Clearly, the emperor wished to demonstrate to the Tibetans that the Dalai Lama was an object of his reverence, but at the same time a dependant of the court. Manchu devotion thus contained always an element of menace; both were equally real, and it required probity and skill on the part of the Tibetans who dealt with the Manchus to find the appropriate equilibrium between these apparently opposite tendencies. The career of Kelzang Gyatso – the Seventh Dalai Lama for the Tibetans but for the Manchus the Sixth – would be, in effect, played out in the crosscurrents between imperial faith and power.

Kelzang Gyatso arrived at the Potala during the autumn of 1720. That winter he was ordained by the foremost Gelukpa master of the day, the fifth Panchen Lama Lozang Yeshé (1663–1737), who gave him the monastic name Lozang Kelzang Gyatso. Even on this joyful occasion, however, political complications could not be altogether avoided; the Tibetan government, in making seating arrangements for the honored guests invited to witness the event, gave preference to the Tibetan nobles and the emissaries of the Qing court, leaving only inferior seats for the Mongol lords. This perceived insult would be later cited as one of several causes of the rebelliousness of the Mongols and their Tibetan supporters during the years that followed.

In fact it was in Amdo that opposition to the Manchus first erupted





**Figure 19** Gönlung Monastery, the major centre of Tibetan Buddhism among the Monguor (*Tuzu*) people of eastern Qinghai, became especially prominent during the Qing dynasty. Note the markedly Chinese architectural style, 1990.

into open conflict. In 1723, soon after the death of the Kangxi emperor and as the new ruler, Yongzheng (r. 1723–36), was just establishing his authority, Mongol tribesmen claiming the succession of Güshri Khan, together with their Amdo Tibetan allies and supported by some factions within the monasteries, rose up against the Qing in the region of Kokonor. The new emperor insisted on violent reprisals and the Manchu army unleashed a scorched-earth campaign in Amdo, destroying villages and monasteries believed to have sided with the rebels and killing their inhabitants indiscriminately. Even Chuzang Nominhan (1652–1723), who had been the Dalai Lama's chief tutor during his childhood at Kumbum, was numbered among the victims. On hearing of these events leading Tibetan Buddhists in Beijing, as well as Kelzang Gyatso himself, petitioned the court, pleading for clemency. Eventually the emperor relented and ordered that the damaged monasteries be rebuilt with funds from the imperial coffers. By extending direct patronage to the Tibetan Buddhists of Amdo, the Qing intended to ensure their loyalty henceforth, and in this they proved to be at least partially successful.

One of the major sites to feel the Manchus' wrath was the monastery of Gönlung, in the Monguor territory to the east of Xining. The

monastery was thoroughly devastated and its six-year-old incarnation, Changkya Rölpé Dorjé (1717–86), was taken into hiding in the surrounding wilderness. His predecessor, Changkya Ngawang Chöden (1642–1714), had been a close disciple of the Fifth Dalai Lama and, in later life, a tutor of the Kangxi emperor. Accordingly, an order was issued that the boy should by all means be found and brought to Beijing unharmed. Rölpé Dorjé would be raised and educated under the direct protection of the court, groomed from childhood to serve as an intermediary between the seat of Manchu power and the Buddhists of Tibet and Mongolia.

Although by now the young Dalai Lama had been for some years installed in the Potala, he was still in his minority and Tibet remained politically unstable. There was therefore no question of his assuming the authority to rule. For the time being he continued to be occupied solely with his religious education. In the aftermath of the war with the Zung-hars in 1720 the Manchus had punished harshly those in the Tibetan government who had collaborated with the enemy and at the same time sought to impose strict discipline upon the general population, measures that did nothing to endear them to the Tibetan people overall. To govern Tibet, they established an oligarchy of four leading Tibetan nobles, led by Khangchen-né, who exercised authority in collaboration with two Manchu governors, the *ambans*. Adding to the complexity of these arrangements was the new status of the Dalai Lama's father, Sonam Dargyé, who was ennobled following his son's installation, and who soon became entangled in the affairs of the ruling oligarchy.

Throughout the 1720s relations among the Tibetan oligarchs grew increasingly fractious. Khangchen-né, though in many respects a capable leader, was nevertheless arrogant and ill-suited to cooperating with others. Three of his peers – Ngapö, Lumpawa, whose daughters had married Sonam Dargyé, and Jarawa – plotted rebellion. A fourth, Polhané Sonam Topgyel (1689–1747), who participated in the council, albeit unofficially, regarded Khangchen-né to be the rightful leader despite his character, and so for a time sought to distance himself from the conflict. In 1727 Khangchen-né and his retainers and family were assassinated in a *coup d'état*, whereupon Polhané reacted by rallying armies in western Tibet and Tsang to overthrow the killers and those who supported them. Though badly outnumbered, he was the superior strategist and, by carefully concentrating his forces, secured control of important fortresses in the west, notably Shigatsé. Continuing his assault, he was able to occupy Lhasa, while waiting for Manchu reinforcements. Once these arrived, the rebellion was firmly suppressed, but it was now clear to the Qing

court that local governmental arrangements in Tibet needed to be thoroughly overhauled. The oligarchy was henceforth abandoned in favor of Polhané's unified rule. Though in principle he exercised authority in concert with the ambans, foreign observers during this period, such as the renowned Capuchin missionary Cassiano Beligatti de Macerata, came to regard Polhané as the real "king" of Tibet. Part of Polhané's price for accepting his newly elevated position, however, was the exile of the Dalai Lama's family. Because, in Polhané's view, Sonam Dargyé was a troublemaker who would continue to find supporters in central Tibet so long as his son remained there, this meant that Kelzang Gyatso, too, would have to go.

These developments placed the Manchus in a quandary. For, on the one hand, Polhané had in effect saved Manchu authority in Tibet and so had a just claim on their support, while, on the other, the Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors had themselves approved of Kelzang Gyatso's recognition, so that the court was bound to remain loyal to the Dalai Lama they had helped to install. The pragmatic solution that was adopted, though perhaps not ideal, did permit Polhané to consolidate a stable regime in Tibet for the first time in over a quarter-century, while the Dalai Lama was given every provision for the advancement of his religious vocation; in Gartar, to the far east of Kham in Sichuan, a place far removed from central Tibetan affairs, a monastery was newly built as Kelzang Gyatso's court-sponsored residence. For the next eight years he devoted himself entirely to study and meditation, while teaching and writing on behalf of those who gathered to receive his blessing.

The Qing decision simultaneously to support both the Dalai Lama and his exile involved a contradiction that could not continue indefinitely. In 1735 it was decided that the time had come to authorize Kelzang Gyatso's return to central Tibet. Polhané was now sure of his own authority and, though he clearly did not relish the idea of the hierarch's renewed presence in Lhasa, he recognized that it made no sense to oppose it and so acquiesced in the imperial decision under the condition that Kelzang Gyatso be permitted to assume only religious and ceremonial functions. Under the order of the Yongzheng emperor, a royal entourage of 500 religious, civil, and military representatives was sent to accompany the Dalai Lama from Gartar to Lhasa. The religious leader of the delegation was none other than Changkya Rölpé Dorjé, then eighteen years of age.

For the latter, this was an opportunity he had been waiting for, and he enthusiastically grasped the occasion to continue his studies under the guidance of the Dalai Lama and his tutors. During the two years that followed, he became Kelzang Gyatso's intimate confidant and close



**Figure 20** Miwang Polhané, or perhaps his son Gyurmé Namgyel, overseeing offerings of tribute. Lamo Monastery, 2004.

disciple, and many years later would be his official biographer, too. In 1737 Changkya traveled to Trashi Lhünpo in Shigatsé to receive his complete ordination, as the Dalai Lama himself had done, from the Panchen Lozang Yeshé. His sojourn with this master, however, was cut short by news of the Yongzheng emperor's death and Changkya was obliged to return in haste to Beijing. The new monarch was, as matters turned out, his closest friend among the princes, who was elevated to the throne under the imperial title Qianlong (1711–99, r. 1736–95). Given Changkya's now established connections with both the Manchu ruler and Kelzang Gyatso, he came to play a uniquely important role in Sino-Tibetan affairs throughout the decades that followed.

The death of Polhané in 1747 ushered in a new period of instability. He was succeeded by his second son, Gyurmé Namgyel, who sought to renew ties with the Zunghars, forever the opponents of Manchu hegemony in Inner Asia. He is also said to have shunned the Dalai Lama. Tensions brewed and came to a head in 1750 with the assassination of Gyurmé Namgyel by the Manchu ambans. In retaliation the office of the amban was attacked and a general massacre of the Chinese population of Lhasa ensued. Gyurmé Namgyel's supporters were now the sworn enemies of the emperor, who did not hesitate to take severe punitive measures against them: those who were captured were either executed or imprisoned. Their rebellion against both the Dalai Lama and Manchu rule made it impossible for Kelzang Gyatso to intercede on their behalf.

In the wake of these events, the Qianlong emperor decided that the Tibetans could no longer be trusted to rule themselves and that henceforth the two court-appointed ambans would act as the sole governors of the region, effectively therefore transforming Tibet from a protectorate into a colony. The value of Changkya Rölpé Dorjé's role as the recognized intermediary between the Tibetan clergy and the emperor now became clear; he argued before the monarch that the attempt to place the Tibetans under direct Manchu rule would inevitably lead to further armed rebellion. It was his recommendation that his teacher and friend, the Dalai Lama, now be allowed to assume his rightful role. The emperor, for his part, came to recognize the merits of Changkya's position, and in a long proclamation addressed to the Tibetan authorities he justified the complete suppression of Gyurmé Namgyel's faction, while establishing a system of shared rule in which the ambans and the Dalai Lama, with the aid of respected officials such as Doring Pandita (1721–92), would together take charge of Tibetan affairs. For the first time in his life the Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso now occupied the political center-stage.



**Figure 21** Foreigners in the court of the Seventh Dalai Lama, from a mural at Samyé Monastery, 1990.

The Seventh Dalai Lama's success as a political leader was unforeseen. Trained as a monk-scholar, the turmoil that surrounded his youth and early adulthood had effectively excluded him from an active political role until the events of 1747–50 propelled him to head the Tibetan government at the age of forty-three. His personal reputation for learning and spiritual integrity, together with the widespread devotion of the Tibetan people to the figure of the Dalai Lama, earned him the cooperation of the general population as well as important factions of the clergy and aristocracy and, of course, the Manchu court. It was therefore possible for him to act with a degree of consensus that partisan elements in the Tibetan leadership had lacked.

Among the principal political institutions created under the Seventh Dalai Lama, one must take special note of the *kashak*, the leadership council or cabinet, which served as the apex of secular administration in Tibet until 1959 and continues today under the Tibetan government-in-exile. Because prominent members of the first *kashak* – notably Doring Pandita and Dokhar Zhabdrung (1697–1763) – had been important allies of Polhané, an appropriate measure of continuity in government was also maintained. In 1754 the Dalai Lama moved to enhance the education of lay officials by founding a new school specializing in calligraphy, the lit-

erary arts, and astrology – the principal subjects required for Tibetan government service – as well as the famous Döpel artistic workshop in the Zhöl quarter beneath the Potala. An archival office was later added to these new facilities, which together regulated the material aspects of Tibetan secular and monastic administration. During the years that followed, the Dalai Lama personally supervised a considerable production of religious art and publication. His health began to weaken, however, in 1756 and he passed away during the following year, at the age of just fifty. The reins of government were assumed by a regent, the sixth Demo Khutugthu Jampel Delek Gyatso (1723–77).

## Regency and Retreat

The eighth Dalai Lama, Jampel Gyatso, was born in Tsang in 1758 and was taken to Trashi Lhünpo at just two years of age, where he seems to have been tacitly recognized by the Sixth Panchen Lama, Pelden Yeshé (1738–80). His formal recognition in Lhasa took place two years later, in 1762. Though Tibet was officially governed by the regent, the Demo Khutugthu, and by Tsemönling (r. 1777–86) following the former's death, the Panchen appears to have operated, simultaneously, as a virtually autonomous Tibetan leader.

This was a period during which the repercussions of new alignments of power in the Himalayan lands of Bhutan, Nepal, and later Ladakh, as well as in India, were strongly felt in Tibet. Bhutan, where Tibetan culture had long been influential, was first formed as an ecclesiastical state during the seventeenth century by *zhabdrung*\* Ngawang Namgyel (1594–c. 1651), a Tibetan lama whose partisans had lost the struggle, when he was in his early twenties, to secure his contested recognition as the Fifth Drukchen, the incarnate leader of the Drukpa Kagyü order and the immediate rebirth of the great sage and scholar Pema Karpo (1527–92). Following a legal dispute with the Tsangpa government, which ensured the success of his rival, Paksam Wangpo (1593–1641), he crossed the Himalayas to enter Bhutan in 1616. There he was invited by the local headmen, who were not as yet organized into a single polity, to

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\* This designation, meaning roughly “chief steward” (lit. “before the feet”), was sometimes used in Tibet for clerics or laymen occupying a position analogous to that of lord chamberlain in the households of major religious hierarchs. It was taken over in Bhutan, however, as the unique title of Ngawang Namgyel and his later incarnations.

assume a leadership role. Though the Tsangpa attempted to invade the country on several occasions, they proved unable to establish a firm presence in Bhutan. Ngawang Namgyel, popularly credited for this victory, seems in fact to have led only indirectly, through the inspiration derived from his saintly character, and not by becoming personally involved in military campaigns. Contemporary testimony about the *zhabdrung* is found in the record of the Jesuit Estêvão Cacela, who traveled through Bhutan and met him in 1627:

He is also much praised for his abstinence: he never eats rice, nor meat, nor fish, nor anything besides milk and fruit. As for the retreat which he did for the three full years before we arrived: he left to dwell in a little cottage constructed for that purpose in the midst of a mountain, clinging to a great cliff, without seeing anyone or letting anyone see him. He was brought food by means of two cords descending from that cottage to others situated directly below; he received it thus for the entire time he was there without uttering a single word. As he explained to us himself, he dedicated himself to prayer. In the spare time left from the divine office, he made some works of art. One of these he showed to us, because it was the best: an image of the face of God in white sandal, small but very well done.<sup>11</sup>

In his later career, the *zhabdrung* consolidated a system of fortresses, called, as in Tibet, *dzong*, which both secured internal rule and bolstered resistance to invasion, for the Tibetans, now led by the Fifth Dalai Lama and backed by Mongol armies, again set their sights on Bhutan, beginning in 1644. His increasing involvement in secular affairs, however, does not appear to have weakened in any way his essentially religious outlook, and in later life we find him consecrating a stupa as a memorial to the dead on both sides of Bhutan's wars with Tibet.

The death of Ngawang Namgyel was concealed from the public under the pretext of a strict religious retreat, as that of the Fifth Dalai Lama would be as well, but in this case the veil was not lifted for the remarkable period of a half-century, until c. 1705. Bhutan was ruled by a succession of regents, and no power immediately arose that succeeded fully in continuing the legacy of the *zhabdrung*. During the eighteenth century conflict with Tibet flared up once again; Lhazang Khan attempted to invade in 1714 and Polhané sent an army in 1730, which succeeded at last in occupying the country, though Tibetan rule there endured for just three years. Bhutan is sometimes listed as having been a Qing-dynasty dependency because acceptance of Tibetan governance during this time required also formal submission to Tibet's overlords, the Manchus. On



this slender basis Chinese claims on Bhutan would be later reasserted from time to time, but without appreciable effect.

During the 1770s the Bhutanese sought to dominate the neighboring Indian principality of Cooch Bihar, with which they had long had close commercial relations. This move soon led to armed confrontation with the British East India Company, which simultaneously sought to assert its interests there. In an effort to bring the fighting to a halt, the Panchen Lama took the initiative to write to the Company's governor in Bengal, Warren Hastings, in 1774. Recognizing an opening, Hastings soon dispatched a talented young protégé, a Scotsman in his service named George Bogle, to the Panchen's seat in Shigatsé, where he arrived in December of the same year. Bogle recorded this description of the hierarchy, whom he calls the "Teshu Lama" (from Trashi Lhünpo, the Panchen's monastery):

Teshu Lama is about forty years of age, of low stature, and though not corpulent, rather inclining to be fat. His complexion is fairer than that of most of the Tibetans, and his arms are as white as those of a European; his hair, which is jet black, is cut very short; his beard and whiskers never above a month long; his eyes are small and black. The expression of his countenance is smiling and good-humoured. His father was a Tibetan; his mother a near relation of the Rajahs of Ladak. From her he learned the Hindustani language, of which he has a moderate knowledge, and is fond of speaking it. His disposition is open, candid, and generous. He is extremely merry and entertaining in conversation, and tells a pleasant story with a great deal of humour and action. I endeavoured to find out, in his character, those defects which are inseparable from humanity, but he is so universally beloved that I had no success, and not a man could find it in his heart to speak ill of him.<sup>12</sup>

Bogle reported, too, that merchants from Bengal were already active in the Tibetan bazaars. Given this, and the cordial connections he had formed with Tibet's leadership, the late eighteenth century might well have witnessed a growing bond between British India and Tibet. However, the premature deaths of both Bogle and the Panchen Pelden Yeshé – the latter of smallpox in Beijing in 1780 and the former the year after – followed within some years by the downfall of Hastings and a series of wars involving Nepal, effectively removed the conditions favoring the growth of such ties. Despite a mission to Tibet by Samuel Turner in 1784, the final decades of the eighteenth century would be the beginning of Tibet's long retreat into isolation, giving rise to the myth and romance of a closed and mysterious land.

The modern kingdom of Nepal had its origins during this same period, when the ruler of the principality of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah (1742–75), embarked upon a campaign of expansion that came to engulf much of the Himalaya, from the frontiers of Bhutan to Kashmir, before the modern borders of Nepal were roughly delineated at the conclusion of the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814–16. The Kathmandu Valley had been subjugated by the Gorkhas in 1769, and henceforth Tibet's relations with Nepal, traditionally conducted with Newar rulers and merchants with whom strong cultural ties had been developed over many centuries, were mediated by the conquerors, whose assertative Hinduism had few affinities with traditions known in Tibet. Nevertheless, there were important economic connections reaching across the Himalaya, and the Gorkhas were eager to turn these to their advantage. In 1788 they claimed Tibetan violations of conventions governing coinage minted in Nepal as well as of accords on the import of Tibetan salt. In addition, the tenth Zhamar incarnation Chödrup Gyatso (1741–91), who was a brother of the late Panchen Lama and was involved in the restoration of Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the Kathmandu Valley, allied himself with the Gorkhas, apparently in the hope that they would help him to recover the Panchen's inheritance, which he believed had been wrongly appropriated at Trashi Lhünpo. After the Tibetans refused to accede to Nepal's demands to devalue the old coin still in circulation, an army of 18,000 was dispatched, with the aid of the Zhamar's faction, and swiftly invaded southern Tibet, proceeding as far as Trashi Lhünpo, which was plundered. The infant Seventh Panchen was hastened to safety in Lhasa, and the Tibetan government appealed to China for aid. After the Gorkhas refused to respond to Chinese demands for restitution on behalf of Tibet, a force of 70,000 was dispatched to punish the invaders. The Qing army, after routing the Gorkha troops still remaining in Tibet, continued its march towards Kathmandu, arriving on the outskirts of the city in September 1792. Nepal at last sued for peace, accepting terms whereby the kingdom became a tributary of China, with the obligation to restore all that had been plundered in Tibet. One result was that, some two decades later, when the Nepalese found themselves at war with England, they turned to China for support, which did not, however, materialize. Nepal's brief experience of Chinese dominance was thereby brought to an end. As for the Zhamar incarnation, his monastery at Yangpachen was taken over by the Tibetan government and converted to the Gelukpa order. Following his death in Nepal in 1791 the recognition of a future trülku in his line was forbidden.

The Qianlong emperor seems to have regarded this entire messy busi-

ness as having stemmed in part from failures of administration in Tibet, which might have nipped matters in the bud, together with the results of apparent nepotism in the selection of trülkus (in particular, the Tenth Zhamar's relation with the Sixth Panchen). The imperial intervention in Tibet came little more than a decade after a very costly war in the Jinchuan region of Sichuan (1771–76), the area known in Tibetan as Gyelmorong. These events help us to understand why the emperor, who earlier in his career had shown himself as a devoted disciple of his boyhood friend Chankya Rölpe Dorjé, now turned a stern visage on Tibetan Buddhism and acerbically wrote,

The fact that last year the Gorkhas, incited by the Zhamarpa, looted Tibet is clear proof [of the corruption of the trülku institution by its monopolization within certain clans]. When I gathered troops to chastise them, they immediately submitted for fear of punishment, and so Tibet was pacified. But if the dignity of the *khubilghan* [trülku] were transmitted for generations within the same clan that be would egoism. What has the Buddha to do with egoism? This must therefore be terminated.

For this reason I have had a golden urn cast and sent to Tibet. Whenever a *khubilghan* is to be elected, the names of all eligible persons shall be written and placed in the urn. (The person to be appointed) shall be determined by the lot. Although by doing so I cannot entirely eliminate abuses, it seems to be somewhat fairer than by following the former method when one person asserted his will. . . .

Admitting that Our government protects the Yellow Church [the Gelukpa] (We feel) in perfect agreement with the "Kingly Institutions" which say: "(The tribes) were instructed without changing their customs. . . ."

But those who stir up the masses and infringe the laws shall be punished according to the King's laws in the same way as the ordinary subject of China proper.<sup>13</sup>

The golden urn, designed to transform the selection of high incarnations from an oracular and hieratic mystery into a public lottery under state supervision, was just one of twenty-nine administrative reforms for Tibet introduced by Qianlong by decree in 1792, but, as an imperial intrusion penetrating the heart of Tibetan religious life, it was by far the most resented, so that every effort was made to circumvent its use. Among the remaining twenty-eight provisions that were mandated, one specified that the ambans, and the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, were to be treated as equal in rank, requiring similar honors from the lords; others addressed aristocratic and military ranks, currency standards and taxation, senior monastic appointments, criminal justice, foreign trade, etc.

Although the Eighth Dalai Lama served as the designated ruler of

Tibet for three years (1787–90), he was only at ease as a monk-scholar and clearly preferred to stay out of public affairs. Until his death at the age of forty-seven he devoted his energies to religious practice and teaching, taking special interest, as had his predecessor, in improvements to temples and artistic commissions of various kinds.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century the Dalai Lamas were without any power and the reins of Tibetan government were firmly in the hands of the regents. Four of the Dalai Lamas during this time – Lungtok Gyatso (1805–15), Tsültrim Gyatso (1816–37), Khedrup Gyatso (1838–55), and Trlíné Gyatso (1856–75) – were notably short-lived and it has long been rumored that they were the victims of poisoning, whether at the hands of their own regents or of the representatives of the Manchu court. Natural causes of death, however, cannot be ruled out in any of these cases, and no evidence is now known that will clarify once and for all the truth of the matter. In any event, only two were ever invested with political power, the Eleventh, Khedrup Gyatso, for some months preceding his passing, and the Twelfth, Trlíné Gyatso, during his last two years. A poignant record of a meeting with the Ninth Dalai Lama Lungtok Gyatso when he was just seven is found in the journals of Thomas Manning, an eccentric English traveler who reached Lhasa in 1812:

I made the due obeisance, touching the ground three times with my head to the Grand Lama, and once to the Tí-mu-fu [the regent Demo Khutughtu]. I presented my gifts, delivering the coin with a handsome silk scarf with my own hands into the hands of the Grand Lama and the Tí-mu-fu . . . Having delivered the scarf to the Grand Lama, I took off my hat, and humbly gave him my clean-shaved head to lay his hands upon . . . The Lama's beautiful and interesting face engrossed almost all my attention. He was at that time about seven years old: had the simple and unaffected manners of a well-educated princely child. His face was, I thought, poetically and affectingly beautiful. He was of a gay and cheerful disposition; his beautiful mouth perpetually unbending into a graceful smile, which illuminated his whole countenance. Sometimes, particularly when he had looked at me, his smile almost approached a gentle laugh . . . I was extremely affected by this interview with the Lama. I could have wept through the strangeness of sensation. I was absorbed in reflections when I got home.<sup>14</sup>

After a meeting some months later, however, Manning noted that the young Dalai Lama “was pale and worse in health.”<sup>15</sup> He died at the age of ten, just three years later.

Despite the powerlessness of this group of Dalai Lamas, their selection did have an important ramification for Tibetan government, above

and beyond the mere sense of continuity that was maintained by ensuring that the office of Dalai Lama was filled. All four were born into families that did not belong to the central Tibetan aristocracy – the first three in fact hailed from Kham – which circumstance required that their parents be granted estates and ennobled following their sons' elevation. In most cases, the descendants of these households would include some of the major figures in twentieth-century Tibetan political affairs. The house of Changlochen thus arose from the family of the Ninth Dalai Lama, Yutok from that of the Tenth, and Pünkhang from that of the Eleventh. (The second of these should not be confounded with another noble household called Yutok, which claimed descent from the legendary eighth-century physician, Yutok Yönten Gönpö, and which later changed its name to Tsarong.) The Lhalu household sprang from the ennobled family of the Eighth Dalai Lama, though the name was later transferred to that of the Twelfth. The descendants of Sonam Dargyé, the ennobled father of the Seventh Dalai Lama, similarly formed the house of Sampo. These families, known as *yabzhi*, came to occupy the very highest ranks of the aristocracy.

The regular recognition of Dalai Lamas among families not belonging to the central Tibetan aristocracy no doubt served to prevent the highest power from being dominated at any given time by any particular noble line and so may have served to reduce friction within the aristocracy, while the fact that so many came from altogether outside of the central Tibetan system avoided the tensions that surely would have arisen if the families of commoners were too often elevated at the expense of their own lords. Though it is sometimes thought that social class was the sole significant differential in the elevation of the “commoner” Dalai Lamas, it is clear that geography thus played a major role here as well. The status of the families concerned relative to the Khampa society from which they hailed, however, has yet to be adequately examined.

The political impotence of the Ninth through Twelfth Dalai Lamas – as children they could hardly be expected to exercise real authority – meant that the chief executive of the Tibetan government throughout this period was the regent (titled *desi* or *sikyong*), who was now always a highly placed monk. A few were distinguished by their long tenure, and hence by the considerable influence they came to wield: Tseling Jampel Tsültrim Gyatso (r. 1819–44), Reting Yeshé Tsültrim Gyeltsen (r. 1845–62), and Dedruk Khyenrab Wangchuk (r. 1864–73) together dominated much of the age of the four child-hierarchs.

A topic that has been debated at times concerns the actual extent of the Qing dynasty's control over Tibet and the adjacent Tibetan populations during the nineteenth century. On one extreme are those who argue

that Tibet was fully and firmly a part of China under the Manchus, while oppositely some maintain that, with the exception of a small number of forceful interventions, the later Qing had virtually no real authority among Tibetans, whatever nominal powers they may have arrogated to themselves. The truth seems to lie somewhere between these extremes. The real complexities and uncertainties of Sino-Tibetan relations under the Qing at this time may be illustrated briefly by some anecdotes drawn from the life of the great mystic and poet of early nineteenth-century Amdo, Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl.

During the course of his pilgrimages and teaching missions throughout western Tibet, Shabkar had amassed a considerable fortune in the donations of the faithful (see p. 88 above). Part of this he decided to use to restore and to reconsecrate the famed Bodhnath Stupa of Nepal in 1821. He sent large numbers of his disciples into the Kathmandu Valley with abundant offerings of gold for this purpose. However, the cross-border trade in precious metals, as well as Tibetan restorations of Nepal's Buddhist stupas, had been among the causes of hostilities between Tibet and the Gorkha rulers of Nepal during the run-up to the war of 1788. Although no doubt motivated by the purest religious intentions, Shabkar had thus unwittingly stirred up a hornets' nest, and even given the slow pace of communications across Inner Asia during the early nineteenth century, the news was nevertheless relayed by the amban to Beijing in short order. The court reminded the yogin that he had acted improperly in not seeking official permission, but allowed him to proceed on the condition that he would stay clear of border areas thereafter. In fact, Shabkar did not travel to Nepal to see the completion of the work he had commissioned, but instead performed the rituals of consecration at a distance. Thus, even during a period in which the Qing dynasty is generally thought to have already considerably weakened, it was nonetheless capable of concerning itself with distant Tibeto-Nepalese relations.

Then, in 1828, when Shabkar returned from central Tibet to his homeland in Amdo, the Tibetan government-licensed caravan with which he journeyed was brutally attacked and looted en route by Golok tribesmen. Shabkar's leading disciple was among those who died as a result, and the accumulated wealth of the party, including their pack animals and mounts, was lost. Those who eventually made it out of the wilderness region in which they were stranded counted themselves lucky just to have lived. The fact that the caravan traveled with letters of passage granted by the Dalai and Panchen Lamas had counted for nothing in the eyes of their assailants.

Shabkar himself some months later was able to recount what had

taken place to the Qinghai amban, the chief Manchu administrator in Xining. The amban readily admitted that the Golok tribes had been beyond the reach of imperial control of late. Would Shabkar, as a famed Buddhist teacher, be interested in taking up the challenge of preaching to them, as this might be the only means to tame them, at least to some extent? Shabkar complied, and soon found himself teaching the dharma in the camps of tribes who, in their fondness for feuding and banditry, were cut from just the same cloth as the Golok who had victimized him. Much of the value of his earlier loss was, nevertheless, now recouped through their stupendous offerings to him. Thus if the Qing emperor could make his presence felt in far-off Nepal, at about the same time he exerted no semblance of real authority among Tibetan tribesmen on his own doorstep in Qinghai.

Part of the difference between Shabkar's experiences of Qing rule in central Tibet and in Amdo stemmed, to be sure, from differences in the mechanisms of governance involved. Whereas the ambans in Lhasa were officially designated to rule Tibet in concert with the Dalai Lama or regent, and were accorded command of Chinese troops in Tibet, whose role was in large part to protect the borders from foreign intrusions, Manchu authority in Kham and Amdo was diffused through a network of "native chiefs." So long as the latter, called *tusi* in Chinese, made an appropriate show of their loyalty to the court and, most importantly, restrained their people from directly attacking Qing interests, they were to all intents and purposes left to do as they pleased. The endemic feuding and banditry among eastern Tibetans was not often by itself sufficiently troublesome to warrant imperial intervention.

By the middle of the century, however, above all in the wake of the Opium War (1839–42), the Qing, plagued by troubles in China proper, were no longer capable of maintaining an effective military presence in central Tibet. When the army of the Dogras of Jammu led by Zorawar Singh, who had already taken Ladakh, attacked western Tibet in 1841, it was the Tibetan winter that delivered the crucial blow, leaving the invaders at the mercy of an otherwise inferior Tibetan force that then proceeded to annihilate the survivors. Zorawar Singh was himself decapitated in battle and his head carried off as a trophy. Although the Dogras would make no further attempts on Tibet, Ladakh never recovered its independence and in 1846, as part of Jammu and Kashmir, it came under the rule of British India.

The period of the Taiping rebellion (1850–64), as China plunged further into the throes of disorder, was accompanied by new travails in Tibet's relations with Nepal, the latter no doubt well aware that this time

no help would be forthcoming as had been the case in 1788. Complaining of Tibetan ill-treatment of Nepalese traders, in 1855 the Gorkhas invaded some border towns, whereupon the resident amban in Lhasa decided to negotiate rather than to resist. It was agreed that the Tibetans should pay an indemnity to Nepal, but the invasion was continued nevertheless. With no alternative but to raise a local levy of troops, including monks from the major monasteries, the Tibetans succeeded in gaining some ground, only to be soundly defeated when Gorkha reinforcements arrived. The Nepalese demands were now stiffened and, in addition to receiving an annual tribute payment of 10,000 silver rupees, Nepal was granted rights to open an embassy in Lhasa, for its merchants to trade freely there, and for Nepalese residing in Tibet to enjoy extraterritorial privilege. The last condition struck the Tibetans as particularly ignominious and became the cause of further dispute. In 1883, a marketplace quarrel over a string of corals erupted into a full-fledged riot in which the Nepalese shops in Lhasa were mostly destroyed. War was avoided only after the Tibetan government committed itself to paying substantial reparations, which so strained the budget that it became necessary to request a loan of almost 70,000 Chinese silver dollars from the provincial treasury of Sichuan.

The weakening of the Qing in tandem with hostile confrontations with neighbors to the south and west, especially given the role of the British empire simultaneously in both China and India, generally encouraged Tibetan isolation. Whereas Tibet had never been of easy access, neither had it been as sealed from contact with the surrounding world as it became during the nineteenth century, leading to its reputation at the dawn of the twentieth as an impenetrable land of mystery. The Manchus, now too feeble to rise to their protectorate's defense, favored a clear policy of closure, while the Tibetans, fearful of outside aggression, were content to comply. Under such circumstances, the "race to Lhasa" gained an allure for Western adventurers that it never had during the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, when Catholic missionaries and Armenian traders circulated in what was not yet thought of as the "mythical city" on the roof of the world.

## **Cultural Developments in Eastern Tibet**

The turmoil in central Tibet during much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, together with the new foundation of important monastic centers in Kham and Amdo, or, in some cases, the revitalization of older



institutions, contributed to a remarkable shift in Tibet's cultural geography at this time. Whereas central Tibet had been, throughout the preceeding centuries, the unrivalled heart of Tibetan religious life, even if many of its religious luminaries hailed from other regions, masters of various orders now increasingly devoted their energies to activities in the Tibetan far east. Natives of Kham and Amdo continued to visit central Tibet for study and pilgrimage, but fewer would spend their entire careers there. And, as was always the case in Tibet, a concentration of learned religious activity was accompanied by the development of the arts, medicine, and other branches of learning.

The eastward displacement of cultural activity had many causes. We have referred already to political instability in central Tibet, which in some cases had grave consequences for religious leaders, requiring them or their followers to pursue their paths elsewhere. Thus the civil wars of the seventeenth century made an exile of the tenth Karmapa, Chöying Dorjé, a talented painter and patron of the arts, and led him to spend much of his career in the far southeast of Tibet, in Sino-Tibetan frontier regions in what is now Yunnan. The sponsorship of his order by important princes in these areas encouraged his followers to regard the east as their true base. During the succeeding centuries, in fact, the major center of learning and culture in the Karmapa order would be Pelpung Monastery, near Dergé. The leaders of Pelpung, the Tai Situ Rinpoché (who had no connection with the earlier Pakmodrupa leaders who had also been granted the Chinese title *tai situ*), came to be in effect the second-ranking hierarchs of the order, after the Karmapas themselves. Their position became all the more important following the ban placed upon the Zhamarpa line by the Central Tibetan government in 1791. The eighth Tai Situ, Chöki Jungné (1699–1774), gave new impetus to Tibetan grammatical and linguistic scholarship, and studied Sanskrit with Newari scholars in Kathmandu. A connoisseur of the arts, he was also a noted painter who achieved a subtle integration of Tibetan and Chinese techniques. Thanks to the patronage of the rulers of Dergé, he contributed to the foundation of Tibet's greatest printing establishment, the Dergé Printery, and served there as editor of the Kangyur, the collection of scriptures attributed to the Buddha himself. A renowned Sakyapa contemporary, Zhuchen Tsültrim Rinchen (1697–1774), edited the parallel commentarial collection, or Tengyur. The Dergé edition of the canon is considered one of the masterworks of traditional Tibetan printing, and is an object of pride among the Khampa in general.

Besides persecution and new patronage, other forces also contributed to the move east. The government of the Fifth Dalai Lama, in particular,

strongly supported the development of mass monasticism in all parts of the country, and new Gelukpa establishments were founded everywhere. Besides this, some older centers of the other orders and of the Bön religion were converted to the Gelukpa. Most of the eastern Tibetan Gelukpa monasteries were affiliated with one or another of the “three seats” – Ganden, Sera, and Drepung – or with Trashī Lhünpo, and these as a result recruited large numbers of monks from the length and breadth of Tibet until their activities were curtailed in 1959. At the same time, however, some of the Gelukpa monasteries in eastern Tibet became for the first time important centers of learning in their own right, particularly in Amdo. The best-known examples were no doubt Kumbum, which had been founded by the Third Dalai Lama in 1588 at Tsongkhapa’s birth-place not far from the city of Xining (Qinghai Province), and Labrang Trashī-khyil, established by the Jamyang Zhepa in 1709 in southern Gansu. Owing to Amdo’s close connections with the Mongols and other non-Tibetan adherents of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelukpa centers of Amdo often had something of a multi-ethnic character. Gönlung Jampaling, for example, founded in 1604 in a district inhabited by the Monguor (Ch. *Tuzu*) people, emerged as the seat of three of eighteenth-century Tibet’s greatest savants: Sumpa Khenpo (1704–88), Changkya Rölpé Dorjé (1717–86), and Tuken Chöki Nyima (1737–1802). All entered the service of the Manchu court; the second, in particular, we have seen as the Buddhist tutor of the Qianlong emperor, who was placed in charge of the vast imperial projects of Buddhist translation and publication, among other responsibilities on behalf of the throne.

With these developments in the background, the nineteenth century saw a virtual cultural renaissance in Kham, centered on the principality of Dergé. One of the driving figures here was Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820–92), who was regarded as a trülku of both the Sakyapa and Nyingmapa orders. A man of copious talents, he had an insatiable appetite for learning and consumed the curricula of all the Buddhist orders, taking special interest in the traditions of rare and poorly known lineages. The example of his impartial (*rimé*) stance with respect to Tibetan sectarian claims proved an inspiration for many. His leading associate in this regard, Jamgön Kongtrül (1813–99), for instance, had been born a Bönpo, was educated as a Nyingmapa, and eventually became recognized as a Karma Kagyü trülku. Though they and their like-minded contemporaries in no way sought to challenge existing sectarian institutions, their eclectic approach to Tibetan religious traditions has often been spoken of as constituting a distinct *Rimé* movement.

While masters such as these were preaching sectarian tolerance, mid-

nineteenth-century Kham was nevertheless a scene of intense political conflict. Gönpö Namgyel (?–1865), a chieftain from the region of Nyarong, launched a series of campaigns that, over a period of some three decades, engulfed much of Kham in almost incessant warfare. Beginning his conquests in order to settle a local feud in 1837, by 1863 he had taken over almost all of eastern Kham, including the important principality of Dergé. Thus interposed between the Lhasa-based administration of the Ganden Palace and the Chinese provincial authority of Sichuan, his rule in Kham was seen as a challenge to both. Though Chinese forces from Sichuan launched an offensive against his eastern flanks, their progress was slight, whereupon they encouraged the central Tibetans to attack from the west. The Tibetan army was dispatched for this purpose in 1863 and Nyarong finally succumbed two years later. Though there was little love lost for Gönpö Namgyel in most parts of Kham – he had a reputation for unspeakable cruelty – the misconduct of the central Tibetan troops, who pillaged the countryside as they advanced, became a cause for long-lasting enmity among the Khampas toward the Lhasa regime.

The *Rimé* movement came to fruition in the wake of these disturbances. Following its occupation by Nyarong, Dergé reasserted itself as the cultural center of eastern Tibet and, under the guidance of Khyentsé and Kongtrül, massive new publication projects were undertaken at its famous printery and at the nearby monastery of Pelpung. The production of the “five great treasures” (*dzöchen nga*) of Kongtrül, roughly a hundred large volumes in all, provided comprehensive documentation of indigenous Tibetan Buddhist traditions of revelation, ritual, and learning; among them, the three-volume *Treasury of Knowledge* remains an unparalleled encyclopedia, treating the history and doctrines of the various schools and orders, as well as the secular arts and sciences. These works became, in some respects, a new canon of uniquely Tibetan elaborations of Buddhist traditions. At the same time, Khyentsé’s brilliant disciple Mipam Namgyel (1846–1912) composed an entirely new philosophical curriculum, which, though emphasizing primarily the doctrinal perspective of the Nyingmapa order, contributed to the improvement of formal education in monasteries throughout Kham.

Though the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876–1933) was sympathetic to the goals of the *Rimé* movement, some factions within the Gelukpa leadership were not. Prominent among them was the highly revered teacher Pabongkhapa Dechen Nyingpo (1878–1941), whose visions of the Gelukpa protective deity Dorjé Shukden – thought to have been the wrathful apotheosis of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s rival Drakpa Gyeltsen – seem to have entailed a commitment to oppose actively the other schools

of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the Bön religion. There has been, as a result, a continuing legacy of sectarian dispute among Tibetans down to the present day.

## The Life and Times of the Great Thirteenth

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama was born to the family of Kunga Rinchen and his wife Lozang Drölma in the village of Langdün, in Dakpo, in 1876. At two years of age he was recognized by the eighth Panchen Lama Tenpé Wangchuk (1855–82) and given the name Tupten Gyatso. Because there was soon a consensus within the hierarchy regarding the recognition, it was possible on this occasion to dispense with the much-hated lottery of the golden urn. In 1879 the new Dalai Lama was installed in the Potala and began his formal education. As had been the practice in earlier generations, his family was ennobled, taking the name of their native village, Langdün. The regent during this time was Tatsak Ngawang Pelden (r. 1875–86), following whose death the Demo Khutugthu Lozang Trinlé (r. 1886–95) was elevated to the post.

When he was nineteen, in 1895, the Dalai Lama received his final ordination as a *bhikshu* and was also made head of state. The Demo Khutugthu, however, was apparently not content to cede the power he had enjoyed, and launched a bizarre plot against the Dalai Lama in 1899. He employed a sorcerer to prepare evil spells to be stitched into the Dalai Lama's boots, so that the latter would be magically weakened with every step. After this occult conspiracy was revealed, the Demo Khutugthu was punished with the loss of both rank and estate, and the Dalai Lama was left free to form a government of his own design.

At about the same time the Dalai Lama began to entertain the idea of counterbalancing British overtures in Tibet by establishing relations with czarist Russia. In this he was encouraged by one of his tutors, the Buryat lama Agvan Dorjieff (1853–1938) of Drepung Monastery. Dorjieff, as a Russian Mongol who had come up through the clerical ranks at Drepung thanks to his skill in dialectics and debate, regarded the czar as a protector of the Buddhist religion (which to his Buddhist subjects he certainly was), no doubt an attractive vision for Tibetans, given the uncertainties overtaking Central Asia in the course of the "Great Game." In 1901 Dorjieff, bringing a letter from the Dalai Lama, was received at court by Czar Nicholas II in the course of a mission in which he met widely with Russian officials to discuss Tibetan affairs. The British, for their part, reacted with considerable alarm to these developments, which promised,

as they understood it, to produce a Sino-Russian accord on Tibet, from which Britain would be altogether excluded. Thanks to his role in these affairs, Dorjjeff himself became a sort of bugbear to British intelligence, by whose agents he was at times even confounded with the controversial Georgian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949). He died, however, in Burjatia, having continued in his efforts even after the Russian Revolution and staunchly maintaining that his motivation had been to secure the independence of Tibet. In his final testament he wrote,

I . . . was officially appointed in 1901 as the plenipotentiary of Tibet at the Government of Great Russia by the Tibetan Government and Tibet's Supreme Ruler, the Dalai Lama. . . . My 40-year long political activity was directed towards establishing the best relationship between Tibet and Great Russia – the USSR; however, because of the extreme political tensions which had evolved in the recent years in the Far East and in Europe, and consequently of Tibet's international situation, I was unable to do much for the sake of the actual national independence of the great Tibetan people.<sup>16</sup>

The British Raj, for its part, had been interested in trade relations with Tibet for quite some time. Overtures made toward the end of the eighteenth century came to nought, but with the empire's expansion into Tibetan cultural regions such as Ladakh (1846) and Sikkim (1861), as well as the evolution of Anglo-Nepal relations during the same period, renewed efforts to regularize the British rapport with Tibet came to the fore. At the outset, however, because Britain regarded Tibet to be clearly governed by China, it was hoped that conventions with the latter would resolve any diplomatic or commercial difficulties that arose. This was not to be the case, however, so that during the last decades of the nineteenth century it became increasingly apparent that Tibetan affairs would have to be to a large extent negotiated with the Tibetans themselves. Nevertheless, this conclusion was not readily accepted. Following a series of border skirmishes in Sikkim in 1888, which had been sparked by a Tibetan military presence in what the Raj considered to be Sikkimese territory under British Indian protection, but about which the Tibetans thought otherwise, bilateral negotiations were once more opened between Britain and China. The resulting accords came to nothing, however, as the Tibetans had little interest in implementing trade agreements to which they themselves had not been party.

By 1903 the British had run out of patience. They were determined to reach a viable trade agreement with Tibet and at the same time felt pressured by the (mostly imaginary) implications of Dorjjeff's dealings

with Russia. In the event they opted for a diplomatic mission to Tibet, led by Colonel Francis Younghusband (1863–1942), whose long experience in India and Central Asia had earlier included an epic trek across the Gobi Desert. The mission, however, soon metamorphosed into a full-dress invasion. Known to posterity as the Younghusband expedition, it proved to be an inglorious chapter in the history of the Raj: numbers of ill-prepared Tibetan troops were cut down by infinitely superior firepower, the Dalai Lama fled to Outer Mongolia, and the English exacted terms from the acting Tibetan government that would soon be repudiated by Parliament itself, which launched a hostile investigation into the entire affair. Strangely, Younghusband was religiously moved by his experiences in Tibet – he seems to have had a romantic, mystical streak all along – and in his retirement he established a movement for world spiritual brotherhood. His dying wish was to be buried with the statue of the Buddha that the Ganden Tri Rinpoché, Tibet's regent in the Dalai Lama's absence, had given the invader as a parting gift.

As the British approached Lhasa in early 1904 the Dalai Lama, who had been isolated in religious retreat, departed with Dorjjeff for Mongolia. He clearly did not desire to seek Chinese aid in this time of crisis, and was no doubt much influenced by Dorjjeff's encouragements to turn to Russia instead. In the event, the Russians, who were then reeling under the strains of their disastrous war with Japan, were not forthcoming, and the cold reception accorded by the Jebtsundampa of Urga made it quite clear that no serious support could be anticipated from this direction either.

Accordingly the Dalai Lama moved from Mongolia to Amdo and then to Wutaishan, the famous Chinese mountain sacred to the bodhisattva Mañjushri, where he continued to teach for some time. The Qing court, for its part, withdrew its recognition of him and abolished his titles before summoning him to Beijing for an imperial audience in 1908. This did not go well. Though the Dalai Lama offered his submission, according to protocol, before the Guangxu emperor, he was told in no uncertain terms that all matters of business between China and Tibet would have to pass through the office of the amban stationed in Lhasa. With this rebuff, the Dalai Lama decided that he would never again count on the Chinese court. The Guangxu emperor died shortly thereafter; his infant successor, chosen by the empress dowager Cixi (1835–1908), was to be the last emperor, Puyi (1906–67). The Dalai Lama, having met with them both, left Beijing in 1909 to return to Tibet via Qinghai.

Once back in his own capital, relations with the amban swiftly deteriorated even further. In a final flare of imperial energy, however, the dying

Qing dynasty named the militant general Zhao Erfeng to be the imperial commissioner of Tibet. Zhao, who had already occupied large parts of Kham under the authority of Sichuan Province, and had incorporated his conquests as the new provincial unit of Xikang in 1907, departed for Lhasa with an expeditionary army, which took control of the city in 1910. Once again the Dalai Lama appointed a regent and took flight, this time to British India. His warm reception there came as a great surprise, and he was welcomed by British officers, above all Charles Bell, who had experience of Tibetan affairs and could converse with him in his own language. At the same time the Chinese government responded to his exile by once again abolishing his titles. Under these circumstances, it came as an unpleasant shock for him to learn that London had mandated that the government of India was not to meddle in Sino-Tibetan affairs at all.

As the dynasty collapsed in late 1911 Chinese troops stationed in Tibet began to mutiny, while the Tibetans organized resistance to their presence. The exile of the Dalai Lama and the brutality of Zhao Erfeng's administration had produced only public resentment, so that China's position in Tibet was quite lacking in local support. In 1912 the Dalai Lama returned to his country to popular acclaim and soon declared Tibet's independence. Tsarong, a leading official who had continued to serve under the Chinese, was executed as a collaborator along with his son and several others, and the Dalai Lama later transferred his estate to his favored officer, Dazang Dramdül (1886–1959), thereby ennobling him. He would be one of the Dalai Lama's major collaborators in the modernization schemes that were attempted during the decades that followed.

During the years following the fall of the Manchu dynasty, China was in no position to assert itself in Tibet, and in the ongoing local conflicts between Tibetans and Chinese in Kham, the Tibetans, who began to acquire British rifles and had superior command of the terrain, often held the advantage. The Tibetans, for their part, wished to drive China altogether out of far eastern Tibet, and to reestablish the integrality of the Tibetan political realm as it had been when Güshri Khan made his famous donation to the Fifth Dalai Lama. For the Chinese, however, Amdo had become the administrative unit of Qinghai following the anti-Manchu rebellion of 1723, and Kham, which had mostly been placed under the authority of Sichuan Province during the same period, was now, as Xikang, a province of China as well. This seemed, in the Chinese view, to warrant a division of Tibet, similar to that of Mongolia, into an Outer Tibet, comprising the territories administered by the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, and an Inner Tibet, those parts of Kham and Amdo which were closely tied to China.

Great Britain, in an effort to settle these disputes, as well as their own claims in regard to Tibet's border with India, in 1913 organized a tripartite convention in Simla, India, to which China only begrudgingly sent representation. The Tibetan and Chinese parties both arrived with hardline demands, the Tibetans wishing to affirm a fully independent Tibet within its ideal seventeenth-century borders and China insisting that Tibet was wholly integral to the territory of China. The final agreement negotiated in 1914, and orchestrated by the British, included this still problematic resolution:

The Governments of Great Britain and China recognising that Tibet is under the suzerainty of China, and recognising also the autonomy of Outer Tibet, engage to respect the territorial integrity of the country, and to abstain from interference in the administration of Outer Tibet (including the selection and installation of the Dalai Lama), which shall remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa.

The Government of China engages not to convert Tibet into a Chinese province. The Government of Great Britain engages not to annex Tibet or any portion of it.<sup>17</sup>

Though the independence of the Dalai Lama's domain was thus in effect acknowledged, the Simla Agreement, by its inscription of the ambiguous notion of Chinese "suzerainty" and the division of Inner and Outer Tibet, failed in just those areas that were most deeply contested. The Chinese, in the event, would not accept any curtailment of the authority they believed to be their right in Tibet, and so only initialed but then repudiated the accord. Britain and Tibet accepted it, the latter, no doubt, because it seemed to guarantee the minimum of autonomy that it sought.

The Dalai Lama's travels during the preceding years, though provoked by successive crises, had the salutary effect of making him aware of technological and political changes in the contemporary world, and of Tibet's isolation and vulnerability in relation to these developments. Aided by Dazang Dramdül, now Tsarong, and other loyal officials, he sought to enact a range of improvements and reforms. These included new agricultural development, the creation of a post office and bank, and the installation of a telegraph system. A number of aristocratic youths were sent to be educated in England, and an English school for the sons of the aristocracy was opened in Gyantsé. This was soon closed, however, owing to sharp opposition on the part of conservative elements within the Gelukpa monastic establishment. The Dalai Lama abolished capital punishment and punishment by mutilation and, moved by his Buddhist principles, tried to ban the slaughter of animals as well.



In these measures, particularly the latter, his efforts met little enduring success. Perhaps most importantly, he and Tsarong regarded modernization of the army as crucial to ensuring Tibet's independence in the long term; recruitment, training, and equipment were all in need of a thorough-going overhaul. To achieve their goals in this respect, however, they were dependent upon British goodwill, for only Britain now enjoyed relations with Tibet that were appropriate for supplying the required military aid. Though some factions within the imperial government supported the Tibetans in this regard, others counseled restraint. The result was a modest level of British assistance in the form of light arms, artillery, and training. Even these efforts, however, met with resistance on the part of the monastic conservatives, whose reaction contributed to the demotion of Tsarong and other military officers in 1925. Although efforts to upgrade the army were later renewed from time to time, they were never sufficient to prepare the Tibetans for the challenge they would face when, after some decades, revolutionary China chose to invade.

The events leading up to the 1925 reversal of the progressive movement included rumors of a plot against the Dalai Lama himself. These had their origin in the tensions between the military and monastic factions of the government, and in the clearly expressed desire of the former to exercise greater autonomy with respect to military affairs. In response to the factional problems that beset Tibet's ruling elite during this period, the Dalai Lama responded by becoming increasingly autocratic, choosing to rule through hand-picked favorites and disregarding the *kashak* and other institutions of government altogether.

One of the grave problems to emerge during this time concerned the Thirteenth's relation with the Ninth Panchen Lama Chöki Nyima (1883–1937). The latter, reacting to the central Tibetan government's demand that, in order to finance improvements to army and infrastructure, he should accept the burden of taxation, from which he had previously been exempted, fled with his closest supporters to China in 1923, where he opened offices under aegis of the Chinese Republican government. He thus became perhaps the most prominent of the several Tibetan clerics who were closely aligned with the Chinese Nationalists, some performing ritual functions on behalf of powerfully placed Chinese sponsors, others gaining a more popular following in cities such as Chengdu, Shanghai, and Nanjing. Hence, despite the poor rapport between the governments concerned, in some areas Sino-Tibetan relations did draw closer during this period, particularly in the spheres of culture and religion. The Panchen Lama tried to return to Tibet in 1934, after the Dalai Lama had died, but he was blocked in this by the

government in Lhasa. The last three years of his life were spent preaching Buddhism and elements of the thought of Sun Yat-sen in Amdo and Kham.

While the Chinese Republicans, led by the Guomindang, wished to assert a continuing control over Tibetan affairs, in practical terms their position was weak and Tibet was effectively independent under the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's rule. The Republicans' sphere of direct authority was in any case reduced by the presence of powerful warlords ruling large parts of China, particularly in western provinces such as Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan, whose Tibetan populations constituted much of so-called Inner Tibet. Moreover, with the onset of war with Japan (1931), and civil war against the communists, the Guomindang was unable to commit precious resources and manpower to making good its claims over the furthest reaches of the former Manchu empire in Tibet and Mongolia.

As the surrounding countries thus tumbled toward a new world war, the Dalai Lama was keenly aware that Tibet could not count on the security of its relative isolation forever. It would inevitably be drawn into the maelstrom. In his last political testament he wrote,

The present is the time of the Five Kinds of Degeneration in all countries. In the worst class is the manner of working among the red people [the Soviet communists]. They do not allow search to be made for the new Incarnation of the Grand Lama of Urga [the Jebtsundampa Khutughtu, leader of Mongolian Buddhists]. They have seized and taken away all the sacred objects from the monasteries. They have made monks to work as soldiers. They have broken religion, so that not even the name of it remains. Have you heard of all these things that have happened at Urga? And they are still continuing. It may happen that here in the centre of Tibet the Religion and the secular administration may be attacked both from the outside and from the inside. Unless we can guard our own country, it will now happen that the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, . . . the Holders of the Faith, the glorious Rebirths, will be broken down and left without a name. As regards the monasteries and the monks and nuns, their lands and properties will be destroyed. . . . The officers of the State, ecclesiastical and secular, will find their lands seized and their property confiscated, and they themselves made to serve their enemies, or wander about the country as beggars do. All beings will be sunk in great hardship and in overpowering fear; the days and nights will drag on slowly in suffering.<sup>18</sup>

These words were written by the Great Thirteenth in 1932, the year preceding his death. Before three decades had passed, they proved to be prescient indeed.

# Tibetan Society

In the preceding chapters relatively little has been said of the organization of Tibetan society. Concepts of property and rights of land use, family structure, social class, government, and law have been touched upon on occasion, but not described in any detail. In considering now these aspects of Tibetan civilization, focusing upon conditions under the rule of the Ganden Palace before 1950, we must take care not to suppose that we will find here an unchanging social reality, persisting throughout the Tibetan world for more than a millennium following the fall of the old empire. For, although the pace of change was assuredly slow, and despite the limitations of the modest body of research that has so far been devoted to the study of premodern Tibetan society, there is nevertheless reason to believe that in some spheres important developments had taken place prior to and even during Ganden Palace rule. Comparative data make clear that there was not one fixed model of social organization followed throughout cultural Tibet, but rather some general patterns that demonstrated considerable local variation. Accordingly, despite the major concern of this chapter with Tibetan society under the rule of the Dalai Lamas, questions pertaining to historical and geographical variables will occasionally also be raised. The diachronic study of Tibetan society and economy offers an important and largely virgin field in which one hopes to see significant advances to knowledge in the future. As old archives are uncovered, and as Tibetan historical and biographical literatures are investigated with greater refinement and care, the contours of Tibetan social history will no doubt become much clearer than they are for us today.

## Property, Economy, and Social Class

As in many traditional societies, in Tibet the fundamental productive resource was land and the basic unit of production was the household.

The rights and obligations of household units with respect to the exploitation of agricultural lands and pastures had broad ramifications not just for the economy, but for law, government, family, and population as well.

Within the domain of the Ganden Palace, as was often the case elsewhere throughout the Tibetan world, the people were not the legal owners of the land upon which their livelihoods depended. The land was the property of the ruler, and in those regions under the sway of Lhasa, this meant the Dalai Lama, though there were some exceptions, or disputed cases, as will be mentioned below. Productive lands were organized into estates, which were populated by peasant households whose hereditary land rights were grants of the state, as well as by persons without direct property rights. These common people, whether landholding or not, were bound to the estates, with inalienable obligations of service and tax payment that were thereby entailed. Residential units in agricultural areas were usually clustered as villages, surrounded by the fields that the inhabitants worked. The estate, taken as a whole, was held, also by grant of the central government, by a noble, a monastery, or the state itself. These were considered to be the three major landlords (*ngadak chenpo sum*) of traditional Tibet. Although the "landlord" in Tibet was not literally a property-owner, and peasants who had land-use rights held that privilege as accorded by the state, not the landlord, the nobles did for the most part retain their estates by hereditary entitlement, so that they did exercise a sort of virtual ownership of them. They had no recognized power, however, to expropriate the peasants who lived and worked on the estate, so long as the latter fulfilled their obligations, but they could require them to perform assigned tasks, to send a family member to work as a household servant, etc. The relationship between Tibetan common peasants and their lords, therefore, in these respects resembled that which obtained in European feudal systems. Despite this, events like the Highland clearances, whereby much of the Scottish peasantry were forced from their ancestral lands by their landlords during the early nineteenth century, are not readily imaginable under the Tibetan system, for the entitlements of the tax-paying commoners, at least, were generally considered inalienable.

The Tibetan government was financed by the taxation of the peasantry and the pastoralists. Taxes were for the most part non-monetary, being most often paid in the form of goods and services. Estate-holders were responsible for the collection of the taxes due from their estates and extracted their own share of the produce, largely from designated fields (*demesne lands*) that were worked by the peasants on the lord's sole behalf. In the case of estates that were attributed directly to the state

itself, however, the peasants (known in this context as *zhunggyukpa*) discharged their obligations exclusively through tax payments and corvée.

The landlord class formed the pool from which government officers were drawn, and they were expected to serve the state in administrative, military, or judicial functions, as was required. In most cases their estates were considered in effect to be held in exchange for their discharging these duties. A close observer of late nineteenth-century life in Tibet, Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917), summarized the central Tibetan land and taxation system in these words:

Apart from the lands held by chiefs and nobles, there are . . . altogether fifty-three *dzong*, or districts, under *dzongpön*, and a hundred and twenty-three sub-districts under *dzongnyer*. These constitute what are called *zhungzhing*, or State lands. Each *dzong* contains, on an average, five hundred families of *miser*, or farmers. A *miser* family consists of one wife, with all her husbands, children, and servants. Each family, on an average, possesses two or three *kang* [a variable land-measure, based on the volume of seed cultivated] of arable soil. If one *khel* (50 lbs.) yields nine or ten *khel*, it is considered a good harvest; six to eight is a tolerable crop, four to six a bad one. The Government revenue for each *kang* is, on an average, fifty *sang* (125 rupees), or about one hundred and fifty *khel* of grain. The Crown revenue, if taken entirely in kind, would therefore amount to 2,625,000 *khel*, which would be equivalent in money to 2,000,000 rupees. This is partially expended by the State for the Church, and in distributing alms to the whole body of lamas belonging to the monasteries of Potala, Sera, Drepung, Ganden, etc. In every *dzong* are kept registers, in which are entered the collections in previous years and the quality of the land under cultivation. The collector, after examining these, inspects the crops, and estimates the quantity of the yield, and by comparison with that of the five preceding years he fixes the tax for the current year. In very prosperous years the State takes two-fifths of the crop (the maximum allowed it).\*

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\* To put this in perspective, consider the taxation of the *ryots* (peasant farmers) of India under the Mughal and British colonial regimes: "Under the Mughals, an average of between 40 and 50 per cent of a ryot's produce was taken from him, but the proportion was occasionally as high as 65 to 80 per cent. There was no uniform rate under the [British East India] Company, with as much as 83 per cent being extracted in Orissa, an amount which was progressively lowered to 60 per cent by 1840. . . . In the Madras presidency, the ryot's annual income was officially broken down as follows: 40 per cent for costs of cultivation, including seed for the next year's sowing, and 14 per cent for the sustenance of his family,

*Ulag* [corvée and service] consists in supplying to all those bearing a Government order for *ulag*, in which the number of animals, etc., is enumerated, beasts of burden – ponies, mules, yaks, and donkeys. If the *miser* have no ponies, they have to furnish yaks or donkeys instead. For stages along which neither yaks nor ponies can pass, porters must be supplied for carrying the traveler's goods. In default of these, the *miser* are required to pay a certain sum for carriage or conveyance. *Miser*, and all those who own [i.e. have usufruct rights to] more than one *kang* of land, must supply *ulag* and *ta-u* ["horse-service"], consisting of either one coolie or pony, free of charge when the traveler produces his Government pass. The system of levying *ulag* is a kind of indirect taxation, accounts of which are kept by the village headman. Some families supply a hundred *ulag* in a year, others only five or ten. If a *miser* fail to supply *ulag* once a year, he is required to supply double the amount the following year. This duty is levied on all kinds of State lands and subjects, freeholds and private property granted to sacred personages alone being exempt from this hateful tax. Lands purchased [i.e. leased] from the Government are also liable to it. Under the Lhasa Government there are about a hundred and twenty landlords, out of whom about twenty are very rich and powerful. The present regent, Lama Tatsak Rinpoche, of Kündéling, has upwards of 3000 *miser* on his estates in Kharu and Tibet Proper. The ex-regent, whose estates lie in Kongpo, has about 5000 *miser*, and other great lamas and laymen about 1000 *miser* each. The greatest noble of Tibet, Pakpalha, of Chamdo, is lord over 10,000 *miser*.<sup>1</sup>

The economy of Tibet was thus based on status, not money, with goods and services flowing generally from those of lower to those of higher rank. The latter redistributed some part of the wealth thereby acquired, mostly in the form of religious donations of various sorts. Beside the obligations to provide the agricultural goods and transport services mentioned by Das in his account, some persons and communities, owing to skills they possessed or to the environment they inhabited, made more specialized contributions to the economy of the Tibetan state, providing manufactures (textiles, earthenware, metalwork, paper, ink, etc.), natural products (medicinal plants, wood, salt, minerals, furs, etc.), or distinctive labor services (for example masonry, carpentry, painting and

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which left 46 per cent for the government. This estimate, which made no provision for the vagaries of climate, condemned the ryot and his descendants to exist perpetually at a subsistence level without the opportunity to save or acquire additional land." From Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: Abacus, 1998), p. 192.



**Figure 22** A nomad family's camp, Ngaba, Sichuan, 1990.

other crafts, and music and entertainment). Money, therefore, played only a modest role in the scheme of things overall.

In its most general features, the land and taxation system operated in nomadic regions much as it did in agricultural areas. The anthropologists Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall have studied the manner in which it functioned among the nomads of Pala, a region in western Tibet that belonged formerly to the estate called *Lagyab lhojang*. The people here were the subjects of the Panchen Lama, the organization of whose domains closely paralleled those under the control of Lhasa. The traditional system as they knew it gave them considerable control over their moveable assets, but within well-defined territorial limits:

The nomad families in *Lagyab lhojang* owned their herds, managing and disposing of them as they wished. But they were not free to leave the estate and move with their livestock to the estate of another lord, even if that lord welcomed them. They were hereditarily bound to Pala . . . and to their lord. If a situation arose where a family felt compelled to take its livestock and flee to a new lord (for example, due to a dispute with the lord's officials), the receiving lord would normally have to negotiate a payment to the original lord to compensate for the loss. . . .

Being "bound" to the estate of a lord, however, did not mean that one could never leave one's village or encampment. So long as the obligations

to one's lord were fulfilled, and families could hire others to accomplish this, members of the household were free to go where they liked, including visits, trading trips, or pilgrimages. Lords were interested in maintaining the flow of goods from their estates, not in micro-managing the daily lives of their subjects.

To be a subject . . . moreover, did not imply poverty. Many of the Panchen Lama's subjects in *Lagyab lhojang* were wealthy, some owning very large herds of several thousand sheep and goats and many hundred yaks. Given this, it is not surprising to find that traditional nomad society contained important class distinctions. A stratum of poor nomads . . . worked as full-time servants and hired laborers for wealthy nomads, even though both were subjects of the Panchen Lama.<sup>2</sup>

Though elementary class distinctions, as described here, obtained throughout the Tibetan world, there was no fully unified class system. The Tibetan state under the Dalai Lamas, nevertheless, was rigorously structured in this respect. Outside of this realm, examples are known of smaller Tibetan states that recapitulated aspects of the central Tibetan model on a reduced scale, as well as of tribal and clan-based communities in which state and class formations were all but unknown. Owing to the prestige and importance of the Lhasa regime, however, and also because its class system has been relatively well documented, it will be our primary concern here. The precise history of the emergence of the central Tibetan class system has been poorly studied to date, and though the system was imbued with an aura of inalterability it is not at all clear that, at the time of its breakup in the 1950s and 1960s, it was more than two or three centuries old. Some have argued, moreover, that by the mid-twentieth century it was already showing signs of disintegration.

Under the Ganden Palace, if one judges by the control of land and human resources, the ecclesiastical hierarchy was clearly the dominant class. Monastic estates amounted to almost 40 percent of all productive land in Tibet, while the lay aristocracy was granted only half that amount, the remainder being placed under the direct authority of the government. Given this, because it must be supposed that the nobility was the dominant party in former times, it is clear that the rise of the Ganden Palace regime and the formation of its system of governance amounted to a broad disenfranchisement of the lay aristocracy. Though aristocratic estates were usually hereditary, the nobles held their estates as grants, not as personal property, and the government could and did resume them when circumstances were perceived to warrant this. We have seen in the preceding chapter that this is precisely what befell the Demo Khutugthu,



an ecclesiastical estate-holder, after he was implicated in the plot against the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1899.

At the same time the subjection of the nobles to church rule was mitigated to the extent that the sons of aristocratic families became ranking hierarchs or monk-officials, and thus shared in church power. Trülkus were frequently recognized among such families, which otherwise often sought to place at least one son in an advantageous position in the ecclesiastical branch of the bureaucracy. Within the broader ruling class, therefore, there was a marked degree of concurrence among its lay and monastic facets. The church, however, was generally chary of lay interference and so more or less systematically limited the opportunities of noble households to exercise any appreciable degree of control over it. An example of this may be found in the pattern of recognition of new Dalai Lamas, who were regularly identified in families not belonging to the central Tibetan aristocracy.

The composition of the aristocracy (*gerpa*, *kudrak*), moreover, was heterogeneous, its newer elements – those ennobled under the government of the Dalai Lamas and, above all, the families of the Dalai Lamas themselves (*yabzhi*) – having come to occupy predominant positions of power and authority, in tandem with the generalized weakening of the aristocracy overall. The oldest layer among the nobility was formed by those households that were traced back to the old Tibetan empire, notably the family of Lhagyari, said to have been descended from the Tsenpos themselves, but also such lines as that of Dokhar, whose antecedents were held to be among the Tsenpos' vassal lords. The Khön of Sakya also sought their roots in imperial times, but of course owed their station above all to their role as Tibet's rulers under the Mongol Yuan dynasty. Several of the princely families of Kham, for instance, those of Dergé and Lhatok, similarly stemmed from those who had been ennobled during Yuan or Ming times.

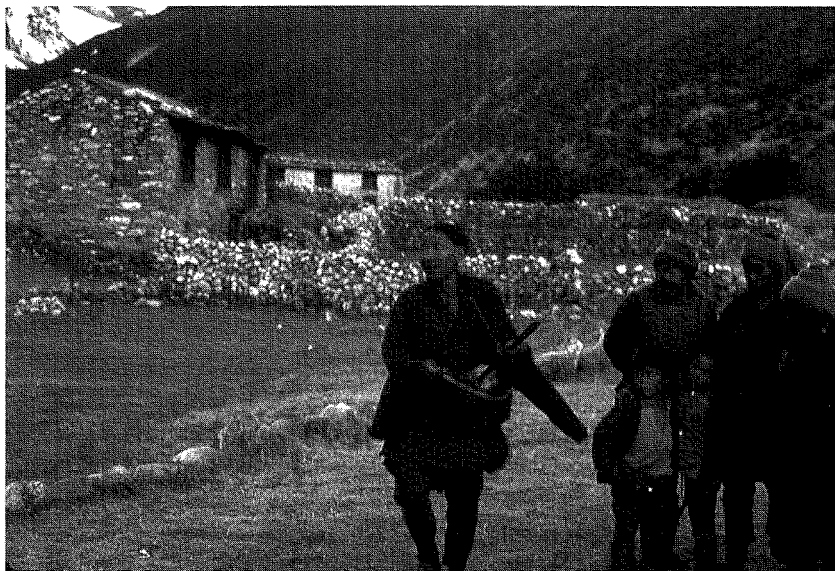
Besides the parents of the Dalai Lamas, those of certain other high lamas were typically promoted as well, though they tended to enjoy more limited powers, usually restricted to estates within the larger ecclesiastical realm to which the hierarch with whom they were associated was attached. The families of the Panchen Lamas illustrate this, as did those of some of the clergymen who were granted the title of *khutughtu* under the Qing. Finally, one may note that during the twentieth century exceptionally wealthy individuals were sometimes granted noble titles in connection with government service. The best examples are those of the powerful Khampa merchants Pomdatsang and Sandutsang, who rose to prominence under the rule of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. In a few of

these cases, e.g. the families of the *khutughtus*, the elevation of status was accorded only to an individual for the duration of his life, and did not generally extend to the family's descendants.

Among the common people, for whom the collective designation in Tibetan is *miser*, perhaps meaning "yellow men," the most important class was that of the taxpayers (*tretpa*). Taxpaying households enjoyed hereditary usufruct rights to farming or grazing lands, which were in principle inalienable so long as the household continued to exist. In exchange for these rights the household was required to pay taxes, mostly in the form of a proportion of their produce, as well as labor and transport services (corvée) of various kinds. These obligations included both what was owed to the landlord and the household's share of the estate's tax payment to the central government, the collection of which was ultimately the responsibility of the landlord or his assigned agents. Other forms of taxation included military service and the "monk tax," whereby families were required to supply a son to the monastery. Because they were bound to the estates they served, they were not free to move, to seek alternative employment, or to flee. Those who were religiously motivated, but not drafted under the "monk tax," required the permission of the estate to enter a monastery.

Persons not belonging to the taxpaying households were in most cases nevertheless bound to estates, with various obligations to them, excluding of course the taxes that were derived from rights to the land. This was the lower class of traditional Tibetan society, called *düchung*, literally "small smoke (i.e., hearth)," who often survived by tenant-farming or by employment in *tretpa* families. Frequently they would receive small plots to work on their own behalf in exchange for laboring for the household that held the usage rights to the land in question. They could also be employed by the *tretpa* to discharge the latter's corvée, military, and community service obligations.

In many parts of Tibet there were small groups considered to be the "lowest of the low," including butchers, "corpse-disposers" (*ragyabpa*), blacksmiths, minstrels, and professional beggars, who lived on the margins of Tibetan society and generally married among themselves. These groups were often considered to be polluted and so in effect were treated as outcasts. In regions bordering on India and Nepal, such as Dingri and Nyalam, the groups in question may have sometimes in fact had their antecedents in South Asian untouchable communities, as did, for example, the smiths descended from Nepalese *kami* (untouchable blacksmiths) who had migrated into Tibet. Nevertheless, this was surely the exceptional result of close geographical proximity in these cases. Regardless of



**Figure 23** A Tibetan minstrel entertaining Sherpa villagers, Khumbu, Nepal, 1973.

the outcasts' ultimate origins, however, South Asian influences in western and central Tibet perhaps did contribute to the adoption of contact prohibitions by the general populace of these regions.

Slavery existed in the Tibetan world as well, especially, it seems, in border regions where neighboring non-Tibetan peoples judged primitive by Tibetans were sometimes enslaved. So far as we now know, however, slavery never played a principal role in the Tibetan economic and social system, though in parts of southeastern Kham it may have been a more important institution than it was elsewhere. Tibet was unfamiliar with plantation slavery, and such slavery as there was mostly took the form of household servitude. Contemporary Chinese publications sometimes refer to the estate-bound *düchung* as slaves, giving the impression that slavery was more widespread than in fact was the case. Though the status of the *düchung* was lowly, they were by no means the personal property of either their employers or lords, and could, under rare circumstances, use what rights they did enjoy in order to prosper and to secure some degree of autonomy. The *düchung*, moreover, were not subject to any particular opprobrium in virtue of their status, as were outcasts and slaves.

As documented by Goldstein, one of the institutions that sometimes allowed the *düchung* to improve their condition was the so-called

“human lease” (*mibok*). This permitted the lessee in essence to rent his own labor by means of an annual payment to the estate to which he was bound, in fulfillment of his obligations to it. The freedom thus gained could be used, according to opportunity, either to secure more profitable agricultural employment than was available on the original estate, or to enter into trade. It also permitted one to marry off the estate to which one was formally bound. Individuals who succeeded in using their “human lease” status to enter into profitable commerce were sometimes able to rise sufficiently for the originally negotiated lease payment, which was unalterable, to become trivial relative to actual income. It was not, indeed, unknown, though it was no doubt quite rare, for estate-holding nobles to be indebted to their own peasants, who, under the terms of “human lease” arrangements, had been able to achieve a degree of monetary success. For Tibetan lords, despite their power and wealth, sometimes found themselves unable to liquidate adequately their revenues in kind. Thus strapped for cash, and with few financial options given the absence of a developed banking system, it sometimes transpired that their more prosperous subjects were the best source of credit available to them. The occurrence of such phenomena, whereby economic class began to be differentiated from social rank, in tandem with the progressive monetarization of the economy, has suggested to some that the central Tibetan estate system had already entered into a phase of slow disintegration that over time would have resulted in its certain breakdown. The diachronic data available so far, however, are too slight to permit us to draw firm conclusions about this.

Despite the convention of attributing all ownership of land to the ruler, small ownership seems to have been countenanced at some times and in various parts of Tibet. Thus, in the biographies of many of the leading religious figures of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, persons who sometimes hailed from modest backgrounds, we read of the sales of plots of land that they had inherited through their families. Given present knowledge, however, it is not always clear whether such sales indeed involved transfers of landownership, or whether the usufruct rights were in fact what was exchanged. Note, however, that in later times, in most places, even the sale of the usufruct would have been prohibited. That land sales were sometimes possible is suggested, moreover, by mid-twentieth century data from Sakya, where some peasants had garden plots, besides the fields belonging to the estates. These small parcels of land were attributed to them personally and could be sold, but only to other subjects of Sakya. It may be the case, therefore, that a class of smallholders once existed in Tibet that was largely absorbed into the central Tibetan estate system,

but of which there was a sort of attenuated survival in some places, of which Sakya offers an example.

Sakya was one of a number of domains whose status in relation to the Ganden Palace resembled that of a dependent principality, rather than an estate. Another instance of this was Lhagyari, a royal household that claimed its descent from the old Tibetan monarchy and whose domains were in the district of E, in southeastern Tibet. As in the case of Sakya, its special status stemmed from its relation to past rulers of Tibet who continued to enjoy the high esteem of later governments. The realm of the Pakpalha trülkus of Chamdo was in some respects similar, as was that of the Panchen Lamas, certainly the most important of these partial exceptions to the rule of ownership by the Dalai Lama. Nevertheless, as the dispute between the governments of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and Ninth Panchen Lama makes clear, there was some ambiguity as to whether the Panchen's holdings constituted an autonomous domain under his ownership, or a sort of super-estate held by the Panchen by the grace of the Ganden Palace. The conventions of land tenure and social organization within the extensive estates of the Panchen Lama, however, as in the other special cases mentioned, were in most respects similar to those holding throughout the realm under the Dalai Lama's rule.

Eastern Tibet, the regions of Kham and Amdo, formed a political patchwork whose many small states had varied ties to the governments of Central Tibet and China. As a substitute for direct administration, the latter maintained a convention of indirect rule through local chieftains, called *tusi* in Chinese, who, with the weakening of the Qing dynasty, were often virtually independent. In the pasturelands, in particular, state structures were often feeble, leaving some eastern Tibetan nomads to pursue their lives with considerable autonomy, governed only by tribal tradition. Though their pastures, even in these cases, were typically regarded as belonging to princely or monastic estates, the flow of revenue to the latter often tended to be understood in terms of tribute or customary donation, rather than taxation; indeed, in such places as Golok, in southern Amdo, there was no coercive force sufficient to have imposed a regular taxation regime upon the tribesmen, besides that of their own tribal leadership.

Though large parts of greater Tibet were thus independent of Lhasa's rule, the major Gelukpa monasteries and the princes patronizing them nevertheless maintained ceremonial relations which they expressed through tribute payments to the Dalai Lama. Through such connections the authority of the Ganden Palace was felt to varying degrees far outside of its proper sphere of governance. Those participating in this larger

network of Lhasa's "galactic polity" often believed that the reunification of the entire realm that had been granted to the Fifth Dalai Lama was the proper Tibetan political end, a sentiment that helps to account for the militant efforts that were made to push the Chinese out of eastern Kham and to reincorporate that region into Tibet after the fall of the Qing dynasty. Of course, Lhasa itself strongly supported this perspective, which it backed up with arms when it could.

The organization and administration of Tibetan villages was varied and sometimes even adjacent villages differed in respect to the form of leadership that they adopted. Nevertheless, a few basic principles appear to be almost universal. Because the *tretpa* households of which villages were constituted were considered to be of equal class status, the heads of all households were generally members of village councils that were responsible for most decision-making that affected the community as a whole. This included, of course, the division of rights and responsibilities with respect to common properties, resources, and obligations of various kinds, for instance: maintenance of irrigation works, wells, and bridges; collective labor in fields that were assigned to the lord; regulating use of wood from communal forests; upkeep of the village temple and the organization of festivals; etc. Villages often also divided such tasks as ploughing, harvesting, roofing of houses, and other work that was more easily fulfilled collectively, even though individual households were the beneficiaries. As leader of the village council and intermediary between the village and the lord to which it was subject, there was always a headman, who usually held the post by virtue of seniority or election, or as a hereditary office, though sometimes the job was simply rotated among the taxpaying households. The headman, generally with one or more assistants who were also recognized as village officers, had the duties of ensuring that individual households respected their tax obligations, maintaining a record of the fulfillment of corvée duties, adjudicating minor disputes, and the like. Group leadership among the nomads was by and large analogous, and the nomad tribe could be considered in many ways as a sort of mobile village. We may note, too, the presence in some parts of Tibet of villages populated by the lay priesthood, the so-called *serkhyim* ("yellow households"), who often were considered to be of higher status than other *tretpa*, and whose tax obligations were sometimes mitigated by the ritual roles that they played.

The relatively egalitarian organization of Tibetan society at the village or tribal level – "relative" because most communities included servants or outcasts who were by no means the social equals of the common peasants and nomads – has sometimes fostered the impression among outside

observers that Tibetans enjoyed a sort of primitive socialism. Because land and grazing rights were often in principle distributed on the basis of an equal allotment to each household, whose heads together participated in village or tribal councils, the impression clearly has a basis in fact. Moreover, wherever tribes or villages held their rights to the land directly from the ruler, without an intervening class of estate-holders to which they were subservient, the autonomy of the common people was sometimes enhanced. This appears to have been the case in many places along the outer peripheries of the Tibetan world: in parts of Kham and Amdo, in the far western regions that came to be included in the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir, and along the northern borders of Nepal.

The Sherpa of Nepal are an illuminating example in this regard. Originally nomads from Kham, according to their own traditions, their forefathers migrated to what is today the Solu-Khumbu region of eastern Nepal in about the sixteenth century, where they settled as farmers, keeping small herds in the higher pastures. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, they began to prosper thanks to their role in trade between Tibet, Nepal, and India, and due to the formation of an emigré Sherpa community in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal in British India. Though Nepal was then under the sway of the rapacious Rana oligarchy, the regime's exactions from the Sherpa were not too onerous and, given increasing Sherpa wealth, the burden was not felt to be particularly oppressive. Under such circumstances the Sherpa, who were treated as rather lowly commoners when they visited Tibet, were content to have secured for themselves a space of relative autonomy under what was otherwise a remarkably predatory regime. Like eastern Tibetans, though they visited central Tibet for pilgrimage and trade, they found little to envy in the lives of the central Tibetan *miser*.

While agriculture and animal husbandry were far and away the major constituents of the traditional Tibetan economy, commerce always played an important, if secondary, role. In its most basic form, this was a barter trade between pastoral and peasant populations, and frequently involved the exchange of grain for meat, butter, and, above all, salt, which was rare in most farming communities but readily available in seemingly inexhaustible quantities to nomads inhabiting territories near Tibet's many salt lakes. Because the salt-and-grain trade was conducted primarily by the nomads and farmers themselves, however, it did not by itself contribute to the formation of a distinct mercantile class, except in those cases in which town-based merchants purchased these commodities for resale. As the market economy was not well developed, this was of markedly less significance than direct barter.

In far eastern Tibet a much more lucrative trade developed from about the twelfth century on, involving the importation of bricks of dried Chinese tea to Tibet in exchange for ponies and horses for the Chinese market. Because the Tibetans were tea-addicts, famously consuming up to fifty cups per day of a brew usually churned with butter and salt, and the Chinese requirement for mounts and draught-horses greatly exceeded their own breeding capacity, this was a business that achieved sufficient dimension as to entail the formation of an important eastern Tibetan merchant class. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, for example, it was estimated that the quantity of tea pouring into Tibet through Dajianlu (Dartsedo) was between ten and fifteen million pounds per annum. Tea bricks, in fact, frequently served as a form of currency in lieu of silver coin.

Chinese and Indian textiles of various kinds, as well as manufactured goods, including light firearms, were traded to some extent in the towns, though much of this commerce was in the hands of merchants from outside of Tibet. Prominent among them were Muslims from Nepal, Ladakh, and Yarkand (in Xinjiang), who operated long-distance caravans traversing Tibet and thus serving as a fragile link between China and South Asia. The most powerful of the Khampa trading families, too, were sometimes able to establish branches in British India, having first achieved their wealth in business with Sichuan. The Raj, as we have seen, wished to encourage the development of Tibetan commerce and regarded wool as Tibet's most promising export commodity. Taken together, these varied enterprises contributed to a slow but steady monetarization of the Tibetan economy. The export of wool, in particular, proved to be an important economic engine, and by 1949 the annual value of sales to the United States alone stood at roughly two million dollars.

## Government and Law

From 1642, when Güshri Khan made his famous donation to the Fifth Dalai Lama, until 1959, when the Fourteenth fled to exile in India, the head of the Tibetan government was in principle the Dalai Lama, though throughout much of this time the real head of state was a chosen regent or minister. Besides the leadership of the government, a number of additional offices were assigned to the Dalai Lama. The most important of these were his private office, charged with the management of his personal affairs, and his ecclesiastical offices as the preeminent hierarch of the Gelukpa order, though the titular head of the order was always the



chief abbot of Ganden, the Ganden Tripa. The occupants of this post were appointed by the Dalai Lama on the basis of seniority and merit for a term of seven years, and were sometimes called upon to perform important governmental functions above and beyond their religious responsibilities, which included the direction of the annual Great Prayer Festival. Thus, for example, it was a Ganden Tripa who assumed the role of regent when the Thirteenth Dalai Lama fled to Mongolia during the Younghusband expedition.

Government business proper was the affair of a corps of lay and monk-officials, there having been 175 officers in each of these two branches of the administration. Lay officers were exclusively drawn from the ranks of the nobility. While the ecclesiastical branch operated without lay interference, a monk was in most cases appointed to collaborate with, and sometimes to oversee, lay offices. The main executive office was the leadership counsel, or *kashak*, founded in its modern form, as we have seen, under the Seventh Dalai Lama. The *kashak* was composed of four ministers, one monk and three laymen. It became customary, too, for the *kashak* to be joined in its deliberations by the head of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy, the *chikhyap khenpo* ("abbot general"), who served as the direct representative of the Dalai Lama.

The religious administration under the *chikhyap khenpo* had a sort of parallel to the *kashak* in the form of the *yiktsang*, literally the "archival office," directed by four monk-officials, whose title was "great secretary," *drungyik chenpo*. This was the highest office occupied with maintaining the records of the monastic estates, with the exception of the three major Gelukpa monasteries near Lhasa – Ganden, Sera, and Drepung – which were administered directly by the offices of the Dalai Lama. The *yiktsang* also directed the recruitment and appointment of monk-officials overall.

Administration of the districts (*dzong*) was conducted by district governors (*dzongpön*) who were appointed for terms of three years and shared their office with a monk-official. They had considerable latitude to adjudicate local affairs as they saw fit and, in the absence any clear system of accountability, were often regarded as corrupt and oppressive. Given the prominent role of bribery in Tibetan political life generally, the office of *dzongpön* provided ample opportunities for personal enrichment.

The lay branch of government included an accounting office, the *tsi-gang*, headed by four ministers, concerned in part with the maintenance of revenue records. For very important business it was also customary for the *kashak* to call a meeting of the National Assembly (*tsokdü chenmo*).

Though this body could be constituted in various ways, its purpose was to act as a consultative body to make public opinion known. When congregated in its fullest form, therefore, it included monks representing all major segments of the clergy, as well as laymen from all social classes. In principle all decisions of the assembly had to be unanimous, so that, once gathered, it proceeded ponderously, deliberations over a single issue sometimes continuing for months. In the wake of the 1904 invasion of Tibet, for instance, Younghusband was routinely exasperated by the glacial pace of the negotiations, as the Tibetans insisted on submitting each article before the assembly for discussion.

The rank order of all officials, nobles, and hierarchs was precisely stipulated. The Dalai Lama himself was regarded as transcending any designated rank, while the grades that were of greatest importance in relation to governmental affairs were numbered one through seven. The regent or ruling minister was assigned to the first rank; members of the *kashak*, the abbot general, and the Dalai Lama's father to the second; those who were granted certain high honorific titles such as *gong* ("prince") and *da lama* ("great lama") were in the third rank; and most of the active government officers were ranged in the fourth through seventh ranks.

We have met the ambans, the highest representatives of Manchu authority posted in Tibet prior to 1912, in the previous chapter, where we saw that the reforms of 1792 made them officially the coequals of the Dalai Lama in the administration of Tibet. Though their actual ability to exercise their authority fluctuated with the vicissitudes of the later Qing dynasty, they always retained command of the Chinese troops stationed in Tibet and often exercised their rights to exact corvée from the Tibetans with brutal rapacity. Das had this to say about them:

The ambans are the terror of the Tibetans, who abhor them from the depth of their hearts. Whenever they leave the capital on pleasure excursions, or on inspection tours, provisions, conveyances, and all sorts of labor are forcibly exacted from the poor villagers, who are deprived of their ponies and yaks, which, owing to the merciless treatment of the ambans' numerous retainers, die in numbers on the road. No compensation is given them for their losses, and no complaints are admitted by the courts of justice, presided over by the lamas, against this kind of oppression.<sup>3</sup>

Justice in Tibet as a general matter, in fact, seldom served the interests of the common folk.

Written Tibetan law was promulgated in a series of legal codes that consisted mostly of general directives. In actual practice, however, custom and precedent were of utmost importance, and were supple-

mented by specific edicts and proclamations as the need arose. Statutes and ordinances as these are understood in contemporary American law played no appreciable role in Tibet. Neither was there an independent judiciary, all cases in the districts being brought before the judgment of the local government officials, principally the governors of the *dzongs* (*dzongpön*), or, as Das notes above, monk-officials. (In Lhasa, however, there was a high court whose judges, a layman and a monk, were appointed from among the government officials particularly to serve in this office.) Moreover, besides custom, there was little formal guidance for punishment. Cases involving protracted court proceedings tended not to be criminal complaints, but rather civil suits in which disputing parties sought adjudication. The goal of the justice system in such instances was usually to find an appropriate formula for reconciliation of the complainants. Thus, in its application, Tibetan law tended to be highly contingent upon the idiosyncrasies of particular cases and the actors involved. The critical view of the system as primarily serving the interests of the empowered classes – the nobles and the religious hierarchy – seems not too great an exaggeration. Despite this clear bias, however, it was not altogether unknown for peasants to sue their lords when the latter were perceived as overstepping their bounds, for example by illicitly appropriating peasant land, and for the peasants' interests in such cases to be vindicated.

The law codes enacted by the Pakmodrupa and Tsangpa regimes served as the basis for a code in thirteen articles issued by the Ganden Palace of the Fifth Dalai Lama. This was supplemented by an important document authored by *desi* Sanggyé Gyatso, the *Crystal Mirror of Obligations and Prohibitions*, which was primarily concerned with regulations and guidelines for government officials. He summarizes his admonitions for those acting as judges as follows:

Before deciding a judgment of law, there should be an investigation entailing these responsibilities: One should receive the petitions and desired objectives of the complainants without partiality, and be skillful in interrogating the parties in detail with regard to outstanding questions. While conducting the investigation, one must not enter into bias or be influenced by bribes. Then, considering the implications of both parties' objectives, one must reach a subtle decision.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the injunction not to be “influenced by bribes” is not quite a prohibition thereof. In fact, bribery was a routine aspect of all government proceedings in Tibet, not limited to questions of justice. Any requests presented before government officials, including legal

petitions, were accompanied by gifts, which were expected to be appropriate to the status of both official and petitioner, as well as to the gravity of the matter at hand. It was often difficult to determine just how great a gift was expected, and persons of all classes often felt themselves vulnerable to prejudicial treatment on the grounds that they had not been sufficiently munificent. Nevertheless, because both parties in a civil dispute could be expected to be pursuing similar strategies of bribery, it may have often enough been the case that those sitting in judgment were able to enrich themselves while dispensing verdicts that were not unduly swayed by *baksheesh*, thus adhering to the letter of Sanggyé Gyatso's directive.

Those charged with crimes against persons, such as murder, injury, and theft, were subject to imprisonment, specified compensation payments, and physical punishment. Individuals apprehended and charged with such crimes were always presumed guilty, so that prolonged proceedings leading to a verdict of innocence were rare. The main function of the court, in these cases, was to determine a suitable sentence. Long-standing precedents that can be traced back to the Tibetan imperial period treated murder as subject to an intricate system of compensation, called *tong*, based upon the class relations of the parties involved. This system was retained in the law code of the Ganden Palace, where nine grades of persons are distinguished. For example, the basic compensation payment for the murder of a person ranked "middle best" – a category that included recognized religious teachers and high officials – was 120 *sang* (the Tibetan currency unit). For persons classed as "middle middle," such as the retainers of government properties, however, the required payment was just half of that sum. The adjudication of murder was not nearly so neat as this may appear, however. Depending upon the number and relations of persons affected by the crime, there were often multiple claims for compensation, and, as a matter of course, the murderer was subject to corporal punishment, usually flogging, as well. The restraint of criminals by means of pillories and leg-irons, the former having been introduced from China under the Manchus, was much remarked by early and mid-twentieth-century foreign visitors, who often photographed such unfortunates begging about the towns.

Punishment by mutilation and execution was inflicted in some cases, too, and was in fact recommended in the Ganden Palace code for such crimes as parricide, the plunder of ecclesiastical wealth, sedition, and sorcery. Though the Thirteenth Dalai Lama attempted to do away with these severe sentences, his reforms never met with full success and fell into neglect after his passing. A case recorded by legal anthropolo-

gist Rebecca French provides a revealing glimpse of the mechanisms of Tibetan law, the application of harsh punishment, and the Tibetan interest in reconciliation as the outcome of judicial proceedings in general. The speaker is an ex-monk-official:

When I worked for the governor of Khams in Chamdo city, they used to send an army man as a messenger for official deliveries. He was equipped with both a short and a long rifle on his journeys, and he rode alone on his horse. During my tenure, one of these messengers was killed by robbers who wanted his weapons.

So an investigation committee was formed to catch these notorious robbers, and having determined the identity of the killers, the governor ordered the army to catch them. . . . Three men and their two wives who acted as assistants were caught. As a monk-official, I was not allowed to have anything to do with this sort of punishment, so it was left to the lay official in the office. The final punishment determined was that the three men should have their legs cut off from the knee down, and this was written in the document.

Then the head of the local monastery and some of its lamas came to request of the governor that this punishment not be given, and they talked about the long life of the Dalai Lama. So the punishment was reduced to cutting one heel tendon and slitting one ear of each of the men. . . .

Then, the criminals were taken to a separate place not far away at the edge of the city surrounded by army men, so that it was difficult for commoners to see. A five-gun salute was fired. The heel tendons of the men were cut, and then the blood was sealed with an iron rod dipped in hot oil. The criminals never cried, but all the women [watching] did. After this, as the criminals lay down on the ground, all the people brought them offerings of food, blankets, clothes, and money to demonstrate their forgiveness of them now that they had been punished, and their compassion for the criminals' suffering. That foot would be entirely useless to them from then on, and their punishment was completed.<sup>5</sup>

Among the nomads, particularly in far eastern Tibet, justice was usually placed in the hands of headmen and tribal councils. For crimes committed between groups, such as cattle-rustling, the councils were charged to determine the appropriateness and means of reprisal, particularly if efforts to achieve negotiated settlement had first proven unsuccessful. Not surprisingly, longstanding feuds sometimes characterized relations between eastern Tibetan nomad groups. Tribal councils also meted out justice to those who violated accepted norms within the tribe; those judged guilty of serious infractions might even have faced ostracism. In the unforgiving environment of the high plateau, where

group solidarity was the condition *sine qua non* for survival, this was a virtual sentence of death. The exile's best hope, in such circumstances, would frequently have been to seek a place for himself among his tribe's enemies, whose hospitality was then contingent upon the utility of the information their homeless "guest" could provide.

## Marriage and Kinship

It has often been observed that Tibetan marital relations are unusually varied. Monogamy, polygyny (several wives married to one man), polyandry (several husbands to one woman), and polyandrygyny ("group marriage") are all known, sometimes giving outsiders the impression that marriage, besides the free consent of adults to mate as they wish, does not exist as we know it in Tibet. However, it is by no means the case that marriage choice is unrestricted, or that no distinction is to be made between marital and extra-marital relations. Some stories about Zurchungpa, an eleventh-century religious master, are revealing in this respect:

Although he had inconceivable spiritual experiences and realisations, Zurchungpa could not even afford the supplies for copying books. At that point, [his master] Lharje Zurpoche said, "In the place called Phen-gi Khangön lives a wealthy lady meditator named Chomo Yumo and her daughter. You should stay with them."

"I will not be a householder," replied Zurchungpa.

"Do not be narrow-minded," said the master. . . . Zurchungpa obeyed and all his wishes were fulfilled. Then, the guru said, "Now, don't stay there anymore. Bring your books and other necessities of worship here gradually and then come to me."

"But is it right to do so?" asked Zurchungpa. "Those two have been very kind."

"Do not be small-minded! . . . In this degenerate age you must propagate the teaching of the Buddha and benefit many beings. How could you be more grateful to them?"<sup>6</sup>

Then later, in his old age, Zurchungpa has a son by the sister of one of his leading disciples. The position of the boy as his father's heir becomes contested, however, because Zurchungpa's relationship with the mother is considered by other senior disciples to have been extra-marital.

These tales make several important points regarding conjugal relations in Tibet: general economic considerations were fundamental (the

impoverished Zurchungpa is sent to the household of a wealthy widow); household units were to be kept intact (the widow and her daughter share the same house); elders typically played a strong role in arranged matches that ensured the welfare of their descendants (hence the actions of Zurchoché, as Zurchungpa's uncle and guardian, in this case); legitimate inheritance was a major concern (the disputed status of Zurchungpa's son); and recognized marriage was indeed distinguished from extra-marital sexual relations. In the case of Zurchungpa's connection with the widow and daughter, which produced no offspring, this latter point is in fact left ambiguous, but in the second story, where the legitimacy of an heir was in question, the problematic status of the union was made quite explicit. The clear importance of legitimacy for matters of inheritance is emphasized, too, in the life of a late twelfth-century Bönpo master, the doctor Khutsa Dawö:

A chieftain of Tanak in Jé went to Samyé on a pilgrimage. On the way he stopped one night in Nyangrong Taktsel with a family called Khu-yé in which there was a daughter with whom he had intercourse. Then he went on to Samyé. While he was making offerings of butter-lamps he found a guide to textual treasure which he took home with him. Later a boy was born to the daughter of Khu-yé. He was given the name Khutsa Dawö (the son of Khu, Moon-light), apparently because his mother was the daughter of Khu-yé and he was born on the fifteenth as the full moon rose. . . . When he grew up he asked his mother where his father was. On being told that the chieftain of Tanak was his father, he soon went to find him and told him that he was his son. His father said that he would investigate the matter. On his invoking gods in the third winter month it is said that there occurred thunder, lightning, and hail. The chieftain said: "Despite the fact that you are my son, you cannot be (treated) as my son. Take this share of my property and go." He gave him the guide of the textual treasure . . . <sup>7</sup>

Among the available forms of marriage, economic concerns played the major role in determining the most suitable form of union. Landless commoners, for instance, who generally had no patrimony besides the house they inhabited and small, moveable property, were as a rule monogamous. Their offspring faced the same challenges as their parents in earning their livelihoods through tenant-farming, and working as hired hands or household servants. But because they had no landed assets to conserve, the maintenance of a continuous homestead over a period of generations was not an issue to persons of this class. Similarly nomads, whose main interest in the land was their share in the grazing rights of the tribe or group to which they belonged, but not a fixed family



**Figure 24** Women attending a festival at Lhagang Monastery in Minyak, Sichuan Province, 1992.



allotment, preferred monogamous unions, with elder children leaving home as they came of age in order to establish families of their own.

The preference for monogamy, however, made less sense in the case of the landed peasantry, whose allotments were, almost everywhere by custom and in most places by clear regulation as well, indivisible. It is clear that shortages of agricultural land began to be felt on the Tibetan plateau long ago, and it was this that led to the general prohibition of the subdivision of landholdings. So long as their tax and labor obligations were fulfilled, the *tretpa* in principle retained their usufruct rights in perpetuity, with rights of inheritance, but they could not otherwise dispose of their land; it was theirs neither to sell, nor, in most cases, to divide. Under such circumstances, the patrimony being an irreducible whole, it was desirable for the heirs, generally a family's sons, to remain together to maintain their allotment. For this reason, fraternal polyandry, in which one woman is married to two or more brothers, became a predominant form of marriage among taxpaying peasants. Occasionally a widowed father would join his son(s) in a polyandrous union as well. Marriages of this sort involving unrelated men were of rarer occurrence, though by no means altogether unknown.

The theme had further variations, of course. In households with daughters but no son, an eligible male without an inheritance of his own was typically invited to become the *makpa*, generally "bridegroom," but more specifically one who becomes the heir to his in-laws' estate and takes their name and titles. In such cases, sororal polygyny closely mirrored the dominant preference for fraternal polyandry. This also served as a means for the continuation of aristocratic family lines lacking male heirs; a case in point, as we have seen, was the Tsarong family of Lhasa, whose daughters, following the execution of the men of the family in 1912, were married to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's bodyguard, Dazang Dradül. Non-sororal polygyny was also practiced to some extent by men of wealth and power – nobles, important merchants, and married priests of the religious orders that permitted this – though statistically it was not widely practiced. It was often associated, moreover, with squabbles and feuds that erupted when legitimate heirs by different wives contested the patrimony. The succession of the Sakyapa ruler Daknyi Chenpo Zangpopel (Chapter 4) offers a well-known historical illustration.

Group marriage seems to have been rarer still and typically occurred when there was a great age spread among the males in a polyandrous household. The presence, for instance, of a brother twenty years younger than the eldest sibling and the common wife might induce the household to invite a new bride to join them. In such cases group marriage may have

served as a legal pretext to maintain the unity of the household, while in fact the younger brother and the new wife lived as a monogamous couple, sharing the home with the older sibling(s). For what was at stake was always the unity of property. In Tibet, one might say, economy trumped biology when it came to the conventions of marriage. For this reason the male children of such arrangements, whether polyandrous or polyandrygynous, were generally considered the sons and heirs of the senior male partner, whatever the true facts of the matter may have been.

Given the variety of licit forms of marriage, the boundaries between the categories of “sibling” and “cousin” were not always clear, so that it is not surprising that one word, *pünkya*, generally served to denote both relations, and could be used, indeed, to refer collectively to all of one’s consanguinal relatives. When singling out siblings in particular, the qualification *pachik machik*, literally, “same father, same mother,” was added, though even here there was some ambiguity, at least to the sensibilities of those for whom monogamy is the norm, for all children in a polyandrous family, regardless of their actual paternity, were nominally designated the progeny of the head of the household alone.

The main Tibetan social classes – nobles, landed and landless commoners, and outcasts – tended to be endogamous groups, but some degree of intermarriage among nobles and commoners regularly occurred. Because marriage with an outcast by one of higher class entailed the latter’s loss of status, such unions were rare. Class endogamy, however, was complicated by various other determinates further limiting marriage choice, including various forms of strict incest prohibition. Thus, when patrilineal clans (*rü*) were invoked, clan exogamy tended to be considered the rule. The Sherpa of Nepal, who exemplify this, stipulate that marriage is strictly forbidden among members of the same paternal clan, but that in the maternal clan it is permitted so long as there is no traceable relationship. Alternatively, one says that prospective spouses must be removed by at least seven generations on the father’s side and by three on the mother’s. Even if this is taken as representing an ideal that cannot be strictly verified in all cases, it nevertheless reflects Tibetan society’s general horror of incest. In communities where clans were no longer recognized, too, principles of consanguinity usually defined kinship groups within which marriage and sexual relations were completely prohibited. Despite this, some incidence of cross-cousin marriage has been reported in ethnically Tibetan communities in Nepal.

Marriage within the Tibetan world thus tended to ensure the stability of class and property, while prohibiting unions among close, consanguine relations. When marriages soured, for whatever reason, divorce was gen-

erally possible, though always strongly discouraged. Community and kin attempted by all means to convince the parties to achieve reconciliation. Inevitably, those with property rights of some kind were less inclined to divorce than were those without, and the monogamous marriages of the *düchung* were accordingly held to be less stable than those of the often polyandrous *trelpa*.

## Women in Traditional Tibet

In her autobiography, *Daughter of Tibet*, the noblewoman Rinchen Dolma Taring recalls that, after the Chinese Communists began to consolidate their power in Lhasa during the 1950s, she was asked to chair a Tibetan committee for the rights of women. Initially her response was one of puzzlement, as she was not aware that women's rights were a problem in Tibet. Having been educated abroad, and English-speaking, she was conscious of the issue in general terms, and particularly as it pertained to the condition of women in India, where the seclusion of women (*purdah*) was still often the norm, or in China, where foot-binding had only recently been abandoned. Tibetan women, however, were the victims of no such injustices, so activism seemed not to be called for. Of course, as an aristocrat belonging to a relatively forward-looking family, Lady Taring was particularly fortunate; she had been able to receive, exceptionally, a first-rate education. But even without regard to such special circumstances, it has often been asserted that Tibetan women were generally unencumbered by the disadvantages burdening women in many other traditional Asian societies.

If this last assertion is at all correct, however, it is only because women's circumstances throughout much of Asia were deplorable. In Tibet, certainly, women did enjoy significant rights with respect to their wealth, including the wealth they brought into a marriage, and were sometimes also the heirs to family holdings. As economic autonomy must be regarded as the basis for the autonomy of the individual in society overall, by this standard Tibetan women frequently did enjoy some measure of freedom. At the same time, however, there were often customary restrictions limiting the kinds of wealth women might control; a clear distinction was thus sometimes made between "female wealth" (*monor*), meaning jewelry and moveable household items, and "male wealth" (*ponor*), referring to house and property. Women, however, were able to engage in trade and frequently played a strong role in the marketplace. Though larger-scale commerce seems always to have been a

man's business, women could nevertheless prosper to some degree in this domain.

The opportunities available to Tibetan women were in all events far more limited than those open to men. (We must recall, too, in this context, that the opportunities for men were themselves severely restricted.) Skilled trades, such as medicine, fine art, and astrology, were essentially male preserves, though one does sometimes learn of women belonging to families that specialized in such areas who were trained to continue the heritage. Similarly, higher religious education was exclusively developed in the monasteries, and nuns seldom were encouraged to go beyond learning their prayers. Nevertheless, within particular lineages it was sometimes possible for women to excel. Thus, in the years following the Zunghar assault upon the important Nyingmapa monastery of Mindröling in 1717, wherein the male heirs to the Nyö family that led the community there were killed, it was a daughter, Mingyur Peldrön (1699–1769), who had been educated in the family's traditions, who undertook and achieved the monastery's restoration. The surviving corpus of her writings, though small, demonstrates her erudition.

Women who excelled within the Tibetan religious world were often associated with the orders and lineages that emphasized practical mastery of ritual and meditation, rather than the scholastic dimensions of Buddhist formal learning. Tibetan society was, moreover, generally open to the acceptance of great female adepts, even if ordinary nuns were severely disadvantaged. From the time at least of Machik Lapdrön (twelfth century), and even of Yeshé Tsogyel (eighth century), if the legends about her stem from the elaboration of facts, down to such very recent saints as Shuksep Jetsünma (1853–1951), who though of common origin came to be revered by many in the aristocracy, we read of women who attained honor and renown thanks to their reputations for wisdom, ritual mastery, and spiritual integrity. As a scholar of the Nyingmapa order once put it, "In Mahayana Buddhism women are in principle the equals of men, but in Tantric Buddhism they are even more equal!"<sup>8</sup> Despite this, just one line of female trülkus was accorded official recognition, that of the incarnation of the goddess Dorjé Pakmo, at the monastery of Samding, near the shores of the Yamdrok lake in southern Tibet. There are, at the same time, less exalted religious specializations in which women figure quite prominently. Among them are various kinds of shaman-like practitioners, including spirit-mediums and those who have undergone near-death experiences (*delok*), who are therefore reputed to have a special connection with the world beyond.

While women might thus have sometimes achieved prominence in

religious and parareligious vocations, the autobiography of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl, to whom we have referred in other contexts, offers by contrast an unusual portrait of an exceptional laywoman, the author's own mother. Judged by her father to have been more competent than her brother, she was made the heir to the family's small but prosperous estate in Repkong (modern Tongren in Qinghai near the Gansu border). Her desire to manage her own affairs, and the fact that her father's bequest gave her the means to do so, resulted in her not marrying. But this by no means meant that she abstained from male companionship. Her son, Shabkar, was probably conceived in an affair with a local nobleman, who, despite being a rejected suitor, remained always solicitous of them both:

My mother's family was neither rich nor poor, but of average means. My grandparents had only one son, their youngest child. Among their many daughters, my mother proved to be the most capable, and so enjoyed greater consideration than did the others. She was intelligent, and became adept at managing the household and taking care of the family and servants. Her parents decided to keep my mother at home to care for their only son while her sisters were given away in marriage.

As my mother grew older, she met many lamas and spiritual masters of the area and listened to teachings on the karmic law of cause and effect and other subjects. Inspired by their instructions, she took delight in the Dharma and refrained from misdeeds. On each full moon, new moon, and on the eighth day of each month, she observed the eightfold precepts of lay ordination. . . . In short, my mother was both skilled in the activities of daily life and eager to practice virtue.

My father's identity was never openly revealed, but almost everyone agreed that it was Tsodu Khen Rinpoche [who had been] born in a noble family . . .<sup>9</sup>

Shabkar's mother was perhaps not so exceptional as her son's account seems to suggest, however, for it was not at all uncommon for parents to keep a talented daughter at home to look after them in old age. The anthropologists Goldstein and Beall record a recent example among the nomads of Pala, in western Tibet:

Drolma's betrothal to a nomad from another group had been broken. . . . About a year before, a 35-year-old nomad from another district asked [Drolma's father] Norsam for permission to marry Drolma. She approved of the man, and her father, after considerable thought, also agreed to the marriage – but only on certain conditions. . . .

[P]arents sometimes decide to keep a daughter in their household even when they have sons. In reality, they evaluate which of their children will

take the best care of them as they grow old, and decide on that basis . . . In this case, Norsam decided to keep his daughter with him, and stipulated that the prospective groom had to move into his household and become his live-in adoptive groom. . . .

The prospective groom, however, had other ideas.<sup>10</sup>

As the authors go on to observe, although the broken engagement was unfortunate for Drolma personally, her decision to place her parents' welfare before her own by staying at home and not eloping demonstrated that her father had been astute in his judgement of her character. Like Shabkar's mother, she became, thanks to her own dedication and competence, the daughter who remained to look after the homestead. There is also evidence that in some parts of the Tibetan world, owing largely to the effects of polyandry and high levels of male monasticism, it was in fact common for unmarried daughters have illegitimate children and form single-mother households. While these circumstances may be seen as pointing to considerable female autonomy in traditional Tibetan society, it may also be the case that in some places an inordinate proportion of domestic labor in this way became primarily the responsibility of the women.

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It has been frequently observed that Tibetan society has been subject to radically opposing perspectives on the part of its foreign interpreters. On the one hand, profound inequities are regarded as having been pervasively inscribed in Tibetan life, the small numbers of those in the privileged classes imposing the burden of cruel and continual oppression upon their inferiors. Thus the common people were tyrannized by their lords, the landless commoners by both their lords and the landed peasantry, women by men, ordinary monks and religious devotees by the grand lamas, etc. At the other extreme, there are those who find in Tibet egalitarian communities living in harmony under a kind of primitive socialism, wherein class difference was virtually unknown, women were near equals of men, and all benefitted from the blessings of the Buddha's compassionate dispensation. On both sides of the debate, examples are adduced from the historical and ethnographic record that appear to confirm the view in question.

One response to this sharp bifurcation is to maintain that the truth of things must have been somewhere between the two extremes. I do not believe this to be a genuine alternative in this case, however. For the truth of the matter about Tibet is that there was no one truth of the matter.



**Figure 25** A nomad girl from the high plateau (*Jangtang*) of central Tibet, attending the Drigung festival, Drongur, 1992.

The Tibetan world as a whole was too big, too diverse, and too poorly centralized for social conventions and practices to have been well standardized throughout. We find examples, therefore, of benevolence and equality, brutality and harsh exploitation, as well as of all the various points on the spectrum intervening between these extremes. It is for this reason, in part, that the modern study of Tibet, as noted in the Preface to this book, has gradually tended to move away from attempts to treat Tibet globally, in favor of specialized studies of local realities. At most, we can speak of wide-reaching patterns and their variations, recognizing nevertheless that we are likely to find exceptions to every rule that we propose.

While acknowledging these incertitudes, however, it is essential to recognize that the conditions of traditional Tibetan life were generally hard. Peasant farmers in many places, even the most prosperous, could see their crops ravaged by a hail storm, and the nomads their herds by an unseasonable blizzard or an outbreak of illness. For those whose circumstances were environmentally marginal, it was often a question of eking one's living from poor, stony fields, or by grazing a few hungry beasts on meager pastures, while for those whose status was socially marginal, slave-like servitude was often one's unalterable lot. Infant mortality rates were in all cases high; education and medical care were in most places all but nonexistent. For the common people, including those who were moderately well off, a life of back-breaking labor was the norm, even without adding to their burdens the exactions of the state and their superiors. Under these circumstances, the necessity of meeting tax payments and the often odious requirements of *corvée* labor meant that common families frequently found themselves in straitened conditions. Furthermore, the bound status of the commoners under the traditional Tibetan system afforded them few prospects for changing their circumstances in any fundamental respect. These facts must be borne in mind when we turn our reflections to the perennial hope of the Tibetan people, the freedom and ease that was promised to them by religion.



# Religious Life and Thought

Religion pervades most aspects of traditional Tibetan life and culture, and the dominant, institutional religious system is Buddhism. The Tibetan Bön religion, in its organized, clerical dimension, is a form of Buddhism, whose first human teacher, Tönpa Shenrap, is always referred to by the Bönpo themselves as a Buddha (*sanggyé*) who lived long before Shakyamuni. Bön, like other forms of Buddhism in Tibet, embraces an encompassing sphere of cultural and religious activity, wherein elaborate traditions of ritual, art, and learning reflect in part the ancient religious matrices of India, Iran, and China. For reasons of convenience we shall use "Buddhism" to refer generally to Tibet's dominant forms of organized religion, employing the designation Bön in order to underscore, where appropriate, its similarities to or differences from the other Tibetan Buddhist orders.

Besides the originally "foreign" traditions of Buddhism and Bön, Tibetan religious life embraces a broad range of beliefs, practices, and specialist practitioners that appear to be autochthonous. These may be found in both Bönpo and Buddhist settings, as well as in some contexts in which sectarian affiliation may be left unclear. At issue are the elements of Tibetan religious culture that constitute what R. A. Stein has called the "nameless religion," in preference to the more misleading designation of "popular religion." For what is at stake here is not at all a distinction between the beliefs of the general populace and those of the religious or social elite. In actual practice, the nameless religion, centering on the cults of local divinities and spirits, the harmony or conflict between humans and the invisible forces with which they must interact, is the concern of persons belonging to all strata of Tibetan society. The nameless tradition, moreover, is seldom present as an anonymous substratum, but is found as an integral dimension of both Buddhism and Bön. A Tibetan Buddhist, for instance, is no more likely to think

of his or her daily offering of juniper incense to the local divinities as non-Buddhist in origin than are many practicing Christians to think of Christmas as in essence a pagan winter festival.

Besides Buddhism and Bön, there are other religions that also number Tibetans among their adherents. The most important of these is no doubt Islam, which has small Tibetan followings in Amdo and in some western parts of the Tibetan plateau, chiefly Ladakh and Baltistan, the latter now part of Pakistan. Tibetan Muslims of Kashmiri, Inner Asian, or Chinese (Hui) descent are also counted among the inhabitants of Lhasa and other Tibetan towns. In general, the urban Tibetan Muslim populace was engaged in commerce and the trades, though some Muslims were employed in occupations considered polluting by most Buddhist Tibetans, especially animal slaughter and butchering. Although Tibetan Buddhist nomads, like peasants and townsfolk, generally viewed these as evil occupations, the pastoral lifestyle always required the nomads to slaughter, bleed, and otherwise injure their animals. The services of Muslim butchers, therefore, were generally in demand only in and around the few urban population centers.

Though seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Catholic missionary efforts in western and central Tibet had no appreciable legacy, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Christianity made some inroads among Tibetans in the peripheral regions of Kham, Amdo, and Ladakh. One even hears occasional reports of Tibetan villages in the far southeast adhering to a nativist religion derived from Christianity that worships the "lord of heaven" (*namdak*). In recent decades, Christian mission activity has been on the increase in some parts of the Tibetan world, although it is not yet possible to assess the impact of this renewed proselytism. At least one Jewish convert of Tibetan origin is known to the present author as well. Nevertheless, though recent demographic trends do suggest that Chinese Muslim settlers are rapidly emerging as a major constituent of the population of the Tibetan plateau, none of the monotheistic traditions can be considered representative of major facets of traditional Tibetan religious life. Accordingly we shall focus here upon the Bön and Buddhist traditions that have long defined the main currents of Tibetan religion.

## Propitiation, Therapy, and the Life-cycle

The Tibetan religions lay great stress upon rituals and practices intended to regulate relations between humans and the omnipresent spirit-world.

Included here are some of the major rites of the Tibetan state, for instance the rituals surrounding the state oracles and protective deities, that have developed over the course of centuries as solemn rites of national significance. On a smaller scale, daily observances such as *sang*, in which the fragrant smoke of burnt juniper is offered to the gods and spirits of the local environment, are performed in virtually every Tibetan household. Rituals of these types are fully integrated with the Bön and Buddhist religions in Tibet, and are generally practiced in accordance with liturgies authorized by the dominant religious orders.

On the sparsely inhabited Tibetan plateau, human life must be negotiated in relation to a surprisingly dense population of non-human agencies, from great gods dominating whole mountain ranges to mischievous spirits infecting a single bush. Belief in such invisible agency is universal in traditional society, and learned scholars no less than unlettered villagers are concerned to establish an appropriately balanced relation with the world of “gods and demons” (*lhasin*, *lhandré*) teeming all around. The cults of the protective divinities are diverse, reflecting differences of region, sect, clan, and even household. Nevertheless, they do clearly belong to a common religious system, whose unifying features include ways of classifying the spirits, the agency and powers attributed to them, the ritual and divinatory means whereby humans interact with them, and the mythologies invoked to account for their origins, character, and obligations. In respect to the latter, we have seen above (Chapter 3) that the legendary accounts of Padmasambhava’s role in the conversion of Tibet to Buddhism place particular emphasis upon his subjugation of the local divinities, converting them to serve as sworn protectors of the Buddha’s way. Historical and anthropological research show later Tibetan Buddhist masters as regularly assuming Padmasambhava’s role in this respect, ensuring that relations with the protectors are mediated, whenever possible, in accord with accepted Buddhist norms. In effect, this meant that sacrifice was replaced with various types of substitutional offerings. Among the protectors, besides the indigenous spirits, there is also a large class of divinities who were introduced at various times from the surrounding lands. These include the Indian Buddhist *dharmapalas*, but in addition deities such as Pehar, the Tibetan state oracle and protector of the Dalai Lamas, who is said to have been brought from Turkestan by victorious Tibetan armies in the ninth century.

High ecclesiastical dignitaries and great aristocrats, no less than lay village priests or simple peasants, may act as the performers, patrons, or beneficiaries of the rites and practices addressed to such beings, and any imputation that these belong exclusively to the vulgar strata of Tibetan

religious life is unwarranted. In a recent study of the philosophical education of the monastic elite, for instance, we find this description of a noted teacher's relationship with a monastic protector:

When Gen Lob-zang Gya-tso enters the Pu-kang regional house of Dre-pung Lo-se-ling, his first act is to prostrate himself to the Great Goddess, the protector of the house. She is there for him in time of crisis. When the house asks him to work as a grain collector, it is the Great Goddess who appears in his dream and persuades him to accept this particularly distasteful task.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, depending upon one's place – literal and figurative – in the Tibetan world, some such practices will be one's immediate concern but others not. Strictly local divinities, those who govern a given valley, for instance, may require primarily the attention of the inhabitants of the location in question, without exacting obligations from others. The class of gods called *yüillha*, "god of the country," thus generally dominate a particular territory, where they are often identified with the mountain from which the principal water sources of the region flow and therefore serve as regulators and guardians of the life of the region in question. If the area concerned is sufficiently large or important, its chief divinity may assume a prominent place in the overall pantheon. Such is the case of Nyenchen Tanglha, the god of the great mountain range sweeping across central Tibet. But others enjoy only local significance – so, for instance, Trashil Pelchen, protector of the Solu Valley of eastern Nepal, whose lofty residence is now generally called by its Nepali name, Numbur Himal, and whose rites, though observed by the monks of Solu, are ignored in similar ceremonial contexts in the adjacent district of Khumbu, not to speak of places further afield.

When particular rites require the transgression of specific religious vows, we may also find a practical limitation placed upon cultic participation on the part of the Buddhist clergy. Thus we read, in an account of the annual festival in Saji village in the Repkong district of Amdo,

A statue of Shachung [the local protective divinity] was borne throughout the village in a sedan chair veiled and decorated with cloth so that the deity would not be polluted by the gaze of the onlookers. The procession visited each and every house, where standard offerings of bread, yogurt, flowers, butter lamps, grain, fruit, liquor, money and ceremonial scarves (*katak*) were made. The homes had been ritually purified to receive Shachung and people wore their best clothes as a mark of respect. An old man told us that people feel the real presence of Shachung, and pay much attention to this event, asking Shachung to bless their lines, property and future happiness.<sup>2</sup>

But because Shachung's cult demands offerings of blood – formerly made through animal sacrifice but now exclusively through the self-inflicted wounds of male devotees – participation in the festival is prohibited to the monks of the region.

In relation to the great domain of the gods and demons, therefore, there is no single body of ritual which engages all Tibetans in common. A measure of consistency is to be found in broad general beliefs and principles, but not in specific content. The ritual maintenance of Tibetan relations with the spirit-world, in its unity of principle and diversity of actual practice, may recall in some respects the religious life of ancient Greece or Rome.

Besides the ongoing need to uphold appropriately balanced relations with the spirit-world through the observance of regular propitiatory rituals, a large class of practitioners and practices has as its prime concern the rectification of these relations when they have been disturbed and so result in disease among humans or animals, nightmares and psychological afflictions, or natural catastrophes of various kinds. A twelfth-century Bönpo work outlines the curative dimensions of religious-medical practice in this way:

In general, living beings are subject to many sorts of affliction due to spirits and the like. One enters the way of practice in order to remove these afflictions by means of divination and exorcism. And because beings are subject to many diseases of fever and chill, etc., one enters the way in order to alleviate those illnesses by medicine and treatment. When the effects of disease or afflicting spirits have appeared, first one investigates what harm has occurred and what sort of disease or afflicting spirit is present. You diagnose a disease by examining pulse and urine, while afflicting spirits are investigated by means of divination and omens. Without halting the application of medicine and treatment to the effects of disease, you seek to bring about the benefits of the medicine and treatment; and without halting the application of divination and exorcism to the effects of afflicting spirits, you seek to bring about benefits through various sorts of exorcism. This is the way of practical action. The view realized here resembles that of a scout on a mountain pass who spies out all enemies and dangers, and so brings about their avoidance or removal. Similarly, in this case you realize, with respect to disease, that it may be treated and cured, and with respect to afflicting spirits, that they may be impeded and deflected.<sup>3</sup>

While the formalized outline given in this text reflects the influence of scholastic modes of analyzing and organizing knowledge that became prominent after Buddhism was established, the therapeutic interests expressed here were no doubt present in Tibet long before. Human



**Figure 26** A diviner (*mopa*) on a Lhasa sidewalk consults the astrological almanac for a client. Note the hand-drum, hanging above his stand, which he uses in the performance of rituals as needed, 1992.

interactions with the world of the spirits were thus to varying degrees analogized to, and regarded as complementing, medical practice. This same principle is illustrated in recent times by the organization of the Tibetan state-sponsored medical college as the Mentsi Khang, the Institute of Medicine and Astrological Calculation, the two arts thereby continuing to reinforce one another. In this context, however, divinatory methods, like medicine, are regarded as belonging to the domain of the sciences and not, strictly speaking, that of religion at all.

Divination (*mo*), whether astrological, augural, or mediumistic, played an essential role in all facets of Tibetan life and remains a chief preoccupation thereof. The counsel of diviners is sought in connection with almost every decision of any importance: marriages, funerals, business dealings, government affairs, construction work, voyages, agricultural activities, medical procedures, ritual practices, and more are routinely decided through divination. Even apparently trivial undertakings – a suitable date for a visit to the barber, for instance – normally require at least a glance at the astrological almanac (*loto*). What is more, divination is not just an ubiquitous aspect of Tibetan life, but is a prolific framework

for the systematization of knowledge; literally dozens of codified systems of divination are studied and practiced. These include numerological divination by means of dice or rosaries, the reading of omens in bird calls, knotted strings (*jutik*), reflections, and meteorological events, as well as, of course, horoscopy.

Besides diviners, there exists as well a broad class of practitioners who have often been assigned to the ill-defined category of "shaman." Included here are a variety of spirit-mediums (*lhapa*), known also as "braves" (*pawo*) or, in some places, *bönpo* (and thus often confounded with the adherents of the institutional Bön religion). These are specialists in therapeutical techniques and exorcism, who enter into trance to channel spirits and divinities of various kinds and thus determine the measures required to address actual or possible disorders in the relations between their human clients and the ubiquitous gods and demons. Other types of practitioner occupying similar roles are also known, for instance, those who have "returned from the beyond" (*delok*), whose near-death experiences have resulted in a special gift for communication with the invisible realm. These varied forms of shamanistic practice found their highest exemplification in the great state oracles, including the divinity Pehar whose medium resided at Nechung Monastery not far from Lhasa. Important matters of government were frequently decided on the basis of cryptic, oracular pronouncements, delivered through the possessed medium. The actual transfer of political authority to the young Fourteenth Dalai Lama in 1950, for instance, was impelled by the insistence of both the Nechung and Gadong oracles.

An important category of ritual practice concerns the expulsion of evil forces of various types: disease, ghosts, and other harmful spirits, inclement weather (especially hail and frost), famine, war, and even gossip. The manner in which such rituals have been adapted for Buddhist use has been extremely uneven, varying both according to local tradition and sectarian difference. Throughout the country, however, monks or lay priests associated with village temples had to be proficient in at least some of these practices in order to minister to the common troubles, fears, and complaints of the populace. Because this grassroots priesthood frequently adhered, at least nominally, to the Nyingmapa order, or sometimes to Bön, a veneer of conformity with the normative teachings of these traditions was often given to exorcistic rituals intended for popular use. In their Nyingmapa versions, for instance, they are often presented as the instructions of Padmasambhava. An example is a ritual for the expulsion of gossip, anthropomorphized here as the "gossip-girl" (*mikha bumo*), whose effigy must be cast out of the

village or household that seeks to purify itself of the divisive evil that issues from loose tongues:

Girl with black, grimy, tangled hair,  
When you first arrived, where did you come from?  
You came from the borders of Tibet and China,  
Where malicious gossip afflicted the Chinese,  
So that the Chinese king sent you to Tibet.  
Many Chinese demons then afflicted our tribes . . .

All the gods and men subject to Tibet  
Were afflicted with the malicious gossip of all nations,  
With the malicious gossip of corporeal men,  
With the malicious gossip of incorporeal gods and demons,  
With the malicious gossip of whatever exists,  
With the malicious gossip of whatever doesn't exist.

Daughter of malicious gossip, listen here!  
First you became nine demon sisters in China.  
Second you became the nine demonesses.  
At last you became the nine gossip sisters.  
But whatever you become, now you are turned back!  
You have no place at all to stay here.  
Malicious gossip, don't stay! Malicious gossip, go away!<sup>4</sup>

In this case the exorcism of gossip addressed an important communal and psychological need. It attempted to promote mutual accord in small communities by attributing gossip and its pernicious effects to a demonic agent, the gossip-girl, who was not a member of the community at all, but rather an alien and unwanted presence within it. The frequent attribution of gossiping, smoking, and other negatively valued behavior to China reflects, too, the degree to which the Tibetans may have felt themselves threatened by the powerful neighbor that often sought to dominate Tibetan affairs. Though the female gendering of gossip here is certainly significant, there were plenty of male demons as well; evils were gendered, but by no means exclusively (or even predominantly) feminine.

Tibetan rituals of exorcism and propitiation often made use of colorful "thread-crosses" (*dö*, *namkha*) or of the carefully crafted offering-cakes called *torma*. Of special importance, too, were rites connected with the restoration of vital energies (*tse*, *sok*), and of the positive conditions promoting longevity (*tsering*), prosperity (*yang*), and good fortune (*lungta*). The removal of pollution (*drip*) and the absorption of blessings



(*jinlab*) were fundamental concerns pervading Tibetan religious life in all its aspects. The steady effort to establish and to maintain positive relations with the surrounding environment was symbolized throughout the Tibetan world by the planting of colorful flags, also called *lungta*, printed with prayers and benedictions to be carried to all quarters by the wind.

Tibetan life-cycle rituals, too, were generally performed in accordance with Buddhist norms. Thus infants were taken to lamas to be named, and the blessing of the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjushri, was invoked as an impetus to success in study. Though marriage was not a sacrament for Tibetan Buddhists, meritorious acts of donation and the like were often enjoined in connection with wedding ceremonies. These were sometimes directed by ritual specialists or monks, especially for marriages among nobles, in order to bring merit and blessings to the union. In one case, that of the wedding of a princess from the principality of Dergé in Kham, there is even a ritual program authored by the renowned master Jamgön Kongtrül (1813–1899).<sup>5</sup> Such ceremonies, given literary form by the clergy, were, however, quite rare.

Within the life-cycle, death was always the preeminent concern of Buddhism and mortuary rites were in almost all cases performed in accordance with Buddhist ritual injunctions. Though one might seek to live to the fullest extent of one's span through special rituals designed to ward off untimely death (*chilu*) and to achieve longevity (*tsedrup*), nevertheless, in the words of the epic of Gesar,

When it comes time to die,  
A thousand buddhas can't turn things around.<sup>6</sup>

In recognition of this truth, the art of dying correctly was a matter of particular urgency for religious Tibetans. Typically this meant either learning to perform for oneself, or having a lama perform on one's behalf, the last rite of *powa*, the projection of the dying consciousness into a pure realm of rebirth. In this context particular devotion was accorded to the buddha Amitabha, whose heaven, the Land of Bliss (*dewachen*, Skt. Sukhavati), was the object of special prayer services:

From here in the western direction,  
Is Amitabha's field.  
May all those who adhere to his name  
Be born in that supreme field!

Like the lotus unsoiled by the mire,  
Unsoiled by the three worlds' taint,

Sprung from the lotus of being,  
May we be born in the Blissful Land!<sup>7</sup>

Additional rites performed on behalf of the deceased included the recitation of the book of *Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate State*, or *bardo*, the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In all events, in times of mourning the merits of charity and religious offering were much encouraged, to benefit both the deceased and his or her survivors. In an episode from the epic, for instance, recounting the death of the hero Gesar's mother, thousands of stupas are consecrated on her behalf, fresh prayer flags are made to adorn the entire kingdom, and bountiful donations are distributed among the monks and the entire population, in accord with each one's rank and merit, all of this to ensure the propitious rebirth of the departed.<sup>8</sup> Though the details are recounted with much hyperbole, the epic here strictly reflects current practice.

An appropriate date for the disposal of the corpse was determined astrologically. In central Tibet the remains were then generally brought to the "mandala" of the cemetery to be dissected and fed to the vultures, whose flight was considered analogous to spiritual flight to the heavens. The origins of this custom are unknown, though some have noted a parallel to Zoroastrian practice and so have suggested Iranian influence. Cremation was also prominent in some places, particularly in the wooded Himalayan regions. High-ranking clergy and reputed saints were often cremated, even in central Tibet, though they were sometimes mummified and entombed in shrines, as was the Fifth Dalai Lama, a practice that recalls the entombment of the early medieval Tibetan kings. Liturgical rites generally continued for a period of seven weeks following death, corresponding to the forty-nine days of the *bardo*. Annual memorial services for the dead were also sometimes held, particularly to commemorate departed religious teachers.

The explicit purpose of these elaborate and long-lasting funerary practices, at least when dedicated to persons who were not regarded as religious masters – for saints were not thought to require the intercession of ordinary mortals – was ostensibly to secure a favorable station of rebirth for the departed. However, as in the case of rites dedicated to worldly protectors, an equally clear function of these rituals was to prevent the spirits of the deceased from disturbing the living and to reassure the survivors on this score. This tacit purpose became explicit in connection with particularly inauspicious death – for example by murder or accident – in which case the spirit might loiter about haunting his former dwellings and making mischief. When this occurred, special rites

intended to exorcize the ghost and dispatch it to a suitable abode were required. The premature decease of children posed similar problems. Thus we are told of an eighth-century noble, the minister Ba, whose young son and daughter suddenly died:

When a monk asked whether the minister wished his children to return as gods or as human beings, Ba chose divine rebirths for them, but his wife wished them to return as her own children once more. To console both, the monk suggested that he lead the son to a godly realm, but that the daughter take birth in the family again. As he performed the ceremony, there was a miraculous transformation of the son's remains into *shariram*, relics, indicating his rebirth as a god. The monk then took a pearl, smeared it with a solution of vermilion, and placed it in the left cheek of the mouth of the daughter's corpse. After performing a ritual "as a mark of faith," the infant was placed in an urn and buried beneath her mother's bed. Ten months later, a child was born into the family with a pearl in its mouth spotted red; the urn was disinterred and found to be empty.<sup>9</sup>

The ritual described, associating the blood-red of vermilion with the rites of the dead, may be immediately reminiscent of the mortuary practices enacted on behalf of the kings (Chapter 2). In this case, however, the influence of Chinese alchemical rites designed to achieve immortality is also evident in the motif of the pearl placed in the corpse's mouth. This serves as a reminder that the vast domain of Tibetan therapeutic and exorcistic ritual was complex in its formation, the product of cultural interactions over the course of centuries, both within Tibet and between Tibet and its neighbors.

## Buddhist Basics

The several orders and schools of Tibetan Buddhism and Bön are distinguished, one from the other, by many special doctrines, rituals, and spiritual practices. Nevertheless, the Tibetan religions also share a considerable, common body of instruction and tradition. As in most forms of Buddhism, the impermanence of conditioned reality and the resulting inevitability of suffering and death are matters of particular concern. This is reflected, as we have just seen, in a remarkable ritual emphasis on the passage of the dead. Living beings who have not achieved nirvana (Tib. *nyangdé*), the enlightenment of a Buddha (Tib. *sanggyé*), are subject to a perpetual round of rebirth (Skt. *samsara*, Tib. *khoriwa*), their condition in any given lifetime, whether human, divine, or infernal,

being determined by the impetus of their past meritorious and demeritorious deeds (Skt. *karma*, Tib. *lé*). Tibetan Buddhism therefore stresses the necessity of gaining merit through donations (Skt. *dana*, Tib. *jinpa*) to monks and religious institutions, offering of lamps and incense, recitation of scriptures, performance of prostrations and circumambulations, ransoming of animals from the butcher (*tsetar*), and religiously valued actions of many other types. One must turn from worldly activities to religion by taking refuge in the Three Precious Jewels (Skt. *triratna*, Tib. *könchok-sum*): the Buddha, his teaching (Skt. *dharma*, Tib. *chö*), and the religious community (Skt. *sangha*, Tib. *gendiün*). Often one's lama, or guru, is added to this universal Buddhist trinity as a fourth refuge. These essential elements of Tibetan Buddhist belief were expressed succinctly by a famed nineteenth-century master:

When it comes time to die, even the power and might of a universal monarch is of no use. The riches of Vaishravana, the god of wealth, are of no more value than a sesame seed. Even if you have a great company of parents, friends, relations, and associates they cannot lead you elsewhere. As if you were merely a hair picked out of the butter, you enter the great abyss of the intermediate state (between death and rebirth, the *bardo*), not knowing your destination. Without refuge or protection you must go on alone. Such a time will certainly come. And when it does come, that is not all – the bewildering manifestations of the intermediate state are terrifying, beyond conception, inexpressible. When you come to experience them, nothing will be of benefit except the genuine doctrine and the precious guru who is your guide. None of the comforts or friendships of this life can help.

Moreover, owing to the force of past actions and psychological affliction we continuously revolve through the three realms of samsara, and in future lives will find only misery, without a moment of ease. Concerning that: If born in the hells, the torments of heat and cold are unbearable. If born among the hungry ghosts, one is afflicted by the pains of hunger and thirst. If born among the animals, one is brought to grief by the pains of being slaughtered, devoured, enslaved, and by that of stupidity. If born among human beings, one will mourn the anguish of birth, aging, illness, and death. If born among the demigods, there is still the suffering of violence and strife. And even if born among the gods, there will be the pain of death and the fall to a lower condition.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly one ought to strive only for liberation, for freedom from the perpetual torments of ongoing rebirth. Tibetan Buddhists are encouraged not to seek nirvana for themselves alone, however, but to cultivate compassion (Skt. *karuna*, Tib. *nyingjé*) for all living beings. One is to



**Figure 27** Turning prayer-wheels (*mani khorlo*) is an ubiquitous spiritual exercise. Associated with the recitation of the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, it is intended to focus the mind on compassion, to bring peace to all suffering beings, Lhasa, 2002.

embark upon the Great Vehicle (Skt. *mahayana*, Tib. *thekchen*) that is the path of a bodhisattva (*changchup sempa*), and to develop the virtues of charity, self-restraint, patience, diligence, meditation, and insight. This last is above all insight into the radically contingent nature of conditioned things, that is, their emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tongnyi*). To comprehend this difficult concept through reason is among the central concerns of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and is a source of considerable debate. The ethical orientation of the Mahayana, considered to be the basis for religious life in Tibet, is summarized in the same sermon cited above:

Thinking of all living beings as the gracious parents of our past lives we should be compassionate to beggars and other unfortunates who come to our doors. We should love those who are unhappy. And we should think as follows: In order to remove the sufferings of living beings and to establish them in happiness I must become a Buddha. Therefore I will practice the genuine doctrine.

So, with love, compassion, and an enlightened attitude we should protect the lives of other living beings, give generously and without

attachment, adhere to our vows, speak truthfully, bring adversaries together, speak gently, praise others' virtues, be content, love others, and believe in the causal principle of karma – these are the ten virtues. Moreover, we should also practice prostrations, do circumambulations, erect images, books, and stupas, recite the scriptures, give worshipful offerings, recollect the words and meaning of the doctrine, expound them to others, critically examine those words and their meaning, become absorbed in the contemplation of that which is genuinely significant, and so forth. We should practice such positive karma ourselves, encourage others to do so, and rejoice when others have done so. Thus, even if we practice only minor virtues, then just as a pot is filled drop by drop, we will gradually attain Buddhahood.<sup>11</sup>

In its general outlines the outlook of institutional Bön was similar. A text whose redaction is attributed by the Bönpo to the eighth-century culture hero Vairocana, but which probably dates to some time after the eleventh century, describes the way of the Compassionate Spiritual Warriors (*thuje sempa*), who are equivalent to the bodhisattvas of mainstream Buddhism:

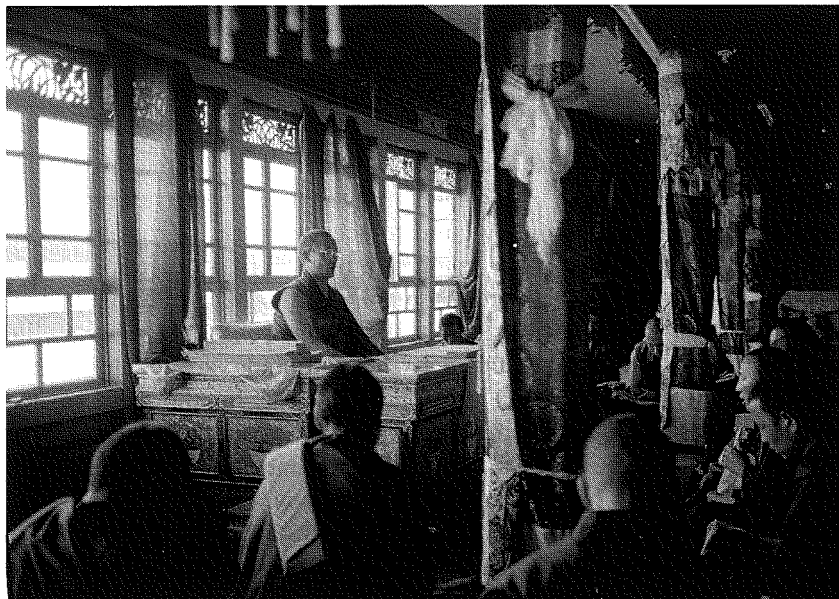
Through the application of the great axioms  
they perceive that outer and inner are not opposed.  
Hence their minds are free from subject and object,  
which they know to be the two aspects of a single experience.  
They preserve the vows restraining body, speech, and mind.  
Savoring the experience of clarity and awareness,  
they meditatively cultivate just the cognition of that consciousness.  
Practicing the path, they perfect themselves in gnosis and merit,  
and act on behalf of both self and others through the force of compassion.  
The result is to realize the level of unborn gnosis, universal light.  
Here seven distinctions are obtained,  
so that their realization, conduct, gnosis, effort, skillful means,  
fruition, and enlightened activity become especially distinguished.<sup>12</sup>

Self-restraint and the cultivation of compassion and merit as the basis for the spiritual life were thus widely accepted as a Tibetan cultural norm. It was an orientation systematically reinforced by means of systems of spiritual exercise (*lojong*), which were the object of rigorous study and practice on the part of the clergy, but entered lay life as well, above all through popular instructions on the meditations of Avalokishvara and other divinities, together with advice for pilgrimage, the practice of circumambulation, the offering of lamps, and other fundamental expressions of Tibetan religious adherence.

## Monastic Institutions and Education

The institutional heart of Tibetan Buddhism was the monastery. Monasticism was encouraged on a massive scale in traditional Tibetan society, particularly after the consolidation of political power by the Fifth Dalai Lama. This was justified by the belief that the monk was in an especially privileged position to avoid evil and to achieve merit, so that by maximizing the number of monks the maximum of merit accrued to Tibetan society as a whole, especially to those individuals and families who most contributed to the monastic system by dedicating sons to the religious life and wealth to support religious activities. Nomadic groups in the east often felt this to be a particularly urgent matter, for the merit earned by supporting good monks and their monasteries was believed to counterbalance to some extent the burden of sin that one acquired through actions prohibited by the system of religious ethics, especially the slaughter of animals, that were nevertheless unavoidable in a nomadic livelihood. Though worldly life was thought to be inevitably ensnared in various evils, a family could still better itself spiritually by committing some sons to the clergy. And if those sons achieved religious distinction, this could sometimes also impact favorably upon the status of the family concerned. This outlook helped to sustain the large or small monasteries and shrines of various kinds that were to be found in nearly every locale.

In practical terms the monastery fostered a concentration of cultural resources, serving as a center for education and the cultivation of the arts, though in most cases only a minority of the monks participated in these pursuits. Significantly, too, the monastery absorbed surplus labor. Whenever the rate of fertility outpaced the expansion of economic activity – and there is reason to believe that this was a regular tendency throughout much of the Tibetan world – monasticism provided a socially valued alternative to production. For religious girls and women nunneries also existed, though convents for nuns were less numerous and less populated than monasteries, and seldom had resources to provide more than a rudimentary education. However, it is also true that nuns more often than monks continued to live with their families, contributing to household work while also pursuing their devotions. The apparent numerical discrepancy between the male and female religious, therefore, may be due in part to the fact that relatively fewer religious women lived in specifically religious institutions. But it is also clear that nuns in most places suffered from economic privation, as patterns of donation generally favored the monks and because many monasteries, but seldom nunneries, controlled substantial estates.



**Figure 28** At the Jangtsé College of Ganden Monastery a senior monk delivers a discourse on the stages of the Buddhist path, 2002.

Most monks entered the monastery as children, and did so at the wish of their parents. Such children were granted the essential vows of the Buddhist novitiate, and became eligible to receive full ordination only in later adolescence. Rudimentary literacy seems to have been relatively widespread among monks and nuns, though the numbers able or inclined to pursue a higher education in Buddhist philosophy, or in such disciplines as medicine, art, or astrology, were few. The majority of the monks participated when possible in prayer services sponsored by lay patrons, who offered tea, butter, grain, and cash to the assembled congregation. Monks also pursued economic or administrative activities required for their own support or for that of the monastic community. They therefore were regularly involved in commerce and in various trades. Larger monasteries had their own complex bureaucracies, in which some offices were filled according to merit and ability, and others were occupied by *trülkus* (incarnates) groomed for the task from childhood.

Major monasteries, whose inmates numbered in the hundreds and sometimes thousands, were often organized by residence houses (*khang-tsen*) that gathered together monks from a particular region. In some cases, fraternities of warrior-monks also were known. Around Lhasa, in



the big Gelukpa monasteries, these were the *dapdop*, appropriately termed "punk-monks" by Goldstein, who were reputed and feared for their rough manners, their penchant for gang violence, and, on occasion, homosexual aggression. Though their behavior sometimes went far beyond the bounds of acceptability within the sangha, the power of such groups meant that their expulsion was usually out of the question. They also served at times as a sort of monastic police force, which was responsible for maintaining public order in Lhasa during the annual Great Prayer Festival.

Some monasteries housed colleges where advanced studies could be pursued by those motivated to do so. Aspirant monk-scholars sometimes traveled for months across the whole of the Tibetan world to enter an especially famous college, such as the Gelukpa Gomang College of Drepung Monastery near Lhasa, or the Nyingmapa Shrisimha College of Dzokchen Monastery near Dergé, in modern Sichuan. Besides the economic and ritual functions of the monastery, therefore, almost the entire apparatus of Tibetan formal education was concentrated within the monasteries as well. Literacy in traditional Tibet was a preeminently religious affair, and so, not surprisingly, the clerical services of trained monks were required by the Lhasa government and by the administrations of the smaller Tibetan principalities as well. There is some evidence that, in order to avoid this conscription of monks into the bureaucracy, the major Gelukpa monasteries near the capital may have actually discouraged the cultivation of full literacy skills in recent centuries. Monk-scholars in these centers were thus taught to read and to debate, but few mastered the fine penmanship and the art of literary composition that were required by the government for clerical work, so that the administration instead drafted youths for special training as scribes.

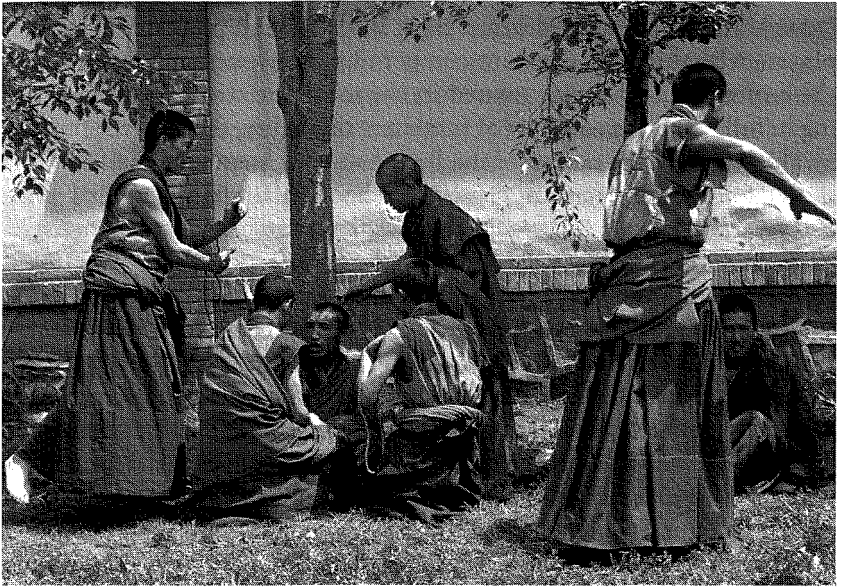
Though it would not be accurate to speak of philosophy as an autonomous domain of intellectual activity in Tibet, Tibetan monastic education did emphasize the practice of debate and the study of Indian traditions of logic and epistemology, together with the philosophical treatises of the major Indian Buddhist schools. It has become customary in recent writing about Tibetan religion to characterize this facet of the intellectual life of the monastic colleges as a type of scholasticism, for there are strong analogies between the approaches to learning valued in Tibet and in the medieval European schools. From the late eleventh century onwards the Tibetan colleges emphasized a highly rationalized approach to Buddhist doctrine, over and against one dominated exclusively by faith, with the epistemological and logical works of Dharmakīrti (c. 600) supplying the major methodological organ, much as Aristotle's logical writings did in the Latin West. Other required topics included the monastic code

(Skt. *Vinaya*, Tib. *dülwa*), the “meta-doctrine” (Skt. *Abhidharma*, Tib. *ngönpa*), the Perfection of Wisdom (Skt. *Prajñāparamita*, Tib. *parchin*), and the teaching of the Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamaka*, Tib. *uma*) of the famed dialectician Nagarjuna (c. second century CE). The first step in studying these topics was the rote memorization of the key texts, of which an accomplished scholar might learn thousands of pages by heart.

Tibetan scholastic practice emphasized close attention to the definition of key concepts and logical consistency which were refined through the art of debate. This practice was itself highly ritualized, with its own rich language of gesture, for instance a characteristic clap of the hands to accentuate a point. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to assume, as some have done, that monastic debate in Tibet had become a mere ritual, devoid of intellectual content. Because the Indian sources upon which Buddhist education was based reflected the considerable advances of Indian philosophy that had occurred during the mid- and late first millennium CE, Tibetan students had to delve into the abstract realms that their Indian predecessors had pioneered, including epistemology, ontology, and the philosophy of language. Questions of the nature of perception, the relation of subject and object, universal and particular, word and meaning, and more were the stock-in-trade of the monasteries’ debate courts. A brief example drawn from a standard manual of debate will illustrate something of the form and content of the monastic debates. In this elementary passage the concern is to introduce the fundamental concept of an “object of knowledge,” or “knowable”:

The synonyms of “knowable” include the terms “existent,” “foundational,” “object of judgement,” “epistemic object,” and *dharma*. This is because synonymity means that the terms in question are mutually pervasive and in the present case the terms in question *are* mutually pervasive. Thus, for instance, “knowable” and “existent” are synonymous, because the two are copervasive. Let that be the implication. It follows because if something is knowable, it is pervaded by existence, and if something is existent, it is pervaded by knowability.<sup>13</sup>

Precise definition of key terms, and the understanding of their relations with regard to a number of basic logical operations, formed the foundations of Tibetan debate logic. In the example above, besides the terms whose synonymity is proposed, “synonymity” itself is defined in terms of pervasion, a technical concept derived from Indian logic that refers to the extension of terms (i.e. what the term “covers”). When two terms are mutually pervasive – they cover the same ground, as we would say colloquially – they are synonyms. Understanding the relations among



**Figure 29** Monks in the debate court of Labrang Monastery, in Amdo (Gansu Province), honing their dialectical skills, 1990.

the terms – whether they are synonyms, contradictories, or contraries – allows one to draw out their implications. And what this system of logic in fact seeks to do is to explore these implications until one arrives at the recognition that one's initial premises were inconsistent or otherwise defective, or else one reaches those fundamental assumptions which must be accepted as intuitively valid, without further possibility of dispute. The debate, conducted in this fashion, is at once an inquiry that seeks to arrive at sound and valid conclusions, and a game in which one deploys all the dialectical skill one can muster with the sole objective of winning against one's opponent. In this respect, the debate becomes also a dramatic performance, in which exaggerated movements, verbal tricks, and sometimes humorous asides are deployed to drive home the point.

Each specific argument is only part of a larger discussion and introduces further possible lines of inquiry, in accord with the overall architecture of the Buddhist philosophical edifice. On the analogy of a game, the individual argument may be seen as a single round or innings. The dialectical method that is employed here is often described as a threefold procedure, consisting of, first, a refutation of erroneous positions (*gag*), followed by the definition of the position one wishes to defend (*zhag*), and, finally, the refutation of challenges to that position

(*pong*). As the debaters develop their skill through practice, like chess players who thrive on constant competition, they pursue the analysis of the entire range of topics treated in the monastic curriculum, examining in full detail the concepts of fundamental reality, the path to spiritual awakening, and the nature of the Buddha's enlightenment itself as these are elaborated in the four principal schools of Indian Buddhist philosophy: Vaibhashika (deemed "realist"), Sautrantika ("phenomenalist"), Yogachara ("idealist"), and Madhyamaka ("dialectical").

A learned monk-scholar spent years familiarizing himself with these subjects and had to support his interpretations of them in the debate court. In the Gelukpa colleges, those who completed the study of the five principal subjects – *abhidharma*, *vinaya*, etc., as mentioned above – were awarded the title of *geshé*, "spiritual benefactor" (Skt. *kalyanamitra*). Other orders preferred the title *khenpo*, "preceptor" (Skt. *upadhyaya*) to designate those who had completed the curriculum and were now authorized to teach in their own right. Scholars such as these, who had distinguished themselves for their learning and mastery of monastic discipline, sometimes rose in the monastic hierarchy, particularly as they gained in reputation and came to be sought out as teachers in their own right. In this respect the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy comported with a broadly meritocratic ethos, in which positive personal attainment was valued. Nevertheless, the presence of monks of aristocratic origin, the existence of important hereditary religious lineages, and the institution of the *trülku* together determined that the Tibetan monastic system was never meritocratic overall. As in the medieval West, the religious life provided a vehicle whereby, in each generation, a small number of talented individuals of humble status might aspire to establish their worth and so rise above what would have been their lot in life had they remained mere worldly men.

## Tantrism and Yoga

Tibet was deeply influenced by the esoteric Indian traditions of the Vajrayana branch of Mahayana Buddhism, the "Vajra Vehicle" (*dorjé thekpa*), whose primary symbol is the *vajra* (*dorjé*), a sceptre-like ritual implement at once representing the diamond-like clarity and unalterability of mind-as-emptiness, its lightning-like brilliance and occult power. Vajrayana Buddhism has its own authoritative texts, called tantras (*gyü*), that are primarily manuals of ritual and esoteric lore. The age of the new translations (Chapter 4), from the close of the tenth century on, came to be so called primarily owing to the tantras introduced during this time;

though Vajrayana Buddhism and the texts of many tantras had become known in Tibet from the eighth century onwards, some of the older translations differed in many important respects from these later arrivals and in fact were suspected of being apocryphal Tibetan works.

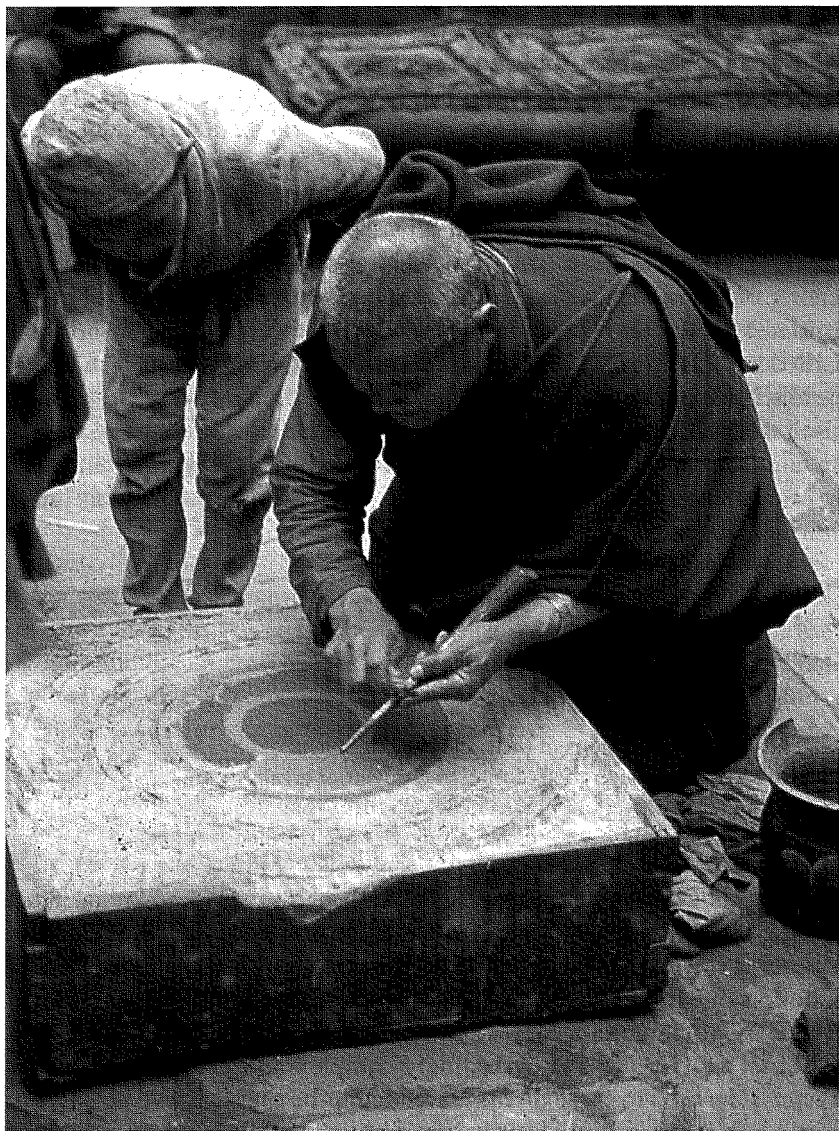
Central to the esoteric teaching of the tantras is *abhisheka* (Tib. *wang*), the consecration or "empowerment" whereby a disciple is initiated by the guru (Tib. lama) into a sphere of meditation called a mandala (*kyinkhor*) that is most often represented as a heavenly palace. At the center of the mandala there resides a deity who is the focal point of the initiate's meditation, and who is invoked by means of special formulae called mantras (*ngak*). The central deity may be male, female – in which case she is sometimes referred to as a *dakini* (*khandroma*, a term also used to describe women who are adepts of the Vajrayana) – or a couple in union, and is often surrounded by a retinue of divine attendants, arranged symmetrically throughout the mandala. The aims of this imaginative reconstruction of the world are described by a poet:

The bodily vessel becomes elemental light,  
A melting stream of divine ambrosia above.  
In the mass of reality's light,  
Conceptions of the six [sensory] aggregates are exhausted.

The varied conceptions of the six classes of beings  
Have arisen through the accumulated power of errant desire.  
Through the power of knowledge which turns that around  
You awaken as Buddha, so that all desires are fulfilled.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the important tantras that became well known in Tibet during the eleventh century were those focusing upon the mandalas and rituals of the many-armed deities Guhyasamaja ("Gatherer of Secrets"), Chakrasamvara ("Binder of the Energy Centers"), Hevajra ("Hey! Vajra!"), Yamantaka ("Slayer of the Lord of Death") and Kalachakra ("Wheel of Time"). The exceedingly complex and demanding esoteric systems devoted to these divinities tended to be the exclusive preserve of virtuoso adepts and ritual specialists, however, while in popular practice more easily accessible tantric meditations focusing upon the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, goddess Tara, and guru Padmasambhava, among others, were generally favored.

Avalokiteshvara (Tib. *Chenrezi*), often called Supreme Compassion (*Tujé chenpo*), is identified in particular as the national patron deity, and as such is the focus of a much elaborated cult. Of central importance here is the recitation of Avalokiteshvara's famous six-syllable mantra, *Om*



**Figure 30** A monk designs a mandala using colored powders. In this case the mandala will serve as the base for the *homa* fire, in which butter, grain, and other substances are to be given as offerings into the flames. Jiwong, Nepal, 1973.

*Manipadmé Hum*. The omnipresence of this formula in Tibetan religious practice – it is often uttered aloud while turning a “prayer-wheel” (*manikhorlo*) containing the mantra written or printed many thousands of times on a paper scroll – was noted even by medieval European visitors to Mongolia, who encountered Tibetan monks during their travels. Tibetan Buddhist practitioners treat each of the six syllables of the mantra as symbolic, bringing the bodhisattva’s blessings to the six classes of living beings: those in the hells, tormented spirits, animals, humans, titans, and the mundane gods. A special type of wandering bard, called *manipa*, offered public preaching of the six-syllable mantra and the teachings of the bodhisattva, conveying to the people at large the good tidings of this most fundamental expression of Tibetan tantric devotion. The essential ethos of the cult is summarized in a verse, apocryphally attributed to the Songtsen Gampo:

The enlightened activity of Supreme Compassion  
Grasps beings with a snare of compassion in which  
Buddhas and sentient beings are no different.  
It slaughters their pain with the weapon of emptiness,  
And draws beings to the level of bliss supreme.<sup>15</sup>

The systems of meditation taught in the tantras are referred to as yoga (*neljor*), “union,” referring to spiritual disciplines intended to unite the adept with the realization of ultimate reality. The indivisible relation of the awakened mind to the absolute that this entails is represented iconographically by the depiction of the deities as couples in sexual embrace. Besides those types of yoga concerned with the visualization of the mandala and deity, and the recitation of the mantra, there are also more advanced disciplines involving visualizations and exercises in which one’s body is conceived of as a network of subtle channels and energies, the skillful manipulation of which is believed to hasten the adept’s progress towards enlightenment, and also to lead to the acquisition of uncanny, magical abilities: clairvoyance, miraculous flight, the resurrection of the dead, etc. These advanced techniques of yoga are often described in terms of six fundamental principles (*chödruk*): the Inner Heat (*tummo*), whereby the adept learns to master the subtle physical energies of the body; the Body of Apparition (*mayakaya*, *gyülü*), through which the illusion-like nature of experience becomes known; the Dream (*svapna*, *milam*), in which one achieves the ability to consciously explore and to transform the possibilities that are revealed in dreams; Radiant Light (*prabhasvara*, *ösel*), referring to the luminous dimension of the mind; Transference (*powa*), the means to cause one’s consciousness to

leave the body abruptly at the moment of death and to seek rebirth in a pure realm; and the Intermediate State (*bardo*) of consciousness in the course of migration between death and rebirth. The first four enable one to attain enlightenment swiftly during this very lifetime, the last two to achieve it at death. Adepts who have attained the goals of this esoteric path are called *siddha* (*drubtop*), “accomplished” or “perfected,” because they have attained *siddhi* (*ngödrup*), the mundane or supermundane powers and realizations that are especially cultivated on the path of the Vajrayana.

The highest teachings of Tibetan tantric Buddhism are those relating to the abstract realization of the ultimate nature of mind. For the Nyingmapa tradition these are represented primarily by the Great Perfection (*dzokchen*) teaching, while for the Kagyüpa and Gelukpa the Great Seal (*chakchen*) system is preeminent. Though there are many special points of emphasis characterizing each of these approaches to the absolute, the words of the Nyingmapa master Longchen Rabjampa (1308–63) serve to introduce their common orientation:

The unsurpassed vehicle is the supremely esoteric Great Perfection, that brings about real union with the spontaneously present expanse [of reality, *dharmadhatu*]. In the unchanging expanse of the ground, similar to space, the qualities of enlightenment are spontaneously present, like the sun, moon, planets, and stars. Because they are spontaneously present from the very beginning, without having been sought out, the path is one of natural direct perception, without tiresome exertion. Its intention is equivalent to that of the Dharmakaya [the “body of reality”], self-abiding as the unconditioned mandala of the expanse of inner radiance, and it is the supreme view of the abiding nature of reality that brings about [its] realization. Ephemeral obscurations are clouds in the expanse of purity: in the minds of beings bewildering appearances become manifest without veridical existence . . . It is by knowing the nature of bewilderment as the appearance of what is not that one is freed . . .

Whatever consciousness arises is the self-liberated play of the body of reality, like water and waves, a single undulation in the body of reality. This is the intention of ultimate truth, the uppermost pinnacle among views; this is the Great Perfection.<sup>16</sup>

A schematic outline of Tibetan tantrism, such as that offered in these pages, may give rise to the mistaken impression that this was a relatively open and accessible tradition. However, this was not in fact the case. Tantric teachings, besides those of Avalokiteshvara and a number of other very popular divinities, were hedged in by restrictions of secrecy and the proprietary rights of particular lineages or religious communi-





**Figure 31** A Bönpo lay tantric assembly (*ngakpa tratsang*), Mewa, Sichuan, 1990.

ties. Before being initiated into these teachings the disciple had often to prove himself during the course of a lengthy apprenticeship. The famed poet-saint Milarepa is revered as the model disciple, who, as we have seen earlier, endured years of privation and abuse at the hands of his dictatorial guru Marpa before being graced with initiation. Though Mila's trials were mercifully not the lot of most aspirants, serious disciples did have to undertake lengthy preliminary practices involving hundreds of thousands of repetitions of offerings and devotions, and frequently a long period of service to one's teacher as well. Once initiated one was expected to cultivate contemplative and ritual practice during long periods of solitary retreat, often under conditions of privation. This was institutionalized to some extent in the "practice college" (*drupdra*), where a complete course of training in a given tantric system was undertaken over a period of three years and three fortnights (*losum choksum*), an approach that has been introduced in the West by leading Kagyüpa and Nyingmapa lamas in recent years.

Those raised in positions of hierarchical privilege, such as the incarnate emanations (*trülku*), were of course granted tantric initiation as a matter of course. Indeed, it was an obligatory aspect of their education

and the performance of tantric rituals of various kinds figured among their responsibilities, both to the lay and monastic communities. Despite their favored status, however, *trülkus* were frequently subject in childhood to the strict discipline of study, religious practice, and carefully orchestrated public appearances. Moreover, the more perspicacious among them were faced with the difficult problem of reconciling what was expected of them with their own emerging interests and values. One particularly rebellious figure, Dūjom Dorjé (late nineteenth century), recalled in his memoirs his extreme discomfort with the tantric practice of *powa*, which he was expected to perform among the last rites on behalf of lay sponsors:

Except for being a means to consume the wealth of the deceased, there was nothing at all here of ultimately meaningful practice, which makes this free occasion [of human birth] valuable, for instance, the exercise of the virtues, the stages of creation and perfection, or meditation and mantra-recitation. Like one sitting astride a horse, but boxed into a pen with no freedom of movement, I was solely occupied in bringing in offerings of the riches of the living and the dead, the best of the harvest. Though some trifling wealth was gathered in this way – let's not talk about moving even so far as a sesame grain in the direction of the Precious Jewels' field! – I was without any power to do more than bring to waste the food and clothing of patrons and to receive payment for their debts. My patrons, moreover, were coarse people of bad character who took no care of me, and though I was but a child, they cursed me, [at once] bestowing titles and finding faults. Though they called me "*trülku*," I was in fact more like their servant.<sup>17</sup>

In short, even disregarding the tribulations of a Milarepa, the milieu of Tibetan tantrism was fraught with difficulties and contradictions of many kinds in its pursuit of "highest bliss."

Nor was hardship by any means the lot of the tantric aspirant alone. Monk-scholars, who devoted their time to study, were frequently incapable of engaging in the economic activities, whether commercial or ritual, through which most monks were assured of their livelihood. As a contemporary anthropologist concludes,

The scholar monks . . . were sorely disadvantaged since they had no time to engage in trade or other income-producing activities because of the heavy academic burden they were carrying. Consequently, they typically were forced to lead extremely frugal lives unless they were able to find wealthy patrons to supplement their income or were themselves wealthy as in the case of the incarnate lamas. Tales abound in Drepung of famous scholar monks so poor that they had to eat the staple food – *tsamba* (parched

barley flour) – with water rather than tea, or worse, who had to eat the left-over dough from ritual offerings (*torma*).<sup>18</sup>

Those motivated to excel in the religious life, whether as scholars or as tantric adepts, were thus often required to undergo many hard years of preparation before their efforts could yield positive success. Like the devout saints of other religious cultures, they usually came to regard such tests as the goad for perfecting their own discipline and resolve.

The worlds of the scholar-monk and that of the tantric yogin may thus be regarded as two parallel, but distinct, religious subcultures, sharing some common problems and goals, but in many respects independent. This, indeed, was generally the case and there was often antagonism between them as well. The tale is told of the eleventh-century master Zurpoché, who sought to quell the hostility that had arisen among the two factions of his disciples:

At first, the teacher and his students . . . mainly devoted themselves to study; so there were few who were adept at the rites of enlightened activity. When discussions were held in the teaching court, those who did know the rites were seated among the ignorant, who did not participate in the discussions. [In retaliation] the ritualists would not allow the others to chant when they assembled for the daily *torma* offerings. At this Lama Zurpoché said, "One may be liberated by arriving at the culmination of any subject. It is not right to scorn one another. Each philosophical and spiritual system . . . has its own scope."<sup>19</sup>

In time, the human ideal for Tibetan Buddhism therefore came to be the master who was believed to have successfully integrated the highest tantric levels of attainment with the intellectual refinement of a monk-scholar. Such figures were called *khedrup nyiden-ki lama*, the "lama who is at once both a learned scholar and an accomplished *siddha*." It was an ideal that many thought was in fact embodied in the leading historical and contemporary masters of the major Buddhist schools.

## Major Orders and Schools

In introducing the "schools" of Tibetan Buddhism, several different phenomena in the formation of religious traditions must be distinguished. One may speak, for instance, of distinct orders or sects (*chöluk*), religious traditions that are set apart from others by virtue of their institutional independence, that is to say, whose unique character is embodied

outwardly in the form of an autonomous hierarchy and administration, independent properties, and an identifiable membership of some sort. Such corporate religious bodies are of great importance in the Tibetan religious world, but they must not be confounded with lineages (*gyüpa*), continuous successions of spiritual teachers who have transmitted a given body of knowledge over a period of generations but who need not be affiliated with a common order. Lineages may be highly specific, for instance the line of teachers through which the study of a particular text or ritual method has been transmitted, or of broader reach, as is the case when one speaks of the "lineages of attainment" (*drubgyü*, see below), which have conserved significant bodies of religious tradition, including textual learning, liturgy, practical disciplines, iconographical knowledge, etc. In this latter sense, lineages have often been the basis for the formation of the distinct orders. Finally, orders and lineages must both be differentiated from schools of thought (*drubta*, "philosophical systems," equivalent to *siddhanta* in Sanskrit). The adherent of a given Tibetan Buddhist order will, in the course of his career, usually receive instruction in (or at least derived from) a number of differing lineages and be exposed to several schools of thought. It should be noted, however, that the terminology introduced here is not used in Tibetan with perfect regularity. Sometimes the expression *drubta*, "schools of thought," for instance, is used to refer to the major orders and lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, especially when the primary interest is the doctrinal and philosophical orientation of the religious traditions considered.

Institutional, lineage-based, and philosophical or doctrinal ways of thinking about religious adherence in Tibet were thus complementary, and to varying degrees intersected with or diverged from one another. Hence the exact classification of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism has posed something of a problem, not only for modern researchers but for traditional Tibetan authorities as well. The renowned fifteenth-century historian Gölo Zhönnu-pel, for example, organizes his great work, the *Blue Annals*, on the principle of lineage, of which he treats about a dozen as particularly important but discusses many others as well. The *Rimé* master of the nineteenth century, Jamgön Kongtrül, arranges his collection of the major systems of teaching, the *Treasury of Instructions*, according to the scheme of the "eight great lineages of attainment," following the enumeration proposed by a sixteenth-century author. And in the classification best-known in the West, the Tibetan government of the Dalai Lamas recognized four major orders, though in fact several others continued to be active, even if not formally acknowledged as such by the Central Tibetan government. For present purposes, because we have con-

sidered the major lineages and their role in the formation of the orders in the fourth and fifth chapters above, a brief review will suffice. Note, too, that the Tibetan Bön religion, which in its institutional dimensions at least may be considered as a parallel Buddhist order, is generally left out of the classificatory schemes mentioned here, though some writers have also considered it in this context.

The "Ancient Translation Tradition" (*ngagyur nyingma*) includes all of those lines of teaching that maintain that their esoteric and tantric traditions were derived from the texts and instructions transmitted during the time of the Tibetan monarchs of the eighth and ninth centuries, Tri Songdetsen above all. By the late tenth century such lineages were maintained primarily by a lay priesthood that increasingly came to be attacked by proponents of the "new mantra traditions" (*sang-ngak sarma*) for adhering to esoteric teachings that, so the critics declared, had been corrupted. The formation of a distinctive Nyingmapa tradition was in some respects a reaction to such charges and involved both the elaboration of historical apologetics and the codification of the older tantric transmissions, their special doctrines, and the rites connected with them.

Historically, the Nyingmapa asserted the preeminence of the Indian tantric master Padmasambhava, who came to be effectively deified by them. Other masters of the imperial period, notably the Indian Vimalamitra and the Tibetan translator Vairochana, were also claimed as forebears. The teaching of these figures was considered to emphasize the organization of the whole gamut of Buddhist doctrine and practice into nine sequential vehicles (*tekpa rimpa gu*), of which the last three, comprising the esoteric instructions of the highest tantras, represented the distinctive heritage of the Nyingmapa. The pinnacle of the system was taken to be the abstract and visionary approach to contemplation of the Great Perfection, the authenticity of which was sometimes contested by adherents of the newer schools. From the twelfth century on, the Nyingmapa came to rely increasingly on a tradition of renewed revelation, mostly of Padmasambhava's teachings, referred to as "treasure-doctrines" (*terchö*). Though widely contested, these came to play a major role in the formation of Tibetan religious culture generally.

The Nyingmapa had their grassroots constituency among lay tantric adepts (*ngakpa*), sometimes organized in village-based communities. Though identifiable Nyingmapa monastic institutions were founded in the twelfth century and perhaps earlier, their organization as a distinct monastic order seems largely to have emerged during the seventeenth century and reflects in large part the political reforms of Tibetan religious administration under the government of the Fifth Dalai Lama. At the same time,

important lines of Nyingmapa teaching have been preserved among the non-Nyingmapa orders, especially in the Khön family of Sakya and in several branches of the Kagyüpa.

Despite its emphasis on the practice of tantric esotericism, and though it has relied during much of its history on familial lineages of lay priests, the Nyingmapa have also sometimes given rise to masters of the scholarly traditions of Buddhism, who have formulated distinctive doctrinal syntheses inspired by the special features of the Nyingmapa teaching. Among the foremost we may mention Nup Sanggyé Yeshé (c. tenth century), Rongzom Chözang (eleventh century), Longchen Rabjampa (1308–63), Lochen Dharmashri (1654–1717), Jikmé Linga (1730–98), and Mipam Namgyel (1846–1912).

We have earlier surveyed the origins and development of the major “new traditions”: Kadampa, Sakyapa, and Kagyüpa, as well as Gelukpa. Among them the Kadampa were ultimately absorbed into the Gelukpa order and so ceased to exist as a distinct religious community. Nevertheless, the principal lines of Kadampa teaching became part of the common legacy of the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions overall. The characteristic emphasis of their teaching was the exoteric Mahayana doctrine of “emptiness imbued with compassion,” concerning which Atisha’s later successors created a remarkable corpus of literature devoted to spiritual exercise, called “training (or purification) of the mind” (*lojong*), in which such common acts as eating and drinking, walking, going to sleep, and even breathing serve as focal points for the cultivation of spiritual love and a keen sense of the relativity of transient things.

The Sakyapa, even after their fall from power during the mid-fourteenth century, continued to exercise a great influence upon the religious life of Tibet, owing to the emergence of dynamic new Sakyapa suborders. The most successful of them was the Ngorpa (founded by Ngorchon Künga Zangpo, 1382–1456), which enjoyed an extensive following, above all in far eastern Tibet, where it became effectively the state religion of the important principalities of Dergé and Nangchen. The Sakyapa also produced a long line of outstanding doctrinal writers, who may be counted among the leading contributors to the development of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Especially noteworthy are Tsongkhapa’s teacher and colleague Remdawa Zhönnu Lodrö (1349–1412), and Rongtön Sheja Künzi (1367–1449), Serdok Panchen (1428–1507), and Gorampa Sonam Senggé (1429–89), who were famed for mounting severe challenges to Tsongkhapa’s doctrinal interpretations. Far from representing a unitary school dogma, these figures show considerable diversity in their approaches to Buddhist philosophical teaching.

The Kagyüpa, too, following the ascent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, maintained their principal strength in regions outside of central Tibet, where they sometimes dominated local regimes, as was the case in Bhutan. Though there had been a great proliferation of Kagyü orders early on, four remained especially prominent in recent times, namely the Karmapa, Drigungpa, Drukpa, and Taklungpa. All of these enjoyed considerable followings in parts of Kham, in particular.

Besides the four major orders, a number of smaller lineages were also important, though in most cases without independent institutions adhering to them. Four in particular are often enumerated, to complete the list of the eight "lineages of practice" mentioned above. Of these, the "Succession of the Transmitted Precepts of Shang" (*shangpa kagyü*), took its name from the Shang valley, where the early twelfth-century master Khyungpo Neljor, a Buddhist convert from Bön, founded his community. Though there is considerable uncertainty about his precise dates, and traditional chronologies generally assign his birth to the year 990, he appears in fact to have been born half a century or so later. During travels in India he is supposed to have met numerous tantric masters, including two remarkable women, Niguma and Sukhasiddhi, the first of whom is referred to in his biography as the renowned adept Naropa's wife or sister. From Niguma, Khyungpo learned a system of six yogas resembling the system of Naropa as transmitted by Marpa, but differing primarily in its notable emphasis upon the contemplative themes of apparition and dream. These esoteric instructions are reputed to have been transmitted in a strictly secret lineage to just one unique disciple in each generation down to the time of Sanggyé Tönpa (1219–90), who began to disseminate them widely among practitioners of tantric yoga. The "six doctrines of Niguma," as they are known, continue to be widely practiced by Tibetan Buddhist adepts at present. Though there were a small number of properly Shangpa hermitages at times, the Shangpa never established an independent order and their doctrinal lineage was transmitted in later times to varying degrees within the major orders, but principally by the Karma Kagyü. More recently the Shangpa teachings have aroused considerable interest among Buddhists in the West owing to the widespread activity of their leading contemporary representative, the late Kalu Rinpoché Rangjung Kümkhyab (1905–89).

The related traditions of Zhijé, "Pacification," and Chö, "Severance," originated respectively with the enigmatic Indian yogin Padampa Sanggyé (d. 1117) and his remarkable Tibetan successor, the female saint Machik Labdrön (c. 1055–1143). Though schools specializing in Pacification were widespread during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries,

the teaching all but disappeared in later times. Padampa continued to be revered as a culture hero, however, and the collection of verse aphorisms attributed to him – the *Century for the People of Dingri* – remains a popular classic of Tibetan gnomic literature. Severance, by contrast, permeated Tibetan Buddhism overall and is today preserved by all orders. Both of these systems of instruction seek to bring about realization as it is understood in the “Perfection of Wisdom” (Skt. *Prajñāparamita*) sutras by means inspired by esoteric Buddhist practice. This takes particularly dramatic form in the traditions of Severance, whose exquisite liturgies involve the adept’s symbolic offering of his or her own body as food for all beings throughout the universe.

The famous *Kalachakratāntra*, or “Wheel of Time,” gave rise to a system of practice called the “Yoga of Indestructible Reality” (*dorjé neljor*), which was transmitted in Tibet initially during the early eleventh century. A great many lineages specializing in this tantra rapidly arose, so that it became one of the dominant esoteric traditions of the early second millennium. The Kalachakra proposes in effect a system of universal knowledge, including astronomical calculation, medical tradition, and, above all, mastery of the internal disciplines of yoga. Indeed, these three domains – that of the universe without, the body within, and the esoteric realm of yoga – are treated homologously here, mapped onto one and the same divine mandala. As will be seen in the following chapter, the Kalachakra would become the basis for the Tibetan calendrical system, among other branches of learning.

During the fourteenth century two approaches to the interpretation and practice of the Kalachakra became predominant. The first was that of Zhalu Monastery, which was given its decisive formulation in the writings of the celebrated scholar and editor of the canon Butön Rinchen-drup (1290–1364). The second major Kalachakra tradition emerged at the monastery of Jonang, where it was promulgated by the philosophically controversial master Dölpopa Sherab Gyeltsen (1292–1361). While these two contemporaries were both widely revered, they arrived at opposing conclusions regarding the Kalachakra’s teaching in relation to Buddhist philosophy. For Dölpopa, the tantra supported the much contested view that the definitive doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism was that of buddha-nature, not emptiness, so that the absolute could be considered not as empty in itself but only as extrinsically empty (*zhentong*) with respect to relative phenomena. In its own nature it was, rather, a plenitude of the qualities of the highest enlightenment. By contrast, Butön held that the discourse of buddha-nature was itself just a way of speaking of the emptiness that stood as the true heart of the doctrine. The latter



came to be favored in the Gelukpa order, and it is the “Butön tradition” (*buluk*) that continues to be transmitted in that order today, above all by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. The Jonangpa order, which was suppressed for political reasons by the government of the Fifth Dalai Lama during the seventeenth century, continued nevertheless to thrive in some parts of far eastern Tibet. Its controversial teaching of extrinsic emptiness would become an important element in the nineteenth century eclectic movement in Kham.

The last of the lineages of instruction that is often enumerated is the rare and so far unstudied “Service and Attainment of the Three Esoteric Realities” (*dorjé sumgyi nyendrub*), which specializes in the internal yoga of the subtle energy channels and vital energies. It is said to stem from the teaching of the goddess Vajrayogini, as received by the Tibetan adept Orgyenpa Rinchen-pel (1230–1309) during his extensive travels in northwestern India. The teaching was popularized for a time by Orgyenpa’s immediate successors, but subsequently it seems to have lapsed into obscurity.

The division of the Bönpo into a number of distinct lineages and traditions has also a long and complex history, blending ancient clan-based priestly lines and later monastic institutions. The most distinguished center of learning among the Bönpo was generally thought to be Menri Monastery in Tsang, founded in 1405 by Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen (1356–1415). The latter had been a disciple of the great Sakyapa teacher Rongtön Sheja Künzi, who himself had been by origin a Bönpo. The curriculum formulated at Menri reflected in most aspects the Buddhist scholasticism of the period, but integrated with a general framework derived from older Bön traditions.

## Festivals, Pilgrimages, and Ritual Cycles

Among the many characteristic religious activities in which virtually all Tibetans participate, pilgrimage is particularly prominent. Pilgrimage was traditionally one of the central phenomena contributing to, and perhaps even to some extent engendering, the cultural unity of Tibet. Pilgrimage, among other things, promoted commerce in both goods and information. It brought persons from distant parts of the Tibetan world into direct contact with one another and thus militated to some extent against divisive regional tendencies.

Most Tibetans regarded the religious shrines of Lhasa to be particularly important to visit. Here, in the ancient Tibetan capital, they could

behold and be blessed by contact with the Jowo Shakyamuni image residing in the central temple, which was thought to have been brought from China by the princess of Wencheng. The pilgrims who flocked to Lhasa brought offerings for the temples and monks, and also frequently engaged in small trade so as to finance their journeys. Thus, besides its purely religious significance, pilgrimage played an important role in the Tibetan economy.

The capital, however, was not the sole center of pilgrimage. In fact, there was a sort of national pilgrimage network in Tibet, whose routes, extending the length and breadth of the country, joined great and small temples and shrines, as well as caves, mountains, valleys, and lakes that were imbued with sacred significance. In far western Tibet the greatest pilgrimage center was undoubtedly Mt. Kailash, regarded popularly as being substantially identical with the world-mountain, the *axis mundi*. As such it was a major destination for both Hindus and Buddhists. The Tibetan pilgrims who sometimes walked for months, even years, to reach the "most precious glacial peak" (*Gang Rinpoché*), were often joined in the final stages of their journey by Indian holy men and devotees, who made the difficult trek from the Indian plains over the Himalayan passes. Other important centers of pilgrimage included Tsari, where a great procession, convened once in twelve years, was said to purge even the taint of murder, and Chöten Nyima, to the north of Sikkim, where incest pollution could be cleansed.

Mt. Kailash is thought to be the center of a sacred mandala, around which, throughout an area extending for many hundreds of miles, all significant geographical features are arrayed in a well-ordered and meaningful fashion. At these great pilgrimage centers religious significance is ascribed to all aspects of the environment. This is reflected in the guidebook to Crystal Peak, in northwestern Nepal near the Tibetan frontier:

At Crystal Peak the environment resembles the great world-system itself. On the upper slopes dwell the masters who are the roots of one's practice and also the past teachers of the lineage. On the middle slopes dwell the assembled meditational deities with whom one forms spiritual bonds. On the lower flanks the dakinis of the three spheres dwell like a mass of gathering clouds. The protectors of the teaching dwell all about.

In the words of Guru Padmasambhava, it is said, "Among the twenty-one great snow peaks there are hidden places, hidden treasures, and hidden lands. Especially at the great Crystal Peak, all who pray, who offer feasts, who make material offerings, who perform beneficial acts of body, speech and mind, will actually be guided by the mother goddesses and dakinis to Sukhavati – no doubt about it! Even if the worst among you pilgrims is



**Figure 32** Pilgrims performing the *lingkhor*, or ritual circuit, of Ganden Monastery, 2002.

merely born in the mundane human world, that one will still avert all the harm of strife and violence, and the bad fortune of illness, war, and famine – there is no doubt!”<sup>20</sup>

Related to the pilgrimage cycles are the festivals of Tibetan Buddhism, which serve to organize time much as the pilgrimage routes organize space. The Tibetan New Year requires the performance of extensive rites on behalf of the protective divinities, followed by the convening of the Great Prayer Festival (*mönlam chenmo*) in Lhasa. In the fourth lunar month the celebration of the Buddha’s enlightenment (*saga dawa*, equivalent to the Vesakh of Theravada Buddhism) is marked by fasting and communal prayer. *Dzamlung chisang*, the “general incense fumigation (*sang*) of the world,” falls on the full-moon day of the fifth month, in the early summer, and is an occasion for ritual dance (*cham*) in the monasteries, elaborate *sang* rites in the mountains, and protracted picnicking. The cycle of celebrations inaugurated in the central Tibetan monasteries of Lhasa, Tramdruk, and Samyé by the ill-fated monarch Muné Tsenpo (Chapter 3) is observed at this time. The Yoghurt Festival (*zhotön*) of the seventh month marks the conclusion of the monks’ summer retreat



**Figure 33** The “lords of the cemetery” (*durtrö dakpo*) confront the comical characters called “teachers” (*atsara*) in a performance of *cham*, Minyak Lhagang, Sichuan, 1992.

and in and around Lhasa is accompanied by the display of gigantic appliqué *tankas* at Sera and Drepung Monasteries, together with public performances of the *Aché lhamo*, masked operas accompanied by elaborate dancing and song. The Buddha’s mission to teach his late mother in heaven and his subsequent return to the human world are commemorated by the Festival of the Descent from the Heavens (*lhabab düchen*), which falls on the twenty-second of the ninth lunar month. The tenth day of each lunar month is consecrated to the guru, and among the Nyingmapa in particular is a time for communal feast rituals, and sometimes also the performance of *cham*, while the twenty-fifth of the month is dedicated to the guru’s female counterpart, the *dakini*.

More detailed consideration of a single event will help to clarify the interweaving of time, geography, and religious knowledge in the spiritual life of Tibet. The festival known as the Drigung Powa Chenmo, “The Great Rite of *Powa* (the transfer of consciousness, at death) taught at Drigung,” takes place once every twelve years, during the monkey year. Though suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, it was revived in approximately traditional form in 1992. (A second revived performance

in 2004 involved some remarkable departures from tradition: the festival was removed from the mountain hermitage at which it was formerly held to a site accessible by road, and it was compressed into just three days, rather than the traditional full week.) A description of its organization, as it was conducted in 1956, however, provides an excellent introduction to the intricate network of relationships – temporal, spatial, religious, and social – that characterizes all events of this type. The translation given here is slightly abridged, but many of the particular details mentioned will now be familiar, having been introduced in earlier sections of this book:

The Monkey Year Powa Chenmo is convened at a place called Drongur, situated in the valley of Zhotö Tidro, during the period from the seventh through the fifteenth of the sixth lunar month. The two hierarchs of Drigung Monastery – the Chetsang and Chungtsang Rinpoché – were the chief officiants for the religious performance, which began when they rode from Drigung Monastery to Drongur. On an astrologically propitious day, they spent a day performing the propitiations of Achi Chöki Drölma, the chief protective deity of Drigung. After prognostications favored continuing the ride, the lamas, incarnates, and monks of Drigung would guide the horseback journey by stages. Following casual ablutions and consecrations, the Lama of Drongur and the chief steward of the Terdrom convent would welcome the party at the base of Tidro Valley with incense, whereupon the chief steward would offer the world-mandala, the symbolic offering of the cosmos, together with an explanation of the sacred features of the site. That afternoon, together with an offering of fragrant incense to the local deities (*sang*) and other observances, they performed a circuit of the hot springs and then proceeded the rest of the way to Drongur. Then, with the nuns of Terdrom and the lamas of Drongur performing a procession known as the “yellow rosary,” they entered the stronghold of Drongur together. Following the admonitions of the leadership, the monks and nuns of Drongur and Terdrom made the preparations for the great teachings of the Monkey Year.

Besides that, the taxpayers and others belonging to the Drigung administration had to appear for an assessment of revenue and be forthcoming with their payments. Then, beginning on the sixth day of the sixth month, the monks of the two Drigung colleges, together with those practicing retreat, gradually had to assemble at Drongur. After riding up with the lamas who were officials of the colleges, they then had to invite into their presence the representations of the Buddhas’ Body, Speech, and Mind in the form of the images, books, and symbols that were installed at Drongur for the teachings. On the seventh day, the two colleges were asked separately to pitch their assembly tents – the assembly tent of Til, “Blue Heaven,” and that of Gar, “White Snow Peak,” had been the presentations of Pemé Gyeltsen, the twenty-ninth head of the lineage of Drigung (b. 1770). These two colleges

together would then request that the great tent of empowerment, the commission of the Ven. Thukje Nyima (the thirty-second head of the lineage), be pitched above the religious court of Drongur.

Four monk sergeants-at-arms, together with four deputies from the larger taxpaying households, would have to shoulder the responsibility of assuring adherence to the religious laws during the festival, along with the laws of the monastic and lay public in general. In the afternoon of the seventh day, at the valley closing the fortress of Drongur, all would have to listen to a proclamation of the ordinances of the religious law. Then by stages, following rounds in the camps of the two colleges, and the most important campsites of the public, the path was closed, and it was arranged that neither mundane business nor affairs involving unclean sorts of things should arrive there. The entire legal power for the duration of the religious assembly was then held as the responsibility of the sergeants-at-arms and their deputies.<sup>21</sup>

Following the completion of these preliminary arrangements, through which the valley of Drongur was transformed into a sealed and well-ordered realm, legally and ritually isolated from the surrounding world, the actual cycle of religious teaching would commence. This began on the eighth day of the lunar month, that is, at the half moon, and reached its culmination on the full-moon day, when the instructions for the rite of *powa*, whereby consciousness may be liberated at death, were publicly conferred:

During the eighth day there is the initial preparatory empowerment. When the assembled public is very numerous there are about thirty thousand, but if not then roughly twenty thousand. On the ninth day there is the empowerment of the Buddha and on the tenth day of the great festival, the two hierarchs don ceremonial garb of Central Asian origin, and they set up the parasol of peacock feathers that the [Chinese] emperor offered. [In this regalia] they confer the *torma*-empowerment of the peaceful guru, the empowerment of longevity, etc. During the following days they bestow the initiations of Avalokiteshvara and the Wrathful Guru, the rite for generation of the enlightened attitude, and such empowerments as those of Tara and Mañjushri.

On the fifteenth, the day of the full moon, the Drigung Powa Chenmo itself is conferred, a profound doctrine renowned throughout all the numberless districts of Tibet. The entire populace, high and low, harbors great hopes of receiving the Powa Chenmo. Anywhere throughout the east, center or west of Tibet, one who has obtained the Drigung Powa Chenmo is counted as being fortunate. In order to obtain it, many people, without regard to sectarian affiliation, travel from afar, undertaking many hardships to get there.<sup>22</sup>

These concluding sentences are in no way an exaggeration. Similar remarks, moreover, may be made with respect to other major Tibetan pilgrimages, such as those to Kailash, Tsari, or, on a regular basis, the holy sites of Lhasa and central Tibet. In traditional society, participation in such pilgrimages was, and still remains, a desired goal for many. If Westerners tend to think of meditation as the characteristic expression of Buddhist faith, for Tibetans, besides such daily acts of devotion as performing prostrations and offering butter-lamps, the religious practice par excellence was without doubt pilgrimage.

It has often been remarked that Tibet, before its forced entry into the People's Republic of China, had only a very weak state structure, whose authority, such as it was, was supported by little coercive force. Indeed, large parts of the Tibetan world were often outside of the Central Tibetan state altogether, and were either subservient to other states, or local princes, or virtually stateless. Despite this, however, and despite the presence of strong tendencies, intensified by the exigencies of geography and poor systems of communication, to accentuate the particularisms of region, dialect, and sect, there were traditionally, and persist today, strong sentiments of affinity and cohesiveness running throughout the Tibetan cultural world. The relative coherence of Tibetan culture, considered in the light of the powerful forces that seem to oppose any such unifying disposition, presents a general problem in the study of Tibetan civilization.

Language, economic ties, and history all play their roles in explaining this, together with the considerable influences of Tibetan religion in general. It is in this context, however, that pilgrimage in particular may be seen as a major factor in the organization of Tibetan culture overall. By ordering the cycles of pilgrimage according to calendrical cycles, by establishing the locations visited and the routes traversed, and by promoting specific religious teachings, historical narratives and symbolic interpretations of the landscape and the events taking place within it, the Tibetan religious world constructed for its inhabitants a common order of time, space, and knowledge.

# The Sites of Knowledge

Despite the modest level of technological advancement and education in its traditional society, Tibet sustained diverse activity in the arts and crafts, as well as in varied branches of learning. Many of these were, of course, tied to the dominant religious traditions, but some also were not. As early as the Tang dynasty, Chinese chroniclers took note of the excellence of Tibetan metallurgy, mentioning in particular the finely wrought mail worn by Tibetan warriors and the remarkable iron chain-link suspension bridges already spanning some of the perilous gorges of far eastern Tibet. Tibetan masonry, carpentry, weaving, paper manufacture, and jewelry figure among several areas of achievement in the practical arts. While the finest work was the domain of small numbers of skilled craftsmen, whose labor was a rare luxury commissioned almost exclusively by the upper echelons of the clergy and aristocracy, attractive textiles, utensils, and ornaments were nevertheless widely produced.

Indian inspiration in the secular sciences contributed to the elaboration of the linguistic disciplines, including grammatical studies and lexicography. Among the literary arts, historical and biographical writing, including autobiography, developed in Tibet to a degree unusual in much of traditional Asia. The production of Tibetan printed books began perhaps during the twelfth century in the Western Xia kingdom and greatly expanded in Tibet itself from the early fifteenth century on. As the corpus of available Tibetan printed texts and manuscripts increases – many tens of thousands of volumes are now known – one cannot fail to be impressed by the extraordinary dedication to the arts of literacy shown by a people whose material circumstances seem in most respects fundamentally opposed to the urban, and urbane, culture in which literary production often has thrived elsewhere. The dramatic arts and music of Tibet were highly developed, in both monastic and secular contexts,



and with them the accompanying crafts of costuming, mask-making, etc. Monastic traditions of sacred music gave rise, as well, to systems of musical notation and detailed choreographical description. We have referred earlier to the complementarity of medicine and the divinatory sciences, areas in which the Tibetans synthesized Indian and Chinese learning. Medical knowledge, both human and veterinary, was particularly well developed and remains one of the dynamic aspects of Tibetan traditional learning at the present time.

Under the influence of Indian sources, Tibetan thinkers adopted various classifications of the major arts and sciences: the five or ten branches of learning, the eighteen dramatic arts, the sixty-four crafts, etc. Of these, the concept of five sites of knowledge (Tib. *rikné*, Skt. *vidyasthana*) – linguistic science, manufacture, medicine, logic, and the “inner science” of religion – formed an important framework for higher learning, for mastery of these areas was explicitly sanctioned in Buddhist scripture as the basis for the “omniscience” whereby a bodhisattva may benefit the world. Those who were competent in these disciplines, together with the astral sciences and the several subdivisions of the language arts (poetics, drama, etc.), were sometimes granted the accolade *künkhyen*, “omniscient,” which was generally reserved for the most accomplished monks. Nevertheless, it was a layman, the Fifth Dalai Lama’s regent Sanggyé Gyatso, who effectively codified the curriculum in the secular departments of learning that were involved.

## The Speech-Goddess’s Mirror

The Tibetan literary tradition, spanning some 1,300 years, is especially rich, and includes works of history, epic, biography, story, drama, and several distinct verse genres. Autobiographical writing, beginning perhaps as early as the eleventh century, may be counted among the exceptional aspects of this enormous heritage. The indigenous Tibetan poetic genres, which are relatively little influenced by the translated literature that inspired much of Tibetan writing, include folk songs, epic and bardic verse, and versified folk oratory. These have generally been transmitted orally, but have contributed to Tibetan literature in many respects.

Some of the best-known poems in the folk song genre are those attributed to the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683–1706), whose famous devotion to love, drink, and song led to political and religious scandal, but won him a lasting place in Tibetan hearts. His poems, composed in the trochaic trimeter (–U/–U/–U/) that is characteristic of the dance-song, remain

part of the repertoire of singers from all parts of Tibet. In this example the stressed syllables are printed in **bold type**:

<i>shar-chok ri-bö tsé-né</i>	above the peak to the east
<i>kar-sel da-wa shar-jung</i>	the limpid-white moon has arisen
<i>ma-kyé a-mé shel-ré</i>	the face of the unborn mother
<i>yi-la kor-kor jé-jung</i>	keeps turning around in my mind <sup>1</sup>

Like many of the songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama, this one has a double sense: the “unborn mother” may be a beautiful, young virgin, who by not having yet given birth is herself not yet “born” into the state of motherhood. But in addition, adopting classical Buddhist diction, she may be Prajñāparamita, Perfection of Wisdom, the intuition of universal emptiness that is deified as the “mother of all buddhas.” Though the songs attributed to the Dalai Lama are remarkable for their religious allusions, Tibetan folk songs frequently had double meanings, often of a sexual nature. Furthermore, folk song could be an important vehicle for political comment and satire. Thus, following the assassination of the Reting regent in 1947, a song circulated in Lhasa that attributed the deed to Ugyen, the son of the nobleman Lungshar who had been persecuted by Reting:

The sinful wage for killing the goat  
was to receive the mayoralship of Lhasa.<sup>2</sup>

In this case, the word “goat” (*ra-pho*) was chosen for its resonance with the name “Reting” (*ra-dreng*).

Traditions of bardic oratory arose early on and were employed in singing the praises of kings and warriors. The *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, as we have earlier seen, contains suggestions of such a bardic tradition. It is not clear whether, during the same early period, one of the heroes thus lauded was Fromo Kesaro, “Caesar of Rome,” in fact the title of a Turkish ruler of what is now Afghanistan, whose reign began in about 738 and who was allied for a time with Tibet.<sup>3</sup> Though later Tibetan history forgot all about this Central Asian king adorned with an ancient Mediterranean title, the name nevertheless seems to have lived on in the person of Ling Gesar. Because the enormous corpus concerning this divine warrior has belonged mostly to oral tradition, it is not possible to reconstruct with much assurance the early history and development of the epic, though brief references in the literature are known from about the fourteenth century. Developed literary versions mostly belong only to the last two or three centuries and tend to be much influenced by Buddhist doctrine. The



**Figure 34** An eastern Tibetan bard chanting an episode from the *Epic of Ling Gesar*. Notice, in particular, his elaborate headgear and the illustration of Gesar hanging behind. Lhasa, 2004. (Photo: Christine Mollier.)

epic of Gesar, in any case, has become one of Tibet's great gifts to world literatures, and, among Mongols, Turks, and others throughout Central Asia, versions of the Gesar tales are known. The divine birth of the

warrior-king, his championship in horse racing, his marriage to the heroine Drugmo, and the martial exploits of Gesar and his generals supply the main subject matter for the best known chapters. Gesar's conquests in all directions amount to a mythic reconstitution of the lost Tibetan empire, but now extended to include even the conquest of the underworld. The bards who sing the epic are often quasi-shamanic figures who sometimes channel characters while in trance, and the greatest of them are said to have hundreds of hours of recitation stored in memory. The *Epic of Ling Gesar* is therefore often said to be the world's longest poem, and though the basic storyline is relatively constant, the different versions of it are altogether distinctive works. When written down, each episode typically amounts to a hefty tome, and a given redaction of the epic may include twenty or more episodes. Although versions of the epic are found in all parts of Tibet, its recitation is now particularly a speciality of bards from the nomadic regions of Kham and Amdo, where tribes claiming lineal descent from one or another of the heroes of Gesar have found in the epic an encyclopedic repository of their beloved traditions, stories, and songs.

In the written versions of the epic, the events that transpire are generally narrated in prose, while the songs in verse are used to develop characters, and to extol the important features of places, events, horses, omens, etc. The songs frequently reflect conventions of folk oratory, and make rich use of rhetorical devices derived from common speech, as well as stylistic elements that are unique to the epic. In one episode, concerning the adventures of the young general Turquoise Light, the warrior Dralha Tsegyel introduces himself to the hero as follows:

So you don't know me, macho me?  
 I'm the unchanging hero, Dralha Tsegyel,  
 From the fortress of Changeless Mercury,  
 From the valley where the four mountains of Ma meet:  
 Mountains whose triangular summits are glacial,  
 Glaciers where snow leopards roam;  
 Mountains whose triangular slopes are covered with forests of sandal,  
 Forests where fierce tigers play;  
 Mountains whose triangular bases lead to stream-watered fields,  
 Fields where six grains grow ripe;  
 Mountains whose triangular valleys hold pure, running rivers,  
 Rivers where fish and otter abound.  
 Among the eighteen lesser noble lines,  
 I am the eighteenth generation of Denma's lords.  
 Though I, Dralha, and you, the boy Turquoise Light,  
 Were not born from the same mother's womb,  
 We are brothers whose minds are as one.

On this day I thus meet a beloved relation:  
 The sun and moon of love and kindness conjoin.  
 But on that day when I encounter my mortal enemy,  
 It's the struggle of tiger and lion!<sup>4</sup>

The genius of the Tibetan epic is manifest above all in such self-portraits as elaborated by the varied characters, in which the eloquence of the bards vivifies the martial culture of Tibet's warrior tribes.

The early Tibetan documents discovered at Dunhuang reveal that literary texts of various types were already being composed during the eighth and ninth centuries. The *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, parts of which are summarized in chapters two and three above, is a case in point; for it is clear that this work was not only concerned to provide a record of events, but that it was also informed by purely aesthetic interests, as demonstrated by its abundant use of verse digressions, parallel phrasing, metaphor, and other figures of speech. Foreign literatures, chiefly Chinese and Indian, were becoming known during the period of its composition, and Tibetan was enriched through both translation and the adaptation of exotic works. Not all of the foreign literary works transmitted in early Tibet were particularly Buddhist, moreover, and the Dunhuang documents contain, among others, Confucian tales from China and a version of the great Indian epic, the *Ramayana*.

An example of the influence of foreign models in the early history of Tibetan literature may be found in relation to the medieval Chinese genre of "transformation texts" (Ch. *bianwen*). These works, no doubt intended for performance and mostly written in verse, relate popular stories, often concerning Buddhist saints, but sometimes they narrate the exploits of martial heroes as well. *The Tale of the Cycle of Birth and Death*, a Tibetan verse narrative found at Dunhuang, perhaps reflects the inspiration of works of this type. Its storyline is an adaptation of one of the most popular of Buddhist sutras, the *Arrayed Bouquet* (*Gandavyuha*), which tells of the wanderings of Sudhana, the son of a rich merchant, throughout India in search of enlightenment, and which became particularly popular in medieval China, where it was subject to numerous retellings. In the Tibetan tale Sudhana is replaced by a young Tibetan god, Jewel-in-Hand, the death of whose divine father, Light Blazing King, impels him to take up his quest. Despite its Chinese and Indian Buddhist sources, *The Tale of the Cycle of Birth and Death* is noteworthy for its employment of some characteristically Tibetan figures of speech. Describing Jewel-in-Hand's divine retinue, for instance, the poet enlivens the scene with an onomatopoeic flourish that we may attempt to imitate in English:

The crowns of the gods rat-tat-tattled,  
 Their bejewelled chimes ru-ru-rung,  
 To varied drum-sounds, du-du-dum!<sup>5</sup>

In devotional poetry written centuries later, one finds a similar use of alliterative echoes in order to enhance otherwise straightforward descriptions.

One of the Chinese transformation texts that became well known in Tibet was the celebrated story of the arhat Maudgalyayana's journey to hell to rescue his fallen mother (*Mulian jiumu* in Chinese). A Dunhuang Tibetan summary of this popular tale, authored by the renowned ninth-century translator Gö Chödrup (Ch. Facheng), provides an excellent example of early Tibetan narrative verse:

Maudgalyayana's mother, named Qingti,  
 Was heedless of karma, and really devoted to sin.  
 Desiring others' possessions, she was stingy and envious. . . .  
 To those who were kind, spiritual friends and preceptors,  
 She did no honor and turned her mind against them.  
 When she died and transmigrated,  
 Driven by the wind of bad karma,  
 She came to experience sorrow in the pit of hell. . . .  
 Maudgalyayana, by the Teacher's power,  
 Marvellously journeyed to that hell.  
 Mother and son met together,  
 Embaced one another and wailed.  
 Seeing his mother's suffering,  
 Maudgalyayana gave her varied food and drink,  
 But by the power of karma it turned into fire and pus.  
 Then Maudgalyayana described his mother's sufferings  
 To the Teacher who said:  
 "If you wish to eliminate your mother's pain . . .  
 Worship the Three Gems and make merit!  
 Thereby, mother's pain will subside,  
 And she'll be born among gods and men."<sup>6</sup>

This story, which enjoyed enormous popularity in medieval China, involving much elaborated retellings of the hero's experiences as he traversed the hells in search of his fallen parent, had a similarly important legacy in Tibet, where it inspired a large number of distinctively Tibetan adaptations. The most famous of these was no doubt the concluding episode of the *Epic of Ling Gesar*, "Gesar's Conquest of Hell." Here the hero, having by now conquered the known world, wages a final battle against the Lord of Death himself in order to rescue his mother from the inferno. A striking twist in the story, however, occurs when at last

Gesar's mother is liberated: it is revealed that she was consigned to the hells not because of any evil she had herself performed, but rather owing to the evil brought about by her son's warlike ways. Significantly, the tale is adjusted to accommodate a Tibetan belief in familial and collective karma, overriding the strictly personal karma of classical Buddhist doctrine.

During the period from the fall of the old Tibetan empire until the flowering of the kingdom of Gugé in western Tibet, the archaic language used by the civil and military administration of the empire became obsolete, while the language of translated Buddhist scriptures and commentaries gradually emerged as the standard for literary Tibetan. This was the case even in writing about secular subjects that had previously been set down in the archaic Tibetan we now know only from the manuscripts discovered at Dunhuang and other artifacts of the early medieval period. Buddhism and Indian learning in general thus became the primary paradigms of Tibetan high culture. From the late tenth century on India was very much in vogue, and tokens of one's connections to the south were greatly prized. One result was the emergence of new literary genres, in which several types of Indian influence may be detected, besides the doctrinal influences of Buddhist teaching alone.

Among the new forms of writing that developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, some of the most important were associated with the growing movements of tantrism and yoga, and in this respect developments in Tibet to some degree echo the innovations in vernacular literature that emerged in connection with new religious movements in India, especially the Apabhramsha verse of the Buddhist *siddhas*. The masters of the Kagyü tradition were particularly renowned for their contributions to the creation of an entirely distinctive family of verse forms, collectively known as *gur*, "chants," and also to the development of biographical and autobiographical literature, in which visionary and dream experiences were of key importance. The most famous author of *gur* is without doubt the inspired sage Milarepa (1040–1123), who is commonly regarded as Tibet's national poet. An example of the verse attributed to him is his description of his meeting with the mountain goddess Auspicious Longevity (*Trashī Tseringma*) and her companions, who confront the sage here in one of the many marvellous scenes contained in his biographies:

I've come here, to the border of Nepal and Tibet,  
A most amazing land, where you want for nothing these days,  
For in this marketplace, where whatever you want is in trade,  
The god Medicine King gives out riches to men!

As for the Glacial Queen, heroic and splendid,  
 Whose crown is fortunate firmness of life,  
 Her sweet name is Auspicious Longevity.  
 On the left ridge of the mountain, swathed in mists,  
 Is a pasture whose rich flocks are encircled by glaciers:  
 Would that not be Chuwar, the Medicine Vale?  
 In that abode is one who meditates one-pointedly:  
 Would that not be I, Mila the yogin?  
 In the past you conspired against me,  
 With insults, making much jest;  
 You worldly gods and ogresses  
 Are so arrogant and untamed!  
 You lurk about the warmth of us yogins:  
 Isn't that why you've come here today?  
 The other night, during the last month,  
 Five girls, beauties captivating the mind,  
 Generated the unsurpassed and supreme aspiration,  
 Promised all desirable accomplishments,  
 And then, becoming invisible, flew into the sky and vanished!  
 That was wonderful, and now you five,  
 In the limpid glow of the moon this very night,  
 Appear as fair-faced, emanational girls,  
 Dancers done up like coquettes,  
 Wearing loosely flowing silk robes,  
 Beautified by necklaces and jewelry.  
 You, their leader, through your resplendence have summoned  
 The arrogant gods and ogresses of the eight classes,  
 Along with their troops and platoons of soldiers,  
 And the host of camp-followers of their own kind.  
 They have filled the sky with clouds of offerings,  
 With foodstuff replete with a hundred tastes,  
 Offered various musical diversions,  
 And then requested my teachings of definitive meaning:  
 Would that not be you, O deities and demons of apparent existence?  
 If I recite now the speech you request, attend with open ears:  
 Disclosed in truthful words, you'll hear it all!<sup>7</sup>

Gnostic verses (*lekshé*, after Skt. *subhashita*) modeled on aphorisms from Indian books of morals and politics, found their greatest exponent in Sakya Pandita, whose *Treasury of Aphoristic Gems* is cited proverbially. Ethical and spiritual instructions (*zheldam*) generally resembled the aphoristic literature, but also made noteworthy use of colloquialisms and elements of folk song, as does the *Century for the People of Dingri*, attributed to the Indian yogin Padampa Sanggyé (twelfth century):



Whatever you crave, let it go from your mind,  
You need nothing at all, people of Dingri.

This world never sits still,  
Make your travel plans now, people of Dingri.

In forest glades, the monkey is carefree,  
But the forest's in flames, people of Dingri.<sup>8</sup>

If the early yogin-poets generally sought to give voice to their personal experience of vision and ascetic practice, and to instruct their disciples accordingly, other tendencies favored more formal approaches to literary expression. As in India, verse was often the vehicle for works on philosophy and dogmatics (*tawa/drupta*). While highly technical works were versified for mnemonic reasons, poetic elaboration of Buddhist doctrine employed scriptural concepts and figures of speech, as in this brief allegory, from the work of the celebrated Amdo master Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé (1762–1823):

The farmer, ignorance, the root of mundane existence,  
Planted deed-seeds in the field of consciousness,  
Fertilized them with the water and shit of craving and grasping,  
So that those seeds, growing strong, ripened into the stuff of existence.  
Born from that, of the nature of name-and-form,  
The shoot unfolds and coils itself into the stalk of the sensory fields.  
From flowers of contact, fruits of feeling will ripen:  
They'll be reaped by aging and death, and then sown back into existence.  
Until it's destroyed by the fire of selflessness,  
The wheel of birth and death must continue to turn.  
So with whatever dispositions reach into the depths of what's abidingly  
real,  
Let's rip out the roots of this whole worldly deal!<sup>9</sup>

With the renewal of Sanskrit literary studies after the tenth century, and in particular owing to the influence of Sakya Pandita's promotion of educational values directly derived from classical Indian literary scholarship, a notably artificial literature, modeled directly on Sanskrit court poetry, supplanted most other genres of Tibetan composition in learned circles. Formal poetry in Tibetan, called *nyenngak* (literally "sweet-sounding speech" and equivalent to Sanskrit *kavya*), would be henceforth conceived in terms of the artful employment of rhetorical and phonetic ornamentation as defined and authorized in the Indian works on poetic theory known in Tibet, above all the *Mirror of Poetics* by the

sixth-century author Dandin. As in Sanskrit, Tibetan poetry of this type may be embodied in either verse or prose, and rhyme is seldom employed. Some of the conventions of Tibetan *kavya* may be briefly illustrated by a verse drawn from a version of the Indian *Ramayana* story composed by Tsongkhapa's disciple Chöwang Drakpa (1404–69). He describes here the hero Rama's first meeting with his bride-to-be, Sita:

Well-conveyed by his well-brightened chariot,  
 Ramana, blazing lustrous light,  
 And she who'd been delivered by her river friend  
 Met together in the time of their flowering.  
 Their eyes fell as do those of the offering-eater  
 On meeting the owl's guttural cry.<sup>10</sup>

The tendency here is to prefer allusive and indirect expression to direct reference: Sita is "she who'd been delivered by her river friend," owing to the legend (found in the Old Tibetan *Ramayana*) of her having been set adrift, Moses-like, as an infant; the phrase "offering-eater" refers to the crow, a bird which Indian lore, as known in Tibet, considers to be unnerved by the presence of the owl. Even in this short example, it is clear that the understanding of Tibetan *kavya* required a special education in its Indian sources of inspiration.

Most of the authors of Tibetan *kavya*, and of commentaries and textbooks on matters relating to poetics, were of course monk-scholars, though some lay aristocrats contributed here as well; the ruler Polhané's protégé Dokhar Tsering Wanggyel (Chapter 5) is an especially prominent example. Monastic education, despite the promotion of Sanskrit literary knowledge by Sakya Pandita and other renowned masters, was primarily a matter of Buddhist liturgy and scriptural learning. Though there were always some monks who sought to master the literary arts, and despite the assumption that a real scholar ought to be familiar with such material, the mainstream of the monastic colleges tended to look askance at such frivolity. Where literary learning was most encouraged was among the lay aristocracy and the factions of the clergy who harbored reservations about the value of the scholastic debate programs. Though it would be wrong to exaggerate this, one may detect some parallel here with the late medieval and early Renaissance division in Europe between schoolmen and humanists. In Lhasa it was almost a given that whereas the educated monks would master the arguments of the Indian philosophers Dharmakirti and Chandrakirti, the sons of the nobility would study Dandin and the various Tibetan imitations of Sanskrit poetic glossaries. Indeed, the actual production of *kavya* among educated laypersons was

certainly much greater than what we find reflected in the published literature. The laity made use of their poetic skills in drafting government and personal documents, in journals, in love poems, and in correspondence, writings never intended for publication. The literary world briefly described here changed little with the passage of centuries, until the events of 1959 brought the cultural life of traditional Tibet to an end.

## To Form Body, Speech, and Mind

The so-called “sciences of manufacture” (*zorik*, after Skt. *shilpavidya*) in principle comprise divisions corresponding to the categories of body, speech, and mind, understood in this context as they pertain to the representation of the Buddha’s enlightened Body, Speech, and Mind, which are always considered to be the highest objects of art. As speech, in this case, is in fact studied in relation to the sciences of language, it is mentioned here just to complete the overall scheme. Nevertheless, its presentation among the various arts of manufacture was taken to emphasize also the physical production of Buddhist scriptures by means of such crafts as calligraphy, illumination, the engraving of printing blocks, etc.

In its most general sense, manufacture relating to the body is thought to embrace all good and useful fabrications: buildings, textiles, tools, ornaments, and so forth. But as a special department of study its primary concern is with the fine arts, above all religious painting and sculpture. Moreover, because the Indian works on these arts available in Tibet focused primarily upon iconometry, the study of the geometrical proportions governing the creation of sacred images, this was always the major intellectual concern in this sphere. In practice, however, because apprenticeship in the actual production of paintings and statues requires much more than iconometrical knowledge, those training in the arts were expected to achieve mastery of drawing, modeling, coloration, and style, together with the manufacture and use of the whole range of materials necessary for producing both two- and three-dimensional works. (A similar division between the transmission of formal textual learning and a hands-on approach to practice characterized medical knowledge as well.)

Tibetan fine art was closely tied to ritual. Temporary or permanent artworks of various kinds were forever required for ceremonies of initiation, funerals, meditation retreats, festivals of all kinds, and much more. These included elaborate sculptures of butter and dough, intricate mandalas that were painted or designed in colored sand, scroll-paintings (*tangka*),



**Figure 35** A Tibetan artisan at work, Bodhnath, Nepal, 1989.

statues, stupas, etc. Besides having to meet strict specifications of iconography and proportion, the actual manner of their fabrication was often ritually regulated and concluded with a final ceremony of consecration, whereby they became charged as spiritually potent objects. Similarly, constructions of all kinds, including religious buildings and secular houses, were hedged by ritual restrictions, which, among other things, determined the selection of the site, negotiated its “purchase” from the local divinities, ensured that its design and the timing of the work were propitious, and so on. In short, there was no clear boundary between artistic activity and ritual; they overlapped as bands of a single spectrum.

For these reasons, at the apex of artistry stood not the craftsman but instead the adept, and above all the artist-adept in whose visions were found the highest expressions of creative perfection. This is reflected in a story of the eleventh-century Nyingmapa master Zurpoché, who invited some artists to assist him in constructing a temple:

The sculptors asked Zurpoché how large the image should be and he replied, “Make it as high as the roof.” They made an appropriate image of the fruitional Heruka, who has three faces, awesome, wrathful, and laughing, and six arms, but the guru said, “It does not resemble my vision. Make it again.”

He had them repeat the work many times and eventually said, "Can you make an image of me?"

"Yes, we can do that."

The next day . . . the sculptors went to meet the master. [He] propitiated Yangdak Heruka and performed the feast offerings. "Now look!" he said, and as he adopted the gaze [of the deity] he actually became Heruka, a fearsome and wrathful apparition, with one face, two arms, gnashing teeth, and twisted tongue, his head resplendent among the clouds and mist . . . The sculptors could not endure his radiance and lapsed into unconsciousness. When they awoke, the guru eased his intention and, with a brilliant smile, said, "Now, do you understand?"<sup>11</sup>

Passages such as these, whatever their correspondence to actual events, help us to understand that the notion of art in Tibet essentially concerned the tangible formation, and not the mere representation, of the body of the Buddha. For what is at stake is not primarily the creation of an image, but the larger role of artistic creation in the project of the religious agent's self-actualization. One may recall, in this respect, the Greek philosopher Plotinus's conception of spiritual growth as a sculpture carved within. For Tibetan Buddhism, similarly, the highest art was not image-making, but the realization of divine awakening. Conversely, because the images expressed in painting and sculpture have their origin not in a mundane artist's fancy, but in the insights of the Buddhas and historical masters such as Zurpoché, the images themselves are revered as the living presence of enlightenment in our world; in this sense, the image of the Buddha is the Buddha in fact. Accordingly, in paintings depicting, for instance, the transport of the Lhasa Jowo, the first Buddha-statue brought to Tibet by the Chinese princess of Wencheng, what one usually sees is not a painting of a statue, but a painting of a Buddha. At the summit of art, the image and its object are one.

Tibetan art has aroused considerable interest in recent years owing to its seemingly limitless iconography, in which the inspiration of Tantric Buddhism has given rise to a dazzling array of divine forms, whether peaceful or wrathful, absorbed in sagely detachment or erotic rapture. A developed tradition of portraiture made further contributions to the development of the iconography, and paralleled in some respects the elaboration of biography among literary forms.

Stylistic diversity is another hallmark of the Tibetan artistic tradition and has become a focal point of art-historical study. As early as the eighth century, according to the accounts of the construction of Samyé Monastery, three different styles were combined in the decorative program of the main temple. These were referred to as the Chinese, Indian, and Khotanese



**Figure 36** The statues and murals of Zhalu Monastery figure prominently among the surviving treasures of early Tibetan art, 2002.

styles, and there is indeed good reason to believe that these were the major sources of Buddhist artistic practice emulated by Tibetans at that time. With the renewal of Buddhist activity during the late tenth century, Kashmiri artists began to receive commissions in Tibet and the artwork of Pala-dynasty Bengal soon became a source of inspiration as well.

The Newar artists of the Kathmandu Valley, long reputed for the high level of their craft, also worked in Tibet, deeply influencing the techniques and stylistic features employed by their Tibetan counterparts. One such Newari artisan, whose name is usually given as Arniko on the basis of its Chinese transcription (Anige), moved on from Tibet to Beijing during the thirteenth century to become a leading artist at Kubilai Khan's court. Tibetan artists, with such precedents upon which to draw, were nevertheless able to reach beyond mere imitation and to develop over time a stylistic vocabulary of their own. Under the government of the Ganden Palace two styles of painting came to dominate official commissions, both ultimately derived from the works of prominent fifteenth-century masters. These were *Menri*, traced back to Menlha Döndrup and characterized in part by its attention to iconometric precision and its incorporation of some elements of Ming-period Chinese painting, and the *Khyenri* style, stemming from Khyentsé Chenpo, which was noted for its dramatic depictions of fire and cloud, effects that favored it for the representation of wrathful divinities. Important innovations in later painting came from the tenth Karmapa Chöying Dorjé, who, when exiled to far eastern Tibet and Yunnan, thoroughly familiarized himself with Chinese brush techniques and so furthered the development of the synthetic style known as *Karma gardri*, the "painting style of the Karmapa's camp."

Historical and biographical literature does sometimes provide circumstantial accounts of the production of specific works of art, with comments on materials, style, expenses, and other points of detail. David Jackson has demonstrated that extant works can sometimes be firmly identified on this basis – for Tibetan art is generally unsigned, though dedicatory inscriptions may mention historical circumstances – and that the literary descriptions of painting styles can thereby be corollated with certain surviving works. He quotes Situ Panchen (1700–74), for instance, on the development of his own painting style, as follows:

I have followed the Chinese masters in color and in mood expressed and form, and I have depicted the lands, dress, palaces and so forth as actually seen in India. Even though there is present here all the discriminating skill of [the major Tibetan artistic traditions], I have made [these paintings] different in a hundred thousand [particulars of] style.<sup>12</sup>

Brief notices such as these must be supplemented, of course, by the careful study of available paintings, particularly when these are inscribed. Progress along these lines has gradually permitted historians to identify

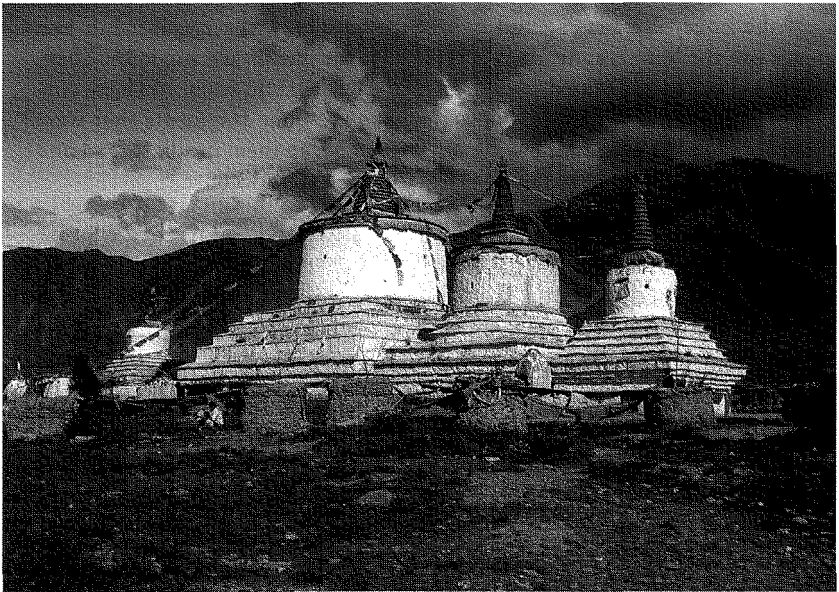
the provenance of particular paintings and sculptures and to delineate the evolution of Tibetan artistic style with increasing precision.

If the “manufacture of body” corresponds largely to fine art, and the “manufacture of speech” primarily to literature, what was the role of the third category, the “manufacture of mind”? In general, two approaches developed in response to this question. For some, the “manufacture of mind” refers primarily to the creation of objects, such as stupas (*chöten*) and vajras (*dorjé*), that are regarded as symbolic forms in which Buddha’s enlightenment is encoded. Others, however, emphasized the practice of meditation itself, whereby the insightful adept might aspire to transform his or her own mind in the attainment of spiritual awakening.

In a sense, the great interest in and devotion to the stupa as a symbolic form embraced both of these definitions, for the edification of a stupa was itself an occasion to disclose the contours of “Buddha-mind” as the organizing matrix both of the iconography and of the actual productive activities of ritual and art. The interweaving of these themes is suggested in the record of the construction of the great stupa of Jonang, built by Dölpopa Sherap Gyeltsen (1292–1361) as a memorial to his master:

In Dölpopa’s thirty-sixth year (1327), his teacher, the lord of the doctrine Yönten Gyatso, passed away. To repay his kindness, he realized that he had to construct a stupa of great merit, and so, on the third day of the third month of the iron horse year (1330), he laid its foundations. The great stupa was outwardly a stupa but inside it was a temple that was most extensive. Each of the four sides of the square base was 215 cubits in length. From the base to the pinnacle of the golden spire the height measured 215 cubits as well. In the 108 interior shrines he installed many images of the deities of sutra and mantra, mandalas, and books. He invited many local masons, carpenters, image-makers along with iron-, copper- and goldsmiths, and, moreover, among the calligraphers he invited were the Newari pandita Manjushri, who was skilled in Indian scripts, along with the Newar Bunu, a skilled goldsmith, and the Newar Rambhati, a skilled jeweler. As this illustrates, he invited all the best craftsmen from all over. Along with his students, patrons, and the faithful, many thousands labored continuously, day and night. Even the guru, Dölpopa himself, was involved in carrying stones, raising walls, and so forth. The building work went on for four years, during which time those involved were indifferent to summer and winter, and in the sixth month of the water female bird year (1334) the great stupa was completed. The consecration was performed on the tenth lunar day. At that time he said, “Though we have constructed such a great stupa as this, we have done so without imposing corvée labor on a single man, and without gathering even a quart-measure in tax; so the virtue is unmingled with evil.”<sup>13</sup>





**Figure 37** A group of stupas (*chöten*) in central Tibet, reliquaries representing the structure of the Buddha's enlightenment, 2004. (Photo: Christine Mollier.)

Tibetan art, therefore, must be seen as inscribed in a ritual and ethical order, in which all may contribute, according to their capabilities, whether as religious specialists, skilled craftsmen, or common laborers. In this way, within the framework of Tibetan religious culture, art and architecture enabled Buddhism's highest goal, that is, the realization of the Buddha's enlightenment, to be seen as much as a social enterprise as an individual end.

## Medicine, Astronomy, and the Divinatory Sciences

The emergence of the Tibetan medical system (*sowa rikpa*) can be traced back to the age of the empire and in legend long before that. With the formation of relations with the surrounding lands, indigenous Tibetan lore began to be integrated with medical knowledge stemming from India, China, and other parts of Central Asia. Manuscripts found at Dunhuang demonstrate that medical practice was already highly developed by the ninth century. A treatment for severe skull fracture, for instance, runs as follows:

If the bone of a man's skull is broken, peel back the cranial skin and remove the bone fragments, but do not let the membrane superate. Then, kill a dog. Having wiped the wound with the dogskin, when you have covered the wound with warm dogskin, take the bone fragments that were removed to the side and, having oiled them, wrap them in silk thread and reinsert them into the wound. Such is the medical procedure.<sup>14</sup>

The same document includes remedies for trouble swallowing, tooth rot, heart ailments, cough, urinary obstructions, and much more. Other Tibetan medical documents from Dunhuang discuss a wide range of procedures, including moxibustion and veterinary medicine, in particular for the treatment of horses.

Though the earliest records have little to say about the history of Tibetan medicine, this topic is much elaborated in later works. The reliability of these sources is open to question, but in some cases they provide information so peculiar that we must suspect there to have been some real basis for their affirmations in fact, even if we can no longer trace this with precision. Thus we read of a doctor named Galenus, who came to Tibet from the Iranian world during the eighth century. This can only refer to the Greek physician Galen (Claudius Galenus, 131–201 CE), whose system was prominent throughout medieval Europe and the Islamic world. Just how knowledge of this figure arrived in Tibet we do not know, but we must assume, given such references, that early Tibetan medicine drew at least indirectly upon sources transmitted from the West, as well as the Indian and Chinese traditions that were closer to home. And, as the entire later development of the tradition makes clear, indigenous lore provided an ever-flowing fount to which Tibetan doctors always returned.

Two doctors of the same Yutok family, both named Yönten Gönpö, achieved particular fame and are regarded as prominent among the fathers of Tibetan medicine. The elder, who is said to have lived during the eighth century, may be legendary, but the younger, his thirteenth-generation descendant, may be assigned to the twelfth century. To the former is attributed the composition of the great encyclopedic treatise on Tibetan medicine, the *Four Tantras*, which was said to have been lost and then recovered in the eleventh century by a “treasure-revealer” (*tertön*) named Drapa Ngönshé. The junior Yutok Yönten Gönpö dedicated himself to its transmission, and was the author of a number of important medical treatises himself. Down to the present day the *Four Tantras* have remained the textual backbone of the Tibetan medical system, accumulating an imposing commentarial literature. Though other key works were known, including important treatises of Indian *Ayurveda* trans-

lated by Rinchen Zangpo and others, they were treated as more or less ancillary to the foundations provided by the *Four Tantras*.

To account for disease the medical system relies primarily on the theory of the three humors: vital energy (lit. "wind"), bile, and phlegm. When these are found in their proper equilibrium, one enjoys good health, but their imbalance causes disease. Medical treatment, therefore, seeks to detect minor disorders of the humors before disease has developed, or, after one as fallen ill, to identify the underlying imbalance and to restore the humors to their correct function. The goal here is not just the alleviation of symptoms, but the achievement of health through the proper regulation of the organic system as a whole.

The major diagnostic techniques employed depend upon the doctor's use of his senses and not on instrumentation. The appearance and body odor of the patient are among the factors generally taken into account, but the most important methods are the examinations of pulse and of urine. Unlike Western physicians, who measure the arterial pulse, Tibetan doctors train themselves to recognize subtle pulses in different parts of the hand and fingers that are regarded as diagnostic of specific organ functions. The inspection of urine takes account of color, odor, and sometimes taste. Those most skilled in this are said to be able to perform reliable diagnoses on this basis alone, without needing to see the patient at all.

Once the doctor has recognized the nature of the patient's condition, whether or not the latter is overtly ill, various sorts of treatment are available. These include advice for diet and lifestyle, and, most frequently, the prescription of medicines drawn from a large pharmacopeia and usually fabricated by the treating physician himself. The ingredients used in the preparation of medications sometimes include mineral and animal substances of various kinds, but the traditional pharmacology is overwhelmingly based upon herbals. Indeed, many of the plants of Tibet and the Himalayan lands have acquired a far-reaching reputation for their efficacy, and so have long been sought as *materia medica* in India and China as well. This has resulted, at the present time, in widespread efforts to standardize Tibetan herbal science and to use it as the basis for the production of new patent medicines. Some object, however, that the fabrication of standardized drugs to be used to treat particular ailments is fundamentally at odds with the "holistic" ethos that has generally governed the practice of Tibetan medicine.

Traditionally Tibetan doctors also cultivated elementary surgical skills, including the treatment of cataract. In the second chapter we have seen the story of the early king Takbu Nyazi, whose blindness in

infancy was cured by surgeons of the Sumpa tribe. The hagiography of the twelfth-century Bönpo physician Khutsa Dawö records an interesting surgery as well:

Khutsa traveled to Nyangtö. On the journey he, being an expert in medicine, was attacked by an ambush of five men organized by Drangti of Mu, another medical expert who was jealous of him. Khutsa, lashing his horse with his whip, escaped, but one of his medical pupils was struck by an arrow and his bowels burst. Khutsa having washed the bowels with milk pushed them back in and sewed up the cut with a white horse's tendon. The pupil recovered.<sup>15</sup>

There is also evidence of doctors enhancing their anatomical knowledge through the direct study of corpses, so that on this basis there was some potential for the refinement of surgical methods. The absence of precise instruments, as well as disinfectant and anesthetic procedures, however, inhibited the development of this branch of medicine.

Inspired by Indian sources, knowledge of human embryology was relatively advanced among premodern medical systems. The notion that the embryo goes through clear stages in which it sequentially resembles a fish, tortoise, and pig recalls Ernst Haeckel's celebrated (but erroneous) formulation "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," though in the absence of a theory of species evolution the analogy remains incomplete. In connection with pregnancy, childbirth, etc., gynecology and pediatrics were recognized as distinct departments of medicine, but were practiced by generalist doctors rather than true specialists.

No clear consensus has yet emerged among those studying traditional Tibetan medicine as to its actual powers and limitations. While some extol its potential as a new vehicle of treatment in the modern world, others express skepticism. Nevertheless, most have been favorably impressed by the quality of the human interaction between Tibetan doctors and their patients, so that some see here a valuable corrective to the coldly impersonal character of much of contemporary medicine. As Fernand Meyer, a doctor and anthropologist who has studied Tibetan medicine closely, writes,

In its total and proper cultural context [Tibetan medicine] arrives at a harmonious, global conception of the universe and of life, in which illness occupies a natural place. The preservation or reestablishment of well-being . . . necessarily operates through organic laws that, with others, govern the body and account for its interdependence with the universe. Medicine here is a way of life. It is certainly not scientific, but like most traditional medical systems, its dimensions are ethical, aesthetic and cultural. It seems



**Figure 38** The divine personification of one of the constellations, *Chu* (Skt. *Magha*), seated astride a bull and holding a blazing jewel, Nechung Monastery, 2004.

to us that the harmony of this system is what is responsible for the satisfactions it brings to both doctors and their patients.<sup>16</sup>

To this we may add that, in Tibetan medicine, as in other medical systems, some patients do in fact get well, an occurrence that, besides offering satisfaction, does much to reinforce belief in the efficacy of the system overall.

The Tibetan astral and divinatory sciences are remarkably diverse, but are dominated by the two categories of “astral calculation” (*kartsī*) that follows mostly Indian sources, and “elemental calculation” (*jungtsī*), also called “Chinese calculation,” which is derived ultimately from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*) and related materials, and which accords a central role to the Chinese theories of the five elements (earth, water, wood, metal, and fire), the eight trigrams (*parkha* < Ch. *bagua*), etc. Because the Indian systems studied in Tibet were influenced in their turn by Greek sources, some aspects of Tibetan astrology seem familiar to Westerners, notably the important role of the Zodiac. Nevertheless, the syncretism of Indian and Chinese traditions, particularly in connection with the calendar and almanac, imparted to Tibetan astral science a character all its own. This syncretic spirit is very much in evidence in the view that the master Confucius (Kongtsé in Tibetan), who is regarded as one of the originators of the Chinese divination systems, was in fact an emanation of the bodhisattva of wisdom Mañjuśrī.

The counting of the years according to the duodecennial cycle marked by twelve animal signs – rabbit, dragon, serpent, horse, sheep, monkey, bird, dog, pig, rat, ox, and tiger – was adopted from China early on, and, combined with the five elements, yields a sixty-year calendrical cycle. The names of the days of the week, by contrast, were inspired by Indo-European usage and so are derived from the principal heavenly bodies, just as are our English designations, and follow the same order: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. With the translation into Tibetan of the great commentary on the *Tantra of the Wheel of Time* entitled *Taintless Light*, the system of calculation taught therein became the basis for calendrical determinations. As that work also employed a sixty-year cycle, based on the period of Jupiter’s orbit, the year of the text’s translation, the fire rabbit year equivalent to 1027 CE, was taken to mark the beginning of a new era, called *rabjung*. We are now in the seventeenth such *rabjung* cycle.

Because the calendrical system sought to be at once lunar and solar, complicated adjustments were required to maintain relatively close correlations between the two systems – a lunar month is not quite thirty

days and the solar year is not quite twelve lunar months. As the fifteenth and the thirtieth of each month are always the full moon and new moon, respectively, days must be regularly subtracted from or added to the calendar in order to recalibrate this correspondence. Similarly, every third year a "leap month" must be added in order to catch up with the progression of the solar year.

The system of astral calculation was not concerned only to rectify the calendar. Solar and lunar eclipse and the orbits of planets and prominent comets also figured among the objects of interest. Nevertheless, despite the extraordinary clarity of Tibet's skies, there is little evidence that the Tibetan astral sciences made use of observational data. Like medieval astronomy in Europe, the tradition was to most intents and purposes in the thrall of the ancient texts upon which its methods of calculation were based. Hence, because the mathematical values employed were inherited from tenth-century India, without any effort over the centuries to refine these in relation to observed phenomena, many of the calculations governing Tibetan astral science no longer corresponded to the actual positions and relative movements of the heavenly bodies involved. In this regard Tibetan medicine appears to offer an interesting point of contrast. Though it was, like the astral sciences, deeply indebted to texts and practices transmitted from India and China, Tibetan pharmacists and physicians appear at times to have also given considerable weight to their own direct knowledge of local botanics and of human anatomy. Further research will be needed to know how far they pushed the empirical dimension of their art in former times.

Besides chronometrical matters, the main purpose of Tibetan astral calculation was astrology. The annual astrological almanac, somewhat resembling the *Old Farmer's Almanac* in the United States, recorded the phases of the moon, lucky and unlucky days, propitious times for planting and harvesting, and much more. The almanac was the indispensable diviner's tool, and few matters of any importance could be undertaken without first consulting it. Special events of many kinds, however, required more detailed astrological prognostication than the almanac alone could provide and for this purpose specialized horoscopes were drawn up. It was generally customary for families to commission a birth horoscope, too, for newborn children.

An important dimension of Tibetan astrology inherited largely from the system of the *Wheel of Time* was an elaborate theory of the correspondences between microcosm (the human organism) and macrocosm (the planetary and stellar system). This theory, which is based on the conception of the subtle body as taught in tantric esotericism, was summarized

by the great *Rimé* master Jamgön Kongtrül. Although he does not enter into full detail in this short statement, what is implied is a vast cosmic mechanism, in which the heavenly bodies and their movements are strictly correlated to the internal channels and energies that must be mastered by the tantric adept:

The central breath is the gnostic wind that depends upon the central channel. Together with the genesis of the secondary energy channels, depending too upon the gnostic wind, the efficient winds, whose nature is that of the five elements [space, air, fire, water, and earth] also arise, or are set in motion. Depending upon the energy channel to the left, the object is generated, whose nature is spirit, moving the five pacific planetary bodies [Moon, Mercury, Venus, Comet Encke, and the descending lunar node] according to the sequence of space, air, fire, water and earth. And depending upon the energy channel to the right, the subject, self-awareness, is generated, whose nature is energy, moving the five fierce planetary bodies [Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the ascending lunar node]. . . . At the conclusion of the four æons, those planetary bodies return to emptiness. The periods of years, etc., that are involved may be related to the inner body in terms of [the circulation of the vital winds] in a youthful individual who is free from disease.<sup>17</sup>

The complementary relationship between medicine and the astral sciences that is entailed by this view of the correspondences between cosmic movements and vital energies received its fullest expression in traditional Tibetan knowledge systems in the form of the Mentsi Khang – the Institute of Medicine and Astral Calculation – founded under the patronage of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama on Lhasa's Chakpori Hill, opposite the Potala, in 1909 by Khyenrab Norbu (1883–1963), who was revered for his learning in both spheres. A source of pride for Tibetans everywhere, the Mentsi Khang is one of the few institutions that has endured the changes of the last half-century, remaining active today in distinct incarnations both in Tibet itself and in exile.



# Tibet in the Modern World

Traditional Tibet remained more or less intact until the foundation of the People's Republic of China (October 1, 1949). The new Chinese nation quickly proceeded to assert its control of Tibetan regions that had formerly been under the rule of the Qing, thereby ushering in a period of change more radical than anything Tibet had previously known. As the last testament of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (p. 174 above) made clear, however, the storm clouds were already gathering on the horizon long before the People's Liberation Army moved in. In the pages that follow, we provide an overview of the events accompanying the decline of the old order after the death of the Thirteenth, and of Tibet's strife-filled integration into modern China.

The interpretation of this history is still very sharply contested, even where there is consensus regarding what actually took place. According to a perspective that has been widely promoted in the United States and Western Europe, the brutal machinery of Chinese communism invaded an independent, peace-loving land, and has since been determined to eradicate any trace of Tibetan cultural and religious traditions in China, while over 100,000 exiles led by H. H. the Dalai Lama, together with their foreign supporters, struggle to preserve an enlightened, spiritual civilization against all odds. The Chinese government, of course, see things quite differently. In their view Tibet has for centuries been part of China and the Tibetans now enjoy unprecedented liberty and prosperity, especially when compared to their lot under the "old society" ruled by the Dalai Lama. The real aims of the latter, according to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), have little in fact to do with religion, but are seditiously motivated with the intent to split China apart.

In the short space available it will not be possible to detail the many points of contention separating official Chinese views of Tibet from the

dissenting voices of the Tibetan exile community. Readers are referred to the Bibliography for works recommended for their discussions of the disputed matters introduced in general terms herein, as well as of the modern history of Tibet overall. For those beginning to examine this area, Melvyn C. Goldstein's *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, in particular, supplies a clear and judicious overview of recent affairs.

## The End of Traditional Tibet

With the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in December 1933, Tibet found itself facing a vacuum. The last years of the Dalai Lama's rule had been markedly autarchic, so much so that within the government no strong successor to the leadership had been groomed. The most powerful individual during these years was the late Thirteenth's favorite, Künpé-la, and many expected that he would naturally assume the post of regent. The Thirteenth had also to some degree promoted his nephew, the lay aristocrat Langdün, who was, however, a weak figure poorly suited for high authority.

Künpé-la was a man of peasant origins who had been drafted into government service in childhood to be trained as a scribe. While still a teenager, he caught the attention of the Dalai Lama, who then supervised his education and directed him to become a monk. Though he proved himself to be an individual of considerable talent, he did not have any official post within the monastic branch of government and so rose solely through the favor of his all-powerful patron. One of the most important projects that he undertook on behalf of the latter was to create a new, elite military division, called the Drongdrak Regiment, whose troops were drafted exclusively from the relatively well-off taxpaying families (*drongdrak*). Under Künpé-la's supervision, the regiment was polished to become a well-equipped, well-trained unit, whose qualities were admired even by British observers. In the period following the conservative reaction of 1925, during which the progressive, anglophilic military command led by Tsarong had been sidelined by the monastic conservatives, this was the most significant effort made to modernize the Tibetan army. Following the Dalai Lama's passing it was widely believed that Künpé-la could therefore have used the Drongdrak Regiment simply to seize the regency, for there was no force in the vicinity of the capital that would have been able to resist. Nevertheless, for reasons about which one can only speculate, Künpé-la chose not to act, but to bide his time while the government considered the late leader's succession. This proved to be his undoing.

It is likely that Künpé-la seriously underestimated the degree of resentment that his rise to power outside of official channels had aroused in both lay and monastic administrative circles. Besides this, the soldiers in his crack regiment were deeply unhappy, for, as the sons of prosperous families, by custom they should have been allowed to hire lower-class peasants to serve in their stead, but, exceptionally, this had been forbidden to them. With these factors in the background, rumors began to circulate that Künpé-la, who had been in attendance at the time of the Dalai Lama's decease, had either been negligent in his care of his master or had even had a hand in his death. It was not long, then, before he was charged and arrested, while his troops mutinied, walking away from the regiment. Künpé-la's inaction thus cost him everything. He was eventually exiled to Kongpo, whence he escaped to India in 1937.

Künpé-la was not without determined supporters, however, including the powerful Pomdatsang trading family. Originally from Kham, and always maintaining a strong base there, the family had established itself in Lhasa and Kalimpong, West Bengal, as the sole agents for the lucrative export of Tibetan wool to India and beyond. Pomda Tobgyé, the head of the family in Kham, mistrusted the Lhasa government and was a close friend of Künpé-la. With the denunciation of the latter, Tobgyé decided that the time had come for forceful action on his part, apparently in the belief that the large numbers of Khampa monks residing in the major monasteries near Lhasa would rally in his favor. In early 1934, therefore, he launched a Khampa nationalist revolt. His forces were, however, routed by the Tibetan army in Kham and he fled for refuge in China. The family's residence in Lhasa was placed under siege, but the government in the end agreed to a negotiated settlement, rather than suppressing the entire Pomdatsang clan. As the holders of the wool monopoly, Pomdatsang controlled substantial Tibetan government funds that otherwise risked being lost, and the authorities were by this time preoccupied with the Lungshar affair, as will be described below.

While these events were unfolding, however, the government did succeed in selecting a regent to rule during the interregnum, until the succeeding Dalai Lama could be located and educated through to early adulthood before becoming head of state, a prolonged process that was expected to take as much as twenty years. After considerable debate concerning the form of leadership to be adopted, it was agreed that power would be shared by a lama serving as regent, as had been the case generally since the death of the Seventh Dalai Lama in 1757, and a lay chief minister. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama's nephew Langdün, who owed his prominence to his late uncle alone, was selected to serve in the latter role.

The choice of a suitable regent, however, was problematic, for the widely admired ex-abbot of Ganden was now nearing eighty, and so refused to be considered, while among the high trülkus whose predecessors had occupied the regency at one time or another only the inexperienced, 24 year old Reting Rinpoché was currently considered eligible. The Purbuchok Rinpoché, a Gelukpa lama famed for his learning, was also favored by some. With the National Assembly deadlocked on the issue, a divination lottery was held. The outcome was the award of the post to Reting, who was installed in late February 1934.

Another focal point in the contest for power that was unfolding at this time was the aristocrat Lungshar. He had chaperoned the boys sent to England to study in 1912 and used the opportunity to learn some English, study European history, and tour a bit on the Continent. He came away from this experience with the strong conviction that Tibet would be lost if it did not reform and modernize itself in short order, but he recognized that this had to proceed through cautious steps, not sudden, radical change. England's adoption of constitutional monarchy, rather than France's revolutionary upheaval, provided the model he favored for Tibet. Lungshar's base of power was in the National Assembly, which was, of course, a consultative body, whose decisions guided but did not bind the *kashak*. Nevertheless, it was his intention to push for a reform of the Assembly's status, making it responsible for the selection of the members of the *kashak*. Under his proposal, the latter would now serve for terms of four years, and no longer receive lifetime appointments. To achieve these modest but far-reaching changes in the division of powers, he created a network among like-minded lay and monastic officials, who set to work organizing a petition in which the proposed reform measures were to be presented.

During this period, the final political testament of the late Dalai Lama was regarded as a prophetic watchword in official circles. Given this, together with the general conservatism of the ruling elites, there were those who began to suspect that Lungshar and his party were communist revolutionaries, much like those who had recently dismantled and persecuted the Buddhist institutions of Mongolia, whose appearance in Tibet had been foretold in the Dalai Lama's text. At the same time an accusation was made that Lungshar was plotting to assassinate Trimön, the senior member of the *kashak*, and to seize power for himself. Lungshar was therefore arrested at the Potala in May 1934 and was found indeed to be practicing sorcery against Trimön, in Tibetan opinion a crime every bit as heinous as mundane murder. Other members of the lay faction of his party were also soon placed under arrest.

The tribunal assembled to try Lungshar's case proceeded with extraordinary alacrity in a land where routine civil suits often dragged on for months; in less than two weeks they found Lungshar guilty and sentenced him to be blinded. The judgment was submitted to the new regent, Reting, who had the authority to moderate the verdict but chose not to interfere. In the event, because the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had mostly abolished punishment by mutilation, there was no longer anyone with direct experience of the method by which the sentence was to be executed, with the result that Lungshar's eyes were gouged out in a terribly botched and cruel operation. To increase his torment, his torturers falsely claimed to him that the same punishment was being inflicted upon his sons. He was released from prison in 1938 and passed away during the following year.

Tibet could ill-afford the internal dissension and weak leadership with which it was plagued at this time. The vulnerability that this entailed became evident as early as the summer and autumn of 1934, when General Huang Musong was dispatched to Lhasa by the Guomindang government of Chiang Kai-shek. His mission was ostensibly one of condolence, to pay China's respects to the late Dalai Lama, but, at the same time, he was instructed to open negotiations regarding Tibet's status vis-à-vis China.

Though Tibet had been effectively independent since the fall of the Manchu dynasty, Chinese leadership never accepted this state of affairs. (The need to restore Tibet to the motherland was in fact one of the few things that the Communists and the Guomindang seemed to agree about.) For this reason, soon after their rise to power in 1928, the Guomindang had established a Tibetan and Mongolian Affairs Commission at their capital in Nanjing, staffed primarily by representatives of eastern Tibetan regions under Chinese control, but also of the Panchen Lama. In 1930–2 Sino-Tibetan relations were further strained by a war for the control of Kham, during which the Tibetans succeeded at first in winning almost the whole of Xikang province before being driven back by the warlord Liu Wenhui, whose advance threatened to proceed even into central Tibet. The diplomatic intervention of Great Britain, as requested by Tibet, encouraged China to call off the attack near the present Tibet–Sichuan border. Tibet's lack of military preparedness in the face of a concerted Chinese effort was now quite plain, though this message made little immediate impact upon the thinking of the government in Lhasa.

It was with this in the background that the condolence mission of General Huang arrived in Lhasa and soon found that their proposals for Tibet's reintegration with China were sharply resisted by the Tibetan leadership, who insisted upon regarding the Simla Accord of 1913 (which

had never been ratified by China) as the basis for the relationship. At the same time, however, the Tibetans were reticent to break off discussions with the Guomindang delegation. They recognized that China would sooner or later have to be reckoned with, so that it was therefore desirable to maintain an atmosphere in which their differences promised to be resolved through negotiation. Though no final agreement was reached, Huang nevertheless did not depart empty-handed; he was permitted to leave behind his wireless radio operator and a small staff to open a Lhasa office. This, in fact, proved to be a larger propaganda victory than the Tibetans had anticipated, for the government in Nanjing was now able to claim that it had succeeded in reestablishing Chinese representation in the Tibetan capital. China, however, was restrained in its efforts in Tibet by the developing war with Japan, together with civil conflict among the Chinese themselves. Under these circumstances, resources could not be diverted to anything more than a mild diplomatic campaign in Tibet, leading the Tibetans to believe that for the moment they held the advantage.

For the government of the regent, in any event, the first order of business was to locate and install a new Dalai Lama. Accordingly, in the summer of 1935 Reting set out on a pilgrimage to Lhamo Latso, the sacred lake associated with the *la*, or vital force, of the Dalai Lamas. There, in a series of visions, he divined that the trülku was to be found in the northeastern region of Amdo, born near a three-tiered, Chinese-style temple. With these and other indications to guide them, search parties were dispatched to several parts of Tibet. When the group that had been sent to Amdo arrived at the main temple of Kumbum Monastery in May 1937 they believed that it corresponded to Reting's vision and so concentrated their investigation in that area, while maintaining secrecy about their actual purpose. In the village of Taktsé, following additional indications that had been supplied to them by the Panchen Lama, they identified a 2-year-old boy, Lhamo Döndrup, who remarkably was able to recognize possessions of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, even when these were placed before him alongside similar objects of finer quality. Following the report of their findings to Lhasa, they were certain that they had found the right child.

Amdo, however, was not part of political Tibet, but under the authority of the Chinese Muslim warlord of Qinghai, Ma Bufang. Although the Tibetans sought to maintain that the boy was still only a candidate, who was being invited to Tibet only for further examination, Ma demanded massive payments for permission for him to leave Qinghai. The monks of Kumbum, moreover, suspecting that the Dalai Lama would be taken

from them without their receiving his blessing, further obstructed the return to Lhasa. In the end the Guomindang government helped to persuade Ma to release the child, but at the same time exacted conditions so as to secure a role for China in the new Dalai Lama's recognition and installation: the director of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission was to participate in the ceremonies in Lhasa. The Dalai Lama finally was able to set out in July 1939 and was enthroned in the Potala as the Fourteenth of the line, under the name Tenzin Gyatso, in February of the next year.

The Ninth Panchen Lama had meanwhile passed away in Jyekundo, Qinghai, in December 1937, having never succeeded in negotiating his return to Tibet. During his last years, spent in Amdo and Kham, he allied himself with Tibetan progressives and advocated modernization along much the same lines as had the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, though encouraging a Chinese role rather than a British one. As he announced,

If I, the Panchen, return to Tibet, first and foremost I plan to build a much needed road between Amdo, Kham and Central Tibet . . . After this, I shall establish telegraph and postal communications between the important district headquarters (*dzong*). Then I shall establish primary schools in which Tibetan written language will be taught together with Chinese language and science. Finally, according to schedule, youth will be selected and sent to China for complete education. This is my plan.<sup>1</sup>

Following his death several candidates for recognition as his *trülku* were discovered. Among them the officials of his administration selected and installed Chöki Gyeltsen (1938–89) as the Tenth Panchen Lama, but refused to submit their decision to Lhasa for ratification. This would prove to be a bone of contention a decade later.

With these circumstances in play, Reting and his faction made few efforts to prepare the country for the future. The regent had forced the resignation of the senior minister Trimön, one of the few who might have stood up to him, in 1935. With little resistance, Reting and his supporters now set about enriching themselves to the detriment of the nation as a whole. Reting's private offices soon became one of the three largest trading companies in Tibet, earning a reputation in the course of their ascent for extortionate business practices. The surpluses that had been gathered under the rule of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama now vanished; the deterioration of the army was allowed to continue. Moreover, Reting showed himself to be personally vindictive, and was ruthless in his treatment of those he regarded as enemies. The noble Khyungram, in particular, who was outspoken in his opposition to the excessively large payments that

Reting's party believed the regent should receive as a reward for having found the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, was exiled to far western Tibet, his estates resumed, and his wives sent back to their natal homes – his family, in short, was systematically destroyed. Nevertheless, despite the hatred and fear that Reting aroused in some circles, his reputation as a great lama, together with the strong support he enjoyed from segments of the clergy – notably the Jé College of Sera Monastery, where he himself had studied, and its affiliates – ensured that for the moment he was secure.

A crisis for Reting's leadership began to unfold, however, in 1941, when the young Dalai Lama was preparing to receive ordination as a novice monk. It was customary for either the monk-regent or the Panchen Lama to bestow upon the Dalai Lama his vows. As the recognition of the Panchen was contested, and the candidates in any case were still infants, it was impossible for the Panchen to serve in this role. But, at the same time, it was widely known that the present monk-regent, Reting, was an active bisexual who thus did not observe the vow of celibacy. He was therefore disqualified from serving as the Dalai Lama's preceptor. Under these circumstances, the only appropriate solution was for Reting to resign the regency in favor of a senior monk who was known for his strict adherence to the monastic code. In this way the Dalai Lama would be ordained, as custom required, by the monk-regent. It was arranged therefore that Reting would cede the regency to his own teacher, the respected, otherworldly Takdra Rinpoché (1874–1952). He did so, however, with the proviso (at least according to his own understanding) that some time after the ordination Takdra would himself resign, allowing Reting to resume his post.

Takdra Rinpoché granted the Dalai Lama his vows in 1942. At the same time he proved himself to be a moral conservative who, in his present position of authority, was determined to put an end to the corruption and venality that had come to characterize administration under his erstwhile disciple, Reting. The latter had retired to his monastery, several days march to the north of Lhasa, where, eager to regain the regency, he and his closest supporters began to chafe under the new regime of Takdra, whom Reting himself had installed.

The tensions that were thus brewing first came to a head in late 1944, following an incident at Lhündrup Dzong, also not far from Lhasa to the north. The Jé College held an endowment to sponsor religious services, the principal of which was loaned to the peasants of Lhündrup, who were required to pay an annual interest to the college. Following poor harvests, however, the government had granted temporary debt relief to the peasants of the region. Though the monastery insisted on being paid



despite this, the peasants were supported in their refusal by the commissioner of Lhündrup Dzong, who as a result suffered a severe beating at the hands of the monks who had been sent as collectors. After he died of the injuries they had inflicted, the government ordered that the monks be placed under arrest. The monastery, arguing that the monks had been acting in the service of their college and were therefore not personally responsible, refused to surrender them. As the abbot of Jé College was among the monks implicated, this soon escalated into a heated standoff between Takdra's administration and a well-armed monastic community – Sera Jé had recently purchased some 2,000 new rifles – loyal to Reting. While Reting wished to retaliate against Takdra, he was dissuaded from this by his own officials. In the end the government succeeded in replacing the abbot of Sera Jé, who fled to China to escape prosecution, in arresting the other monks involved at Lhündrup Dzong, and in confiscating the monastery's weapons, though it established a prayer endowment to compensate the college for the latter.

The regent Takdra now had good reason to believe that Reting and his faction posed a genuine threat. Accordingly he began to purge from government service those remaining high officials who owed their appointments to Reting. He frequently resorted to trivial charges in order to achieve this, however, and his administration in turn accepted huge bribes from those who sought to replace the ousted officials. The reputation for integrity with which Takdra assumed the regency was gradually forgotten, as is reflected in a Lhasa street song of the time:

Takdra came to the throne and  
upheld the virtuous laws,  
[But] like the vows of a nun,  
little by little they were lost.<sup>2</sup>

Having failed to secure Takdra's resignation, Reting and his supporters now decided to launch a *coup d'état*, plotting to assassinate Takdra at a public festival in February 1947. The latter, however, seems to have been forewarned, for he did not arrive for what would otherwise have been an obligatory appearance. The conspirators then resorted to dispatching a parcel bomb, which remained undelivered until it harmlessly exploded, a relative of the individual to whom it was consigned having become curious about its contents. Shortly thereafter the plot itself was blown open when the Tibetan representative in Nanjing secretly sent word that Reting had been covertly seeking Chiang Kai-shek's aid in his bid to return to power. (Apparently it was Künpé-la, angered because he

had been cheated by Reting's trading company in India, who conveyed this information to the Nanjing bureau.) The *kashak* responded to this intelligence by issuing on April 14 an order for Reting's arrest, which was approved by the regent Takdra. Reting's residence was sealed and his closest advisers taken into custody. One of the latter, Nyungné Lama, who had been instrumental in the assassination attempts, committed suicide rather than surrender to the officers sent to apprehend him.

Reting was, of course, still a high incarnate lama with many adherents. Owing to his position, and especially to his role in the discovery and early upbringing of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, even those charged with arresting him therefore felt awkward about doing so. After they had nevertheless carried out their command, the Jé College of Sera Monastery rose up in support of Reting, attempting to free him from his captors as he was being returned to Lhasa. An all-out war with the college followed, during which some 200–300 monks lost their lives before Tibetan government forces succeeded in restoring order. They were fortunate that the rifles confiscated some years earlier had never been replaced. The ex-regent was interrogated and, though he denied active involvement in the assassination plots, his confiscated correspondence proved conclusively that he had supported his advisers in the general effort to retaliate against Takdra. His ultimate role in authorizing their actions was therefore quite clear. On May 8, 1947 Reting died under mysterious circumstances while a prisoner in the Potala. It was generally believed at the time that Lungshar's son Urgyen had taken the opportunity to avenge his father's mutilation and disgrace. However, it now seems more likely that he was poisoned by a servant of Takdra. A rebellion at Reting's monastery, which had begun while he was in custody in Lhasa, was harshly suppressed during the days following his death. The monastery itself was looted, then razed, and whatever of value was left was seized to be sold in Lhasa. Hundreds of persons from the district in which the Reting Monastery was located fled to India as refugees.

The Dalai Lama, of course, found these events to be deeply disturbing; though aware to some extent of Reting's personal failings, he had nevertheless always respected him as his teacher, who had recognized him and guided him throughout his youth. For the former regent to have stood at the center of violent rebellion, culminating in his death while imprisoned in the Potala, the Dalai Lama's own residence, appeared as a dark revelation to the young hierarch of the hidden recesses of the system he was being raised to rule.

Reting's downfall brought to light the extreme fragility of the Tibetan state: its political leadership was corrupt and riven by faction, its military

suited only for small-scale operations directed against fellow Tibetans, its great monasteries home to militant bands dedicated to refusing reform. Not surprisingly, some began to embrace the conclusion that the system of governance was due for profound revision, reaching far beyond the moderate proposals for which Lungshar had been condemned not long before. In fact, two reformist political movements emerged during the 1940s, the Tibetan Communist Party and the Tibet Improvement Party, though both remained quite marginal. The former was founded by Khampa students in Sichuan in 1939, with Bapa Püntso Wanggyel (or Pünwang, 1922– ) among its first leaders, and regarded itself as a nationalist party that aimed to achieve an independent, revolutionary Tibet, allied with, but not subject to, the Soviet and Chinese Communist parties. The second, based in Kalimpong, India, included an eclectic mix of exiles, notably Künpé-la and the aristocrat Changlochen, together with progressive Khampa businessmen and intellectuals. One of its better-known members was the Amdo artist, historian, and translator Gendün Chömpel (1903 or 1905–51), an eccentric figure who has come to be exalted as a culture hero in recent years. The leadership of the Tibet Improvement Party, including Künpé-la, was in the pay of the Guomindang and urged Tibet to become part of the Chinese republic. (It was for this reason that Künpé-la was exiled from India by the British at the request of the Tibetan government, and so was in Nanjing as the troubles with Reting were brewing.) To the extent that either of these parties became active in central Tibet, however, they were thoroughly suppressed: Gendün Chömpel was imprisoned in Lhasa in 1946 and Pünwang expelled from Tibet three years later.

With the victory in China of Mao Zedong and the establishment of the People's Republic, Tibet was thus entirely unprepared to face the new challenge that loomed before it. The old guard was frozen in time, while progressive forces were too few and too feeble to catalyze the thoroughgoing changes that were needed. Moreover, the recent independence of India (1947) meant that Great Britain no longer held any direct interest in Tibet, and the Nehru government, which had inherited Britain's role there, was more concerned to advance the friendship of Asia's two giants than to see Tibet become a point of antagonism between them. As the few Tibetans who possessed radios soon came to know, it was Mao's intention to "liberate" them from the grips of imperialism, which they found puzzling as no imperialists were known to be active in Tibet at the time. Nevertheless, some steps were taken: following the fall of the Guomindang, the Chinese mission in Lhasa was closed and all Chinese expelled; and efforts were made to expand and upgrade the army swiftly.

It was, however, too little, too late. All the while, moreover, dissatisfaction with Takdra's regency was growing.

By early 1950 the Communists had consolidated their hold on most of the eastern Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham, and were engaged in planning their advance into political Tibet. Mao wished to avoid a prolonged conflict and urged instead Tibet's "peaceful liberation," its willing entry into union with China. To achieve this, it was decided that the Southwest Military Administrative Bureau, whose leadership included future leader Deng Xiaoping, would send one of its armies to enter Tibet from Xikang to rapidly neutralize the Tibetan army in the eastern region of Chamdo. At the same time the Northwest Military Administrative Bureau dispatched forces from Qinghai to block the route of escape to central Tibet. The attack was launched on October 7 and took the Tibetan army by surprise. Ngapö Ngawang Jikmé, the governor of Chamdo, received the news four days later and attempted to alert the *kashak* in Lhasa, but the latter were at a picnic when the telegram arrived and had given orders that they were not to be disturbed. With few alternatives, Ngapö chose to flee from Chamdo, igniting a panic among the local population. On learning that the road to Lhasa had been cut off, however, he sent word of his surrender to the Southwest Bureau on October 19. The Tibetan army had by now been immobilized, with fewer than 200 killed in skirmishes with the PLA.

The Chinese, however, did not push on with an actual invasion of Tibet. Their intention was just to make it clear to the Tibetans that they could not expect to resist. China's leaders hoped that with this in mind the Tibetans would now willingly agree that "peaceful liberation" offered the best course. A statement of policy issued by the Southwest Bureau in November, and probably authored by Deng Xiaoping, sought to reassure the Tibetans that their traditions would be respected:

The existing political system and military system in Tibet will not be changed. The existing armed forces of Tibet will become part of the national defence force of the PRC. All members of the religious bodies of all classes, government officials, and headmen will perform their duties as usual. All matters concerning reform of any kind in Tibet will be settled completely in accordance with the wishes of the Tibetan people and through consultation between the Tibetan people and the leadership personnel in Tibet . . .

The PLA . . . will faithfully carry out the above-mentioned policies of the Central People's Government. It will respect the religion and customs and habits of the Tibetan people, be gentle in speech, buy and sell fairly, not take a single needle or piece of thread from the people without permission . . .<sup>3</sup>

Despite such assurances, however, panic soon spread to Lhasa, and the nobles began to move their wealth to safety elsewhere. The pronouncements of the Nechung and Gadong oracles now urged the transfer of power to the Dalai Lama. Under these circumstances, Takdra resigned his regency and the 15-year-old Tenzin Gyatso became head of state on November 17, 1950. The following month it was decided that he would be too vulnerable should he remain in Lhasa and so, together with the *kashak*, he moved to Yadong near the Indian border, a vantage point from which the leadership contemplated the prospects of exile. The lay official Lukhang and the monk Lozang Trashi were left behind in Lhasa to serve as acting prime ministers.

Through the minister Shakabpa, who was then in India and who had traveled in Europe and America, the Tibetans now sought to have their case brought before the United Nations. Though the representative of El Salvador wished to raise the matter before the General Assembly, the major powers were disinclined. Hostilities had begun on the Korean peninsula that same autumn, so that the Americans felt they had bigger fish to fry. And India, which had the greatest interest in Tibet, was pre-occupied with its dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, so that a second headache in the Himalayas was the last thing it wished to contemplate. As it became increasingly apparent, then, that there would be no mobilization of world support for a free Tibet, the Tibetan leadership recognized that it had little choice but to enter into negotiations with China.

Although Ngapö favored inviting the Chinese commander in Chamdo, Wang Qimei, to Lhasa in order to conduct the negotiations there, he was overruled in this by the *kashak*, which sent him together with four other representatives to Beijing, where they arrived in April 1951. The terms they were instructed to insist on, including the demand that no Chinese troops be stationed in Tibet, appeared so unrealistic that Ngapö felt it would only anger the Chinese to raise them at all. After protracted discussions the Tibetan negotiating party on May 23 affirmed conditions proposed mostly by China, but which nevertheless seemed to offer the best terms likely to be forthcoming. Among the key provisions of the 17-Point Agreement were the following:

Point 1. The Tibetan people shall unite and drive out imperialist aggressive forces from Tibet: the Tibetan people shall return to the big family of the Motherland – the People's Republic of China.

Point 4. The central authorities will not alter the existing political system in Tibet. The central authorities also will not alter the established status,

functions, and powers of the Dalai Lama. Officials of various ranks shall hold office as usual.

Point 7. The policy of freedom of religious belief laid down in the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference shall be carried out. The religious beliefs, customs, and habits of the Tibetan people shall be respected, and lama monasteries shall be protected. The central authorities will not effect a change in the income of the monasteries.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, although Tibet was no longer an independent nation, it was given a guarantee that its traditional system, and most importantly its religious system, would be left intact. The position of the Panchen Lama, who had not so far been formally recognized by Lhasa, was also a matter that China insisted on resolving at this time. Although Ngapö and the other negotiators felt that this was a high ecclesiastical matter that could not be concluded as part of a political settlement, a telegram from the Dalai Lama conveniently authorized the recognition of the candidate the Chinese had promoted.

With the 17-Point Agreement providing some guarantee that China would not seek to force sudden, revolutionary change upon the Tibetan religio-political system, the Dalai Lama's advisers urged him to return to Lhasa and not to accept a US offer to arrange for asylum elsewhere. At the same time, General Zhang Jingwa of the Southwest Bureau was dispatched to meet the Dalai Lama in Yadong, and then to continue to Lhasa to begin the work of forming the Chinese communist administration of Tibet. The Tibetan National Assembly, after hearing Ngapö's passionate argument that he would accept the death penalty if it was judged that he had acted wrongly in his conduct of the negotiations, recommended that the Dalai Lama formally accept the 17-Point Agreement. This was done in a telegram to Mao, whose wording had been vetted by Zhang, on October 24, 1951. Tibet was now, after forty years of *de facto* independence, once again part of China.

## Rebellion and Exile

Not all Tibetan leaders were satisfied with the terms of the 17-Point agreement or with the imminent presence of the large numbers of Chinese troops and officers who would take up their posts in and around the capital. One of the two acting prime ministers, Lukhang, went so far as to abandon the genteel norms of aristocratic behavior by expressing his anger openly to the Zhang Jingwa. The shock was only slightly softened

by the translator's reticence to interpret all that he said. His breach of manners and ongoing shows of antipathy to the Chinese met with the approval of segments of the general population, however – Lukhang is in fact still considered a hero by nationalist Tibetans today – and this, together with shortages and rapid inflation in the marketplace, due to the demands of the artificially swollen population, provoked increasingly vocal manifestations of protest, until China felt compelled to insist that he and Lozang Trashī be removed from their posts in 1952.

At the same time, however, other prominent Tibetans favored accommodation with the CCP. This was particularly true during the early 1950s in parts of Amdo and Kham, regions that had long been under Chinese rule, as well as among segments of the clergy, who responded favorably to the generous donations that were distributed in the monasteries by Chinese representatives on ceremonial occasions, taking this to be a sign that the CCP was returning to the “patron–priest” relationship that Chinese emperors had maintained with Tibet in the past. The teenage Panchen lama was no doubt the most prominent of the Tibetan sinophiles, but there were many others as well. An example was the celebrated monk-scholar Dobi Sherab Gyatso (1884–1968), who after allying himself with the Nationalists during the 1930s later turned to the Communists. In 1952 he became the first chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association. Throughout the 1950s Geshé Sherab sought to encourage the Tibetan clergy to see that the best hope for the future of their religion lay with Mao Zedong and the CCP. His motivations may well have been in part opportunistic, but they were also pragmatic and protective of the Buddhist religious tradition in which he had been educated and which he always saw as his first loyalty. In a letter addressed to the administration of Serko Monastery in Qinghai, for instance, responding to reports that some of the monks were misappropriating the monastery's wealth for private gain, he wrote,

Now, at this time when throughout the world there shines the sunlight of Chairman Mao's good system, in which there is freedom of religious faith and protection for the teaching [of Buddhism], there have been some bad monks who – taking account of neither the Triple Gem, nor karma and its results, nor the laws of the state – have disloyally looted the monastery and have in other ways opened the door to evil rebirth. On hearing such things, [I must respond that] from this very day forward this cannot be allowed, and what was done already must be brought to a stop. You must beware, for this [behavior] is evidently reactionary rebellion against both the ways of the Communist Party's United Front and the great policy of protection for the teaching. You should each think about both your present and

future lives! One may well be a monk, but it is not permitted for you to engage in trade or destruction [of property], regardless of the size of the monastic residence unit [to which you belong], nor are others allowed to sell or to destroy [on your behalf]. Bear all this in mind! It is no good if you deliberately neglect either the Buddha's teaching or the customs of the Communist Party.<sup>5</sup>

Geshé Sherab's attempt to find a common ground between the policies of the CCP and the interests of Tibetan Buddhism came to represent in some measure the norm among educated Tibetan clergy during the 1950s. Both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama embraced the hopeful idea that Mao Zedong's revolution had room for their religion, and indeed that the ethical concern of Mahayana Buddhism for universal well-being – which though widely preached in theory remained unactualized in traditional society – would be realized by the dawning socialist order. This was clearly expressed by the Dalai Lama during his 1954–5 visit to Beijing, a journey in which he was accompanied by other major Tibetan leaders whose cooperation Chairman Mao and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai sought to win through their policy of tentative accommodation with Tibet's traditional system. He was even moved to eulogize Mao in these terms:

Our enemy – cruel imperialism – is like a wriggling poisonous snake, an envoy from the devil.

You are a fearless roc that overcomes it.

May your might continue to increase for ever!

Culture and industry, which bring happiness and prosperity to the people and destroy the enemy's armed forces, are like a wide sea swelling at every moment.

They will be as perfect as the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>6</sup>

His hopes, of course, proved to be naive. It seems likely that Geshé Sherab, at least, despite his pro-Communist stance, recognized this early on; besides his high praise for Mao in the letter quoted above, one detects a distinct element of fear for what will befall the religious establishment should they fail to toe the line.

Much as the Tibetans were divided between those who favored accommodation with China and those who opted for resistance, the CCP was itself home to opposing factions with respect to its Tibet policy. In the view of Mao and Zhou Enlai, as well as the leadership of the Southwest Bureau, Tibet was by no means ready for rapid socialist transformation.



To achieve that, it would be necessary first to win over the elite, beginning with the Dalai Lama. Their policy of accommodation, which for the time being left traditional Tibetan institutions in place, was intended to provide a space in which the slow task of converting Tibetan opinion could be effected. By contrast, however, the Northwest Bureau held that the swift advancement of the Communist program among the masses offered the best hope for weaning the Tibetans from the twin evils of superstition and feudalism. They wished to promote the Panchen Lama as a counter to the Dalai Lama, regarding the former, who had been raised in a Sino-Tibetan milieu, as a more reliable ally. Hence, instead of a simple opposition of Tibetans versus Chinese, the developing scene was informed by a range of contested positions on both sides.

During the mid- and late 1950s the promise of a harmonious relationship between Chinese communism and the Tibetans, however, progressively came undone. The difference of circumstances prevailing between the realm under the Dalai Lama and the eastern Tibetan districts incorporated into Chinese provincial units was of crucial importance here. In the former, Mao's insistence on gradually winning over the Tibetan elite convinced many Tibetans that China would desist from forcibly overturning their traditional ways. In the east, on the other hand, provincial authorities were already aggressively pursuing policies of communalization. The integration of Kham, in particular, with China was advanced by the disestablishment of Xikang province in 1955, merging the districts of which it was composed directly with Sichuan. The rigorous application of revolutionary measures by the Sichuan authorities in Kham soon provoked a chain of violent reactions. As the monasteries were considered to be among the centers of resistance to the implementation of Communist programs, and also to be giving shelter to the rebels, they became increasingly prone to direct attack, and in 1956 a number eastern Tibetan monasteries were actually subjected to aerial bombardment. These circumstances were deeply shocking to Tibetan sensibilities and led to the flight of large numbers of easterners, both monks and laypersons, to central Tibet. One result of these developments was the formation of the "Four Rivers, Six Ranges" (*chuzhi gangdruk*) guerrilla movement among militant Khampas gathered in Lhokha in 1957, which was given coherence early the next year at a clandestine meeting in Lhasa under the leadership of Andruk Gönpö Trashi.

As rebellion was spreading in eastern Tibet in 1956 and popular protest increasing in Lhasa, too, the Dalai Lama traveled to India to take part in the Buddha Jayanti, honoring the 2,500th birth anniversary of Shakyamuni. China, in order to convince both the Dalai Lama and the

world of its sincerity, had permitted his departure for this event, though it recognized that this carried the risk of his seeking asylum, particularly given the presence in India of members of his family and other refugees, including the former prime minister Lukhang, who were vociferously anti-Chinese. His elder brother Tubten Norbu, moreover, was strongly allied to the Americans. During diplomatic visits to India during this time, Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai emphasized to his Indian counterpart, Jawaharlal Nehru, that the Dalai Lama was free to choose his own destiny, while at the same time seeking to reassure the Tibetan leader that he had nothing to fear should he return. With Nehru's encouragement, and no clear guarantee that American support would rise to the level necessary, the Dalai Lama agreed finally to return to Tibet, arriving there in March 1957.

It was during this same period that American involvement in Tibet began in earnest. The US State Department had long been clear that it followed Britain's lead in regarding Tibet to be under the "suzerainty" of China. Though this policy was never changed, the communist victory in China at the outset of the Cold War encouraged some in Washington to imagine a Tibetan role in the enemy's "containment." Hence, when the Dalai Lama was in Yadong in early 1951, communications were attempted to determine whether the US might aid him, his family, and his closest advisers in establishing themselves in a suitable place of exile. As the Khampa rebellion developed, the CIA became involved in the recruitment and training of Tibetan operatives and attempted to arrange for their infiltration of Tibet. The goal was to assist and coordinate local Tibetan resistance to China. These clandestine efforts, however, ended in dismal failure. As one of the operations officers who was involved has written,

Of the forty-nine men dropped into Tibet since 1957, only twelve survived. Ten had escaped after arduous and dangerous treks to India. One had surrendered and one had been captured, and both of them served long prison terms. The other thirty-seven had been killed in greatly unequal battles against Chinese air power and overpowering numbers on the ground, coupled with an unforgiving climate and the absence of a safe haven in which to establish a secure base.<sup>7</sup>

American covert support for Tibetan guerilla operations continued until the late 1960s, and was definitively terminated when Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger embarked upon the normalization of relations with China in 1971. The US at no point actually intended to help the Tibetans to secure their freedom. In this the Tibetans were sorely

misled. US interest, as understood in some circles within the intelligence community, for a time dictated solely that the rebels be used to harass China, nothing more. While believing that they were fighting for their national autonomy, they were in fact pawns in a much larger game, of the rules of which they remained largely ignorant.

As these developments unfolded, the leftist wing of the CCP found ever more reason to urge its case for radical reform in Tibet, against what was seen as Mao's failed policy of gradualism. Even loyal Tibetan communists were now suspected of harboring "reactionary" Tibetan nationalist sympathies. Pünwang, one of the founders of Tibetan communism, was arrested in 1958 and would spend the next twenty-two years in solitary confinement. Nevertheless, the gradualist approach was not yet abandoned outright, and Mao himself continued to send assurances to the Dalai Lama that Communist reform could continue to be forestalled. Still, it was not long before the steadily worsening relations between the Tibetan Buddhist establishment and the Chinese Communists spun altogether out of control.

It has been estimated that, by the start of the Tibetan New Year in early 1959, some 50,000 refugees from Kham and Amdo were camping in and around the capital. For many of these people the gradualist policy pursued by the CCP in central Tibet was merely a sham, and their harsh experiences in the east demonstrated to them the true nature of Chinese Communism in its policies toward Tibetan society and toward religion in particular. Their reports of the fighting in the east contributed directly to the volatility that was then building in Lhasa. Among the ominous tidings they conveyed, were tales of the disappearance of several leading Khampa lamas at the hands of the Chinese.

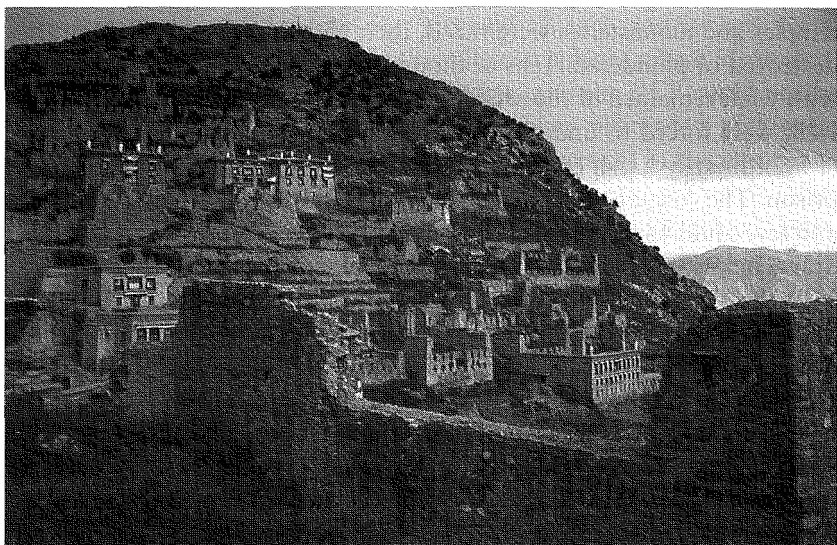
The New Year's festivities were particularly momentous because, as part of the ceremonies, the now 25-year-old Dalai Lama stood for his final examinations for the degree of *geshé*. At the same time the declarations of the oracles as well as astrological indications suggested that it was a time of danger for him. When the Chinese made their own gesture of celebration by inviting him to a musical performance to be held at their military headquarters on March 10, and the news of this became widely known just the day before, rumors therefore began to fly all about that the same fate awaited him as had befallen the missing lamas of Kham. No factual evidence has ever emerged, however, that the Chinese were intending to kidnap or otherwise harm the Dalai Lama. Be this as it may, a spontaneous demonstration of thousands erupted in front of the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace, on March 10, during which one leading Tibetan official was stoned and another, a prominent

monk from Chamdo who was a member of several Chinese work committees, was beaten to death. The protests increasingly took on the aspect of a genuine uprising against Chinese rule. Neither the Chinese nor the Tibetan authorities were prepared for such a manifestation at all. The Dalai Lama, with the agreement of the Chinese, canceled his attendance at the show, but the genie, once let out of the bottle, was not about to return to its confinement so soon.

For one week the demonstrations continued, during which time the Tibetan leadership, to no avail, urged calm and the Chinese forces remained on hold. Disturbances began to erupt in other parts of the country. When the PLA at last made its move on the morning of March 17, shelling some areas in the vicinity of Lhasa, an oracular consultation confirmed that it was no longer safe for the Dalai Lama to remain there. That evening, in the guise of a layman, he took flight. His party entered territory controlled by the Khampa guerillas, who escorted him south to India, where he arrived on March 30. The Tibetan diaspora had begun.

Ordinary monks and religious hierarchs formed a prominent constituency among the Tibetan exiles who followed the Dalai Lama, together with members of the aristocracy and many of the eastern Tibetans who had moved into central Tibet during the late 1950s. Religious persons who remained behind in Tibet were mostly forced to leave their monasteries, some only to return to their homes, while many others were classed as rebels and reactionaries and imprisoned as a result. By 1962 both the Panchen Lama and Geshé Sherab, certainly the two most renowned Tibetan clerics remaining in China, were openly expressing their disillusionment, and both would be shortly dismissed from their posts. The Panchen made his views clearly known to the Party leadership in the form of a lengthy report whose findings, while couched in the diction of a loyal member of the CCP, sharply criticized the application of policy in most respects. Concerning the suppression of the 1959 rebellion, for instance, he wrote,

The Party's correct principle of neither letting one criminal go nor treating a single person unjustly was not completely implemented. This led to no clear distinction being made between those people who joined the rebellion because of their reactionary ideology, those who joined because they were deceived, and those who were forced to join under duress. There were some people who were labelled as rebels because, during the rebellion, they lived in an area where the rebellion was taking place, went to such an area or, passing through such an area, they stayed there for a short time. . . . People who gave materials to the rebels due to fear, those who had been robbed by these bandits, and those who could do nothing else but support



**Figure 39** The wreckage at Ganden Monastery, with some buildings showing signs of restoration following the Cultural Revolution, 1985.

the rebels because they had been ordered to do so by the original Tibetan local government, or by rebel feudal lords . . . were also indiscriminately labelled as supporters of the rebellion. Even more serious is that cadres and activists randomly and with absolutely no cause fabricated crimes of some people, and those people were accused of being rebels and anti-revolutionaries. If even I and other well-known, patriotic and progressive people, could unexpectedly and groundlessly be labelled as reactionaries, how much less need we speak of anyone else.<sup>8</sup>

The Panchen's report, however, only served to convince Mao and others that he could no longer be trusted. An effort was made to destroy all copies and its author was imprisoned, to emerge from confinement only in 1978, after fourteen years had elapsed. The efforts of the CCP to find an accommodation with Tibetan Buddhists, and the efforts of some Tibet Buddhist leaders to find a patron in the CCP, were now decisively finished. It remained only for the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) to undertake the wholesale destruction of whatever remained of Tibetan traditional culture.

Having dominated Tibetan politics, economic life, and society for centuries, the monasteries now had to cede the last vestiges of their power and privilege to the secular force of the CCP. The assault on religion intensified throughout the 1960s, and all but a few of the thousands of Tibetan

temples and monasteries were razed, their artistic treasures and libraries destroyed or plundered. Tens of thousands of monks and nuns, together with what remained of the aristocracy and the middle-class peasantry as well, were forced to undergo “reeducation.” Many thus perished under extraordinarily harsh conditions, or suffered prolonged maltreatment in prison. The religious institutions of Tibet’s old society were annihilated, and few could have imagined that they would ever return. Tibet had been dragged, kicking and screaming, into one version of modernity.

In the Tibetan exile community, mostly living in India, a government-in-exile, headed by the Dalai Lama, was established and planted its base of operations in Dharamsala, a pleasant, out-of-the-way hill station in Himachal Pradesh. With the assistance of the government of India, refugee camps were created in several Indian states, the largest of them in Karnataka, where a number of the major monasteries were able to reestablish themselves and to place renewed emphasis upon the education of the monks, now more than ever considered a priority. Nepal emerged as another center of Tibetan refugee activity, whose lively tourist industry of the 1970s–1990s provided ample opportunities for Tibetan entrepreneurs. The contributions of overseas Chinese and Western Buddhist devotees, moreover, fueled considerable (some would say “excessive”) monastic development in the Kathmandu Valley and the Buddhist holy places of India. At the same time Tibetan Buddhist teachers became established in Europe, the Americas, Southeast Asia, and Taiwan, where they succeeded in creating impressive networks of teaching centers and retreats. Some, such as Tarthang Tulku and the late Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, successfully adapted aspects of their teaching to contemporary Western ways of thought, giving a strikingly modern appearance to millennial traditions. Above all, the Dalai Lama himself emerged as a spiritual leader of international renown, struggling to use his prominence to call the world’s attention to his nation’s predicament.

## **The Promise and Peril of Century’s End**

The conclusion of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the subsequent consolidation of power within the CCP by Deng Xiaoping two years later brought great changes to cultural and religious affairs throughout China. It was now generally recognized that the unrestrained assault on traditional cultural values and institutions had done more harm than good – it represented what the official jargon characterized as a “leftist deviation” – and that some measure of restoration in these spheres was warranted.

However, it was not the case that any and all such activity was to be immediately sanctioned anew. In the religious sphere, where ideological differences between the traditional religions and the CCP could not be readily ignored, liberalization of cultural policy proceeded with great caution. Though there were many regional differences in the manner in which new policy directives were carried out, cultural revival in Tibet unfolded within the same general parameters as it did in the rest of China. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Tibetans (who had witnessed the destruction of their monasteries, religious artworks, and libraries; the exile of many leading authorities in areas of both religious and secular culture; and the persecution of most such persons as had remained behind) found themselves pondering both the wreckage of their civilization and the prospects for renewal that Dengist reform seemed to promise.

It was the visit to Tibet in 1980 by Party Secretary Hu Yaobang that clearly signaled that a cultural revival was now possible. Hu was reported to have been genuinely appalled by the conditions obtaining in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in all spheres, and urged that sweeping reforms be enacted. At about the same time a cautious series of contacts between Beijing and the representatives of the Dalai Lama raised hopes that the Chinese leadership was eager to find a basis for reconciliation with the exiled Tibetan leader. The Chinese, however, were shocked to discover that the Dalai Lama's emissaries were acclaimed by the Tibetan public at large, and not castigated as reactionaries. Despite this clear indication that many Tibetans were still sympathetic to the exiles, China nevertheless began to permit some Tibetans to visit relatives and places of Buddhist pilgrimage in Nepal and India, while Tibetans living abroad, including some religious leaders, were allowed to visit their original homes for the first time in over two decades. Renewed contacts between Tibetans in China and the exile community directly encouraged the restoration of aspects of traditional religious culture, and exiles who had the means to do so contributed financial as well as moral incentives. Once more, this was particularly true in eastern Tibet, where beginning in the early 1980s important religious leaders living abroad were sometimes able to become directly involved in the restoration of their communities. (The central Tibetan religious leadership in exile, by contrast, were severely constrained in this regard.) In addition, older Tibetan religious leaders who had remained in China and had survived the Cultural Revolution were now being rehabilitated and in some cases permitted to resume their religious activities. Foremost among them was the Panchen Lama, who used his regained prestige and influence to support religious and cultural revival to the extent that it was possible.



**Figure 40** A photograph of the Panchen Lama above a temple offering bowl. One of the few icons shared by both ordinary Tibetans and Chinese authorities, 1984.

Besides these developments, the post-Cultural Revolution evolution of Chinese law offered further grounds for hope. The Chinese Constitution promulgated in 1982 discussed freedom of faith in its thirty-sixth article, which stipulates that

Citizens of the Chinese People's Republic have freedom of religious faith.

It is not permitted for any state office, social organization, or private individual whatsoever to coerce a citizen by force to have religious faith or not to have religious faith. It is not permitted to discriminate against a citizen who has religious faith, or a citizen who does not have religious faith.

The basis for state protection of regular religious activity: it is forbidden for anyone, on the basis of a religion, to destroy social regulations, or to harm the physical health of a citizen, or to obstruct the educational programs of the state.

With respect to religious associations and religious work, they must not be subject to foreign influence.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the mere fact that the constitution offered a qualified legal protection for religious *faith* was no guarantee that freedom of religious *practice* would be respected. Earlier Chinese constitutions had done much



the same and, as we have seen above, Tibetan religious leaders during the 1950s believed that they enjoyed similar protections. Nevertheless, in this case additional reinforcement was offered by the CCP's promulgation, also in 1982, of "Document 19," said to have been drafted by Hu Yaobang. Though religion is of course incompatible with the communist ideology of atheism, "Document 19" made it clear that this warranted a prohibition on the practice of religion by party members, but that otherwise freedom of belief was genuinely to be protected. In view of such policy directives, and of the many remarkable and rapid changes taking place under Deng's leadership, a dramatic revival of Tibetan Buddhism now ensued.

This revival in fact took many different forms. At its most basic level it meant that ordinary believers could now engage publicly once more in a variety of devotional and ritual activities: performance of prostrations, circumambulations, offerings, and prayers at temples and other sacred sites; erecting prayer flags and stone walls with prayers carved upon them; and copying and distributing prayer books and religious icons. The small number of temples and monasteries that had survived the Cultural Revolution in more or less usable condition began to be refurbished and reopened, and efforts were made to rebuild some that had been destroyed. In many cases it was even possible to secure aid from the government, or payment in compensation for the damage that had earlier been done. As the monasteries reopened, the small numbers of aged monks who remained were joined by numbers of young new recruits, some entering the order in a wave of religious enthusiasm and others, following tradition, sent by their families. The reinception of religious festivals and pilgrimages was also a development welcomed by both monks and laypersons.

Religious revival unfolded in tandem with, and in relation to, a number of other developments in the increasingly open cultural scene. Of particular importance in this regard were Tibetan-language publication, education, and the preservation of cultural relics. The provincial governments that controlled eastern Tibet for the most part also began to accept a more liberal view of traditional Tibetan culture, and in these regions, in particular, religious revival activities proceeded rapidly and on an astonishingly large scale. One of the best known examples, a traditional Buddhist institute in the remote district of Serta in Sichuan, founded by the late Khenpo Jikpün (1933–2004), has at times had as many as 9,000 residents, despite repeated efforts by provincial authorities to restrict its growth.

The revival of Tibetan Buddhism that began over two decades ago has continued to the present, but it has nevertheless been marked by repeated tensions with the Chinese political leadership, especially in the TAR. Most dramatically, a series of demonstrations in support of the exiled



**Figure 41** A propaganda poster in Tsetang, calling for harmony and solidarity among China's various nationalities, 1990.

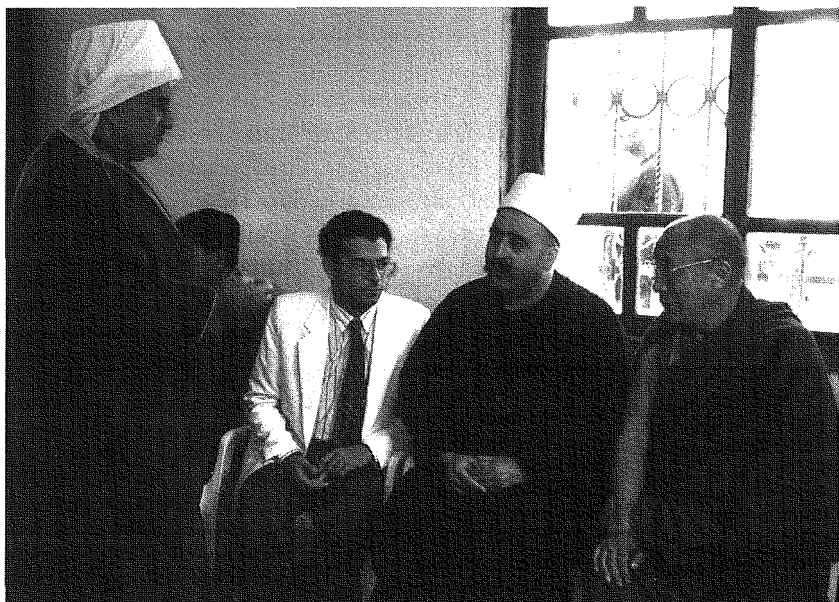
Dalai Lama, staged by monks in Lhasa beginning in 1987, led to rioting that brought heightened international attention to Tibet. The unrest had begun as the Dalai Lama was visiting the United States, and one result was a swell of support for his cause, particularly in the US Congress. This, however, only served to further convince China that he could not be trusted to enter into negotiations in good faith.

During a visit to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in June 1988, therefore, the Dalai Lama sought to clarify his vision of the basis for a future settlement. In his declaration he made clear his willingness to accept what the Chinese had stressed was the condition *sine qua non* for a resolution of the Tibet question: Tibet's independence would be forsworn, and China would be responsible for Tibet's security and defence. At the same time, however, he insisted upon Tibet's genuine autonomy, even if considered part of China, and he defined Tibet not as the TAR, but as the whole territory that had once been claimed by the Fifth Dalai Lama, that is, including Amdo and Kham. Though seen by some in the West as a bold new move, the Strasbourg Declaration in fact was welcomed by neither of the parties concerned; many Tibetan exiles regarded the concession of independence as a sell-out, while China saw the effort

to reconstitute an autonomous "greater Tibet" as an absurdity, further proof of the Dalai Lama's "bad faith."

At the same time, intermittent protest continued in Lhasa, reaching a crescendo early in 1989, when undetermined numbers were killed in police fire and a state of emergency was declared. During the months that followed, the world's attention was turned to Tiananmen Square in Beijing, where pro-democracy demonstrators would be ruthlessly suppressed, triggering riots in cities throughout China. With the events in Lhasa widely understood to be representative of a broad pattern of Chinese official disdain for human rights, the Nobel Peace Prize committee in that year elected to name the Dalai Lama as its laureate, further raising the profile of the Tibetan leader, to the strident protests of China. Since that time the Chinese government's view of the Dalai Lama has steadily hardened, and after a period during which the expression of purely religious devotion to him was tolerated, any explicit manifestation of loyalty to him is now treated as fundamentally political in nature.

In 1989 the highest-ranking Buddhist hierarch to remain in China after 1959, the Panchen Lama, died suddenly and his passing led to new disputes between Chinese authorities and the partisans of the Dalai Lama. This received worldwide attention when, on May 14, 1995, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile announced the discovery of the young incarnate Panchen in Tibet, before the Chinese authorities did so. The Chinese responded harshly: the acting abbot of Trashī Lhünpo monastery, Chadrél Rinpoché, who had communicated with the Dalai Lama regarding the search for the child, was arrested in Chengdu, Sichuan; and Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the young boy who had been recognized as the Panchen Lama by the abbot and confirmed by the Dalai Lama, was detained with his family. Shortly thereafter, his recognition was rejected by the Chinese government, and a lottery, using the hated method of the golden urn for the first time in over a century, was held on November 29, 1995, to choose a new Panchen Lama from among several officially approved candidates. Gyeltsen Norbu, whose parents' political credentials were approved by the CCP, was thereby selected and installed as the eleventh Panchen in what was perhaps a unique manipulation of the arcane mechanisms of reincarnation by China's atheist leadership. For his role in the affair, Chadrél Rinpoché was imprisoned under charges of revealing state secrets, while the precise circumstances of the boy he had championed remain uncertain and have become a topic of much rumor. Chadrél Rinpoché was released from prison and returned to house arrest in Shigatsé in 2002, while the case of Gendun Choekyi Nyima continues to concern the human rights community.



**Figure 42** H. H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has actively sought to encourage interreligious dialogue. Here he confers with leaders of the small and secretive Druse religion, which shares with Tibetan Buddhism a strong belief in reincarnation. Israel, 1994.

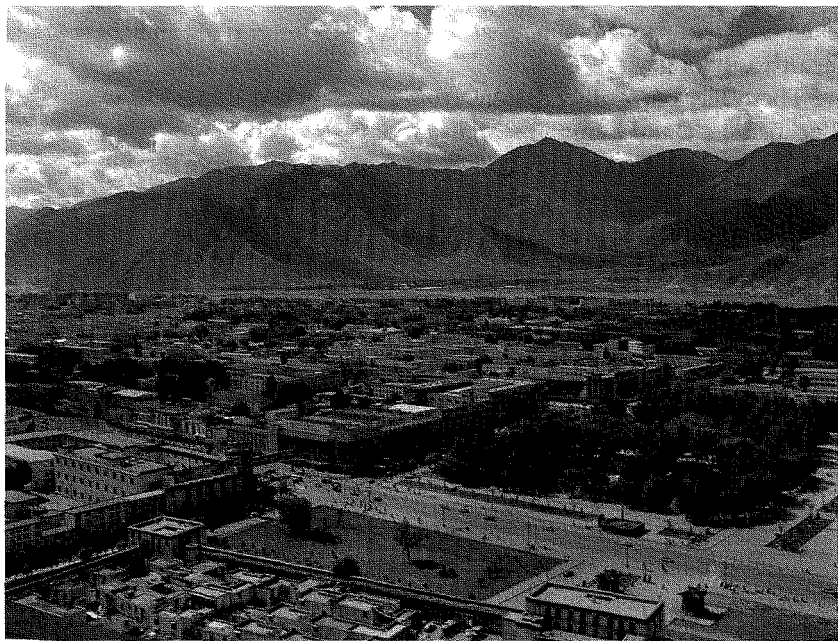
The Dalai Lama remains of course the best known symbol of Tibetan aspirations, in the world at large, and also for Tibetans themselves. One result of religious revival in post-Cultural Revolution Tibet was an outpouring of new-felt devotion to him, manifest frequently in the distribution and display of his image. During the late 1980s and early 1990s photographs of the Dalai Lama were so ubiquitous as to be seen plentifully in temples, homes, shops, and markets. In reaction to the Panchen Lama affair, however, the party launched a campaign in April 1996 to remove such images from view, particularly from public and otherwise high-prestige venues, such as schools, and the homes and offices of Tibetan officials. A riot in protest was reported to have broken out at Ganden Monastery, which resulted in some deaths, many arrests, and new restrictions placed upon the monastery. Nevertheless, the campaign directed against the Dalai Lama has continued unabated, and by the summer of 2000 it was reported that even the homes of ordinary villagers in some districts had been searched for offending images and publications. Outside of the TAR, too, the Dalai Lama's likeness is now rarely displayed. Devotion to him continues to be evident primarily in

such unostentatious practices as the recitation of prayers on behalf of his health and longevity.

There has been other fallout from the Panchen Lama affair as well. Because the Dalai Lama's recognition of a new Panchen is believed to be crucial for the legitimation of the latter, few in the Tibetan Buddhist clergy in China have wished to affirm the legitimacy of the child enthroned with government approval. At the same time the government has sought to secure its position among Tibetan Buddhist believers by insisting that leading monks do make their acquiescence in this matter public and clear. The conflict that this has engendered is widely thought to have contributed to the decision of two of the leading hierarchs remaining in China to leave the country: the Akya Rinpoché, abbot of Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai, in 1998, and the seventeenth Karmapa at the end of 1999. In response the CCP moved to limit contact between Tibetan Buddhists in China and lamas living abroad, so that even some who had regularly visited their home monasteries throughout the two decades following Deng's reforms found themselves subject to increased restrictions.

In tandem with these tensions over religion, the CCP placed ever more emphasis upon economic development as the key to resolving outstanding problems in Tibet. Prosperity would provide the incentive for hastening Tibet's integration with the rest of China, particularly as younger Tibetans discovered that their hopes lay in material advancement, not prayers. Accompanying massive new Chinese investment, however, were large numbers of Chinese workers, so that the beneficiaries of the new economic policies were not necessarily Tibetan at all. With the new urban population of Chinese laborers and administrators, moreover, came prostitution, gambling, and other social ills on a scale never before seen in Tibet. In addition, programs of urban redevelopment systematically effaced the Tibetan character of the towns, homogenizing them with the contemporary Chinese urban landscape. The policy of economic opening, therefore, has proved to be at best a mixed blessing.

With the recent opening of a new high-speed rail link from Qinghai to Lhasa, a remarkable feat of engineering, China has signaled that it intends to fulfill the infrastructural requirements for Tibet's integration into the economic life of China as a whole. The challenge that it faces is to make the Tibetan people the true beneficiaries of ongoing development, or to risk proving the exiles correct by transforming the Tibetans into a people thoroughly disenfranchised in their own homes. While the critics of Chinese policy hold that it is already clear that this is just what has occurred, thus justifying the Dalai Lama's refusal to compromise more than he has already done, China's defenders maintain that the trend of development



**Figure 43** Modern Lhasa, with its broad avenues and concrete buildings, increasingly conforms to the character of a Chinese provincial center, 2002.

will inevitably prove them wrong. They regard the policy of economic integration to have been successful in recent years in encouraging growing numbers of Tibetan youth to identify with a broadly sinicized way of life. This tendency may be seen quite clearly in the field of education.

Policies and programs bearing upon Tibetan affairs during the post-Cultural Revolution era have been set by a series of five-year “work forums,” beginning after Hu Yaobang’s visit in 1980. One of the projects undertaken under directives from the first, and especially the second, such forum was a thoroughgoing overhaul of texts for Tibetan-medium education at the primary and middle-school levels. Though it is not true, as has sometimes been reported, that Tibetan-language education had been entirely prohibited during the Cultural Revolution, it was clear enough by the early 1980s that educational development in Tibet as a whole had been neglected, and that available instructional materials were inadequate and out of date. In response, a new educational consortium among the parts of China with Tibetan populations embarked upon an ambitious effort to create suitable texts not only for learning written Tibetan, but for the whole range of required classes including science, math, civics, geog-



**Figure 44** Schoolchildren in a nomad district of Amdo, Southern Gansu, 1998.

raphy, history, and art. This demanded a remarkable effort to standardize a largely new vocabulary for such subjects as algebra, trigonometry, calculus, chemistry, biology, and physics. The publication of the resulting texts during the 1990s promised to be a signal achievement in the renewal of Tibetan as a vehicle for culture and learning in contemporary China. Though traditional Tibetan religion and subjects closely associated with religion were not among the topics prominently discussed in the new books, nevertheless some aspects of Tibetan religious traditions were indeed represented within them.

Taken by themselves, the second-forum textbooks may therefore be seen as a hopeful sign that Tibetan-medium education in China is being developed along lines that ensure that Tibetan high-school graduates, at least, will be able both to use their native language for contemporary pursuits and at the same time to enjoy a wide range of traditional cultural resources, including, to some extent, the rich textual traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. However, the implementation of the second-forum educational program has not lived up to the potential represented by the texts, and there are plentiful signs that the program as a whole has been giving

way to an increasing emphasis on Chinese-medium education, with a return to the promotion of ideological indoctrination whether in Tibetan or Chinese. It is widely believed, moreover, that Tibetan children should now be educated in Chinese to the fullest extent possible. Tibetan parents and students now often affirm that, despite their desire to continue to use Tibetan at home, Chinese is inevitably the language needed to succeed in China today. The questions raised in this context in some respects resemble those raised in other settings in which bilingualism has become a contested issue in education. As a result, it now seems that in Lhasa and in the larger towns throughout the eastern Tibetan districts, many and perhaps most Tibetan students are being educated primarily or exclusively in Chinese. In some cases, one even notes a reticence (or perhaps inability) among younger Tibetans to use their native language at all.

\* \* \*

Despite the uncertainties confronting Tibetan traditional culture in its homeland, it is ironic that in this period Tibetan Buddhism has again emerged, as it did among Mongols and Manchus during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a religion with an international following. H. H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama has toured widely throughout the world, appealing to many through his personal magnetism and his teaching of "universal responsibility." At the same time, he has actively pursued conversations with leaders of other religions, as well as with contemporary scientists. His keen interest in the sciences and desire to find common ground with current research has in some sense propelled him into the unusual role of a mediator between religious tradition and cutting-edge modernity. Nevertheless, his inability to realize genuine progress in dealing with China over the future of Tibet has lent a somber tint to the otherwise bright canvas of his far-ranging activities. The Chinese leadership, for their part, seem to have concluded that they cannot expect to find an accommodation with him, and so now must push ahead with modernization plans in the expectation of his eventual passing. They hope, no doubt, that when this occurs, the Panchen they have installed will have achieved wide enough credibility to be able to choose a new Dalai Lama, who will be respected by most in Tibet, if not among the exile community. The Tibetans now find themselves at a juncture in their history, in which the key issues of economic well-being, cultural identity, and political autonomy remain unresolved.



# Notes

## Chapter 1 The Vessel and Its Contents

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- 4 'Bri-gung gdan-rabs so-bzhi-ba Chos-kyi blo-gros, *Gangs ri chen po ti se dang mtsbo chen ma dros pa bcas kyi sngon byung gi lo rgyus mdor bsdus su brjod pa'i rab byed shel dkar me long*, in *Gnas yig phyogs bsgrigs* (Chengdu: Si-khron mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang, 1998), pp. 150–1.
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- 6 Robert B. Ekvall, *Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968) p. 63.
- 7 Ibid., p. 36
- 8 Hugh E. Richardson, *Tibet and Its History* (Boulder, CO: Shambala, 1984 [1962]), p. 7.
- 9 Rdza Dpal-sprul Rin-po-che, *Snying-thig sngon-'gro'i khrid-yig* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988), pp. 121–4.
- 10 M. Kapstein, "The Sermon of an Itinerant Saint," in *Tibetan Religions in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 367–8.
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  - 3 Dalai Lama V Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho, *Bod kyi deb ther dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988), p. 118, citing the *Rlangs po ti bse ru*.
  - 4 Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag phreng-ba, *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (Beijing: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang, 1986), vol. 1. pp. 155 and 154.
  - 5 *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung*, 'Dan sras g.yu 'od 'bum me'i rtogs brjod (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1998), p. 41.
  - 6 *Old Tibetan Genealogy* (Pelliot tibétain 1286), in Bsod-nams-skyid and Dbang-rgyal [Wang Yao], *Tun hong nas thon pa'i gna' bo'i bod yig shog dril* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1983), pp. 68–9, lines 30–41.
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  - 8 *Bka' chems ka khol ma* (Lanzhou: Kan-su'u mi-rigs dpe-skrun-khang, 1989), pp. 84–5.
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  - 13 Stag-sham Nus-ldan-rdo-rje, *Mkha' 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi rnam thar* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989), pp. 139–40.

### Chapter 3 The Tsenpo's Imperial Dominion

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- 3 Ibid., pp. 60–1, lines 452–5; after the translation given in M. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 55.
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## Chapter 5 The Rule of the Dalai Lamas

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## Chapter 8 The Sites of Knowledge

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- 3 Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 46.
- 4 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, op. cit., pp. 765–6.
- 5 Shes-rab-rgya-mtsho, *Rje btsun Shes rab rgya mtsho 'jam dpal dgyes pa'i blo gros kyi gsung rtsom pod gsum pa* (Xining: Mtsho-sngon-mi-rigs-dpe-skrun-khang, 1984), pp. 470–1. Translated in M. Kapstein, "A Thorn in the Dragon's Side: Tibetan Buddhist Culture in China," in *Governing China's Multi-ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 236.
- 6 The Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region, comp., *Bod-kyi yig-tshags gces-btus* (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1995), document 107. I give here the published translation that accompanies the Tibetan and Chinese texts. The phrase rendered as "cruel imperialism" (*btsan-por g.yo-ba*) in the first verse might be also read simply as "oppression." In the second, "the



enemy's armed forces" (*gzhan-sde*) may mean "opposition" in general.

- 7 John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), p. 233.
- 8 *A Poisoned Arrow: The Secret Report of the 10th Panchen Lama* (London: Tibet Information Network, 1997), p. 13.
- 9 *Krung hwa mi dmangs spyi mthun rgyal khab kyi khrims yig phyogs bsgrigs. 1991 lo nas 1993 lo'i bar* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1996), p. 498.

# Spellings of Tibetan Names and Terms

In addition to providing the strict transcriptions of all Tibetan words occurring in the text, the present list includes Tibetan equivalents of selected Sanskrit, Chinese, and Mongolian expressions, as well as the original forms of Tibetan book titles given in the main body of the work in English translation. Where a term occurs in the text both with and without the nominal suffix *-pa*, *-ba*, *-wa*, no separate entry is given, in order to save space, but the suffix is shown in parenthesis, e.g.: Kham(pa) *kham* (pa)

Abadai Khan *ab ta'i han*  
Abhidharma *chos mngon pa*  
aché lhamo *a lce lha mo*  
Achi Chöki Drölma *a phyi chos kyi*  
*sgrol ma*  
Agvan Dorjieff *ngag dbang rdo rje*  
Akya Rinpoché *a skya rin po che*  
Altan Khan *al than han*  
amban *am ban*  
Amdo Tso-ngön *a mdo mtsho sngon*  
Amdo(wa) *a mdo (ba)*  
Amitabha *snang ba mtha' yas*  
Amnyé Machen *a myes rma chen*  
Anavatapta *ma pham mtsho, mtsho*  
*ma dros pa*  
Andruk Gönpö Trashī *a 'brug mgon*  
*po bkra shis*  
anuttarayogatantra *rgyud sde bla*  
*med*  
anyé *a myes*

arak *a rag*  
Arigh Böke *a rig bo ga*  
Arslang *ar slan*  
Atisha *jo bo rje, a ti sha*  
atsara *a tsa ra*  
Avalokiteshvara *spyan ras gzigs kyi*  
*dbang phyug*  
Azha *'a zha*  
Ba *sba*  
Bagom *sba sgom*  
Baltistan *sbal ti*  
Bapa Püntso Wanggyel *'ba' pa phun*  
*tshogs dbang rgyal*  
bardo *bar do*  
Batang *'ba' thang*  
Beri *be ri*  
bhikshu *dge slong*  
Bhutan *'brug yul*  
Blue Annals *deb ther sngon po*  
bö *bod*

bodhisattva *byang chub sems dpa'*  
 Bodhnath Stupa *mchod rten bya rung kha shor*  
 Bodong *bo dong*  
 Bön *bon*  
 Bönpo *bon po*  
 Buddha *sangs rgyas*  
 buluk *bu lugs*  
 Butön Rinchen-drup *bu ston rin chen grub*  
 Buyantu *bu yan thu han*  
 Century for the People of Dingri *ding ri brgya rtas*  
 Chadrel Rinpoché *bya bral rin po che*  
 Chahar *cha har*  
 chakchen *phyag chen*  
 Chakla *lcags la*  
 Chakna Dorjé *phyag na rdo rje*  
 Chakpori *lcags po ri*  
 Chakravartin *'khor los bsgyur ba*  
 chakzampa *lcags zam pa*  
 cham *'cham*  
 Chamara *rnga yab gling*  
 Chamdo *chab mdo*  
 Chandrakirti *zla ba grags pa*  
 chang *chang*  
 Changkya Ngawang Chöden *lcang skya ngag dbang chos ldan*  
 Changkya Rölpe Dorjé *lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje*  
 Changlochen *lcang lo can*  
 chap *chab*  
 chapsi *chab srid*  
 Che clan *lce*  
 Chenrezi *spyen ras gzigs*  
 Chetsang Rinpoché *che tshang rin po che*  
 Chetsün Sherap Jungné *lce btsun shes rab 'byung gnas*  
 chidar *phyi dar*  
 chikhyap khenpo *spyi khyab chen po*  
 chilu *'chi bslu*  
 Chim (clan) *mchims/'chims*  
 Chim Jamyang *mchims 'jam dbyangs*  
 Chimpu *mchims/'chims phu*

Chinggis Khan *jing gir rgyal po*  
 Chingpu *'ching phu*  
 Chingwa fortress *phying ba chiru gtsod ru*  
 chö ("dharma") *chos*  
 Chö ("severance") *gcod*  
 Cho the man-bird *bya mi cho*  
 Chödrak Gyatso, Karmapa VII *karma pa chos grags rgya mtsho*  
 chödruk *chos drug*  
 Chödrup Gyatso, Zhamar X *zhwa dmar chos grub rgya mtsho*  
 Chögyam Trungpa *chos rgyam drung pa*  
 Chöki Gyeltsen, Panchen Lama IV *pañ chen bzhi pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan*  
 Chöki Gyeltsen, Panchen Lama X *pañ chen bcu pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan*  
 Chöki Jungné, Tai Situ VIII *tā'i si tu chos kyi 'byung gnas*  
 Chöki Nyima, Panchen Lama IX *pañ chen dgu pa chos kyi nyi ma*  
 Choklé Namgyel *phyogs las rnam rgyal*  
 Chokro *cog ro*  
 Chokroza *cog ro bza'*  
 chöluk *chos lugs*  
 Chonggyé *phyong rgyas*  
 chösi nyiden *chos srid gnyis ldan*  
 chöten *mchod rten*  
 Chöten Nyima *mchod rten nyi ma*  
 Chöwang Drakpa *chos dbang grags pa*  
 Chöying Dorjé, Karmapa X *karma pa bcu pa chos dbyings rdo rje*  
 Chronicle (of Fifth Dalai Lama) *rgyal ba lnga pa'i deb ther*  
 Chu (constellation) *mchu*  
 chüi lapuk *chu'i la phug*  
 Chumik *chu mig*  
 chung-gyé *chung brgyad*  
 Chungtsang Rinpoché *chung tshang rin po che*

Chupsang *chu bzang*  
 Chuwar *chu bar*  
 Chuzang Nominhan *chu bzang no min han*  
 chuzhi gangdruk *chu bzhi sgang drug*  
 Crystal Mirror of Obligations and Prohibitions *blang dor dwangs shel me long*  
 da lama *tā bla ma*  
 Dachu *zla chu*  
 Daknyi Chenpo Zangpopel *bdag nyid chen po bzang po dpal*  
 Dakpo *dwags po*  
 Dakpo Kagyü *dwags po bka' brgyud*  
 Dakpo Lama *dwags po bla ma*  
 Dakpo Lharjé *dwags po lha rje*  
 Dalai Lama *tā la'i bla ma*  
 damtsik *dam tshig*  
 Damzhung *'dam gzhung*  
 Dangma, yak-cow pasture *dang ma 'bri spangs*  
 dapdop *ldab ldob*  
 Darma Dodé *dar ma mdo sde*  
 Dartsedo *dar rtse mdo*  
 Dazang Dramdül *zla bzang dgra 'dul*  
 Dé *lde*  
 Dedruk Khyenrab Wangchuk *sde drug mkhyen rab dbang phyug*  
 Dega, Turquoise Grove at *de ga g.yu tshal*  
 delok *'das log*  
 delön *bde blon*  
 Demo Khutughtu *de mo hu thog tu*  
 Demo Khutughtu Lozang Trinlé *de mo hu thog tu blo bzang phrin las*  
 Demo Khutughtu VI Jampel Delek Gyatso *de mo hu thog tu 'jam dpal bde legs rgya mtsho*  
 Denma *'dan ma*  
 densa chenpo *gdan sa chen po*  
 densa sum *gdan sa gsum*  
 Densatil *gdan sa 'thil*  
 Dentik *dan tig*  
 depa *sde pa*  
 Dergé *sde dge*

Dergé Printery *sde dge par khang*  
 desi *sde srid*  
 Detsukgön *lde gtsug mgon*  
 deu *lde'u*  
 Devaraja *de wa rā dza*  
 dewachen *bde ba can*  
 Dezhinshekpa, Karmapa V *karma pa de bzhin gshegs pa*  
 dharma *chos*  
 Dharmakirti *chos kyi grags pa*  
 dharmapala *chos skyong*  
 Dharmapalarakshita *dharmā pā la rakshi ta*  
 Dingri *ding ri*  
 Dipamkara *mar me mdzad*  
 dö *mdos*  
 Dobi Sherab Gyatso *rdo sbis shes rab rgya mtsho*  
 Dokhar zhabdrung Tsering Wanggyel *rdo mkhar zhabs drung tshe ring dbang rgyal*  
 Dölpo *dol po*  
 Dölpopa Sherab Gyeltsen *dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan*  
 Domé *mdo smad*  
 Dong *sdong*  
 Dönyö Dorjé *don yod rdo rje*  
 Döpel *'dod dpal*  
 Doring Pandita *rdo ring pandi ta*  
 dorjé *rdo rje*  
 dorjé neljor *rdo rje rnal 'byor*  
 Dorjé Pakmo *rdo rje phag mo*  
 Dorjé Shukden *rdo rje shugs ldan*  
 dorjé sumgi nyendrub *rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen bsgrub*  
 dorjé tekpa *rdo rje theg pa*  
 Dorjé Wangchuk *rdo rje dbang phyug*  
 Dorta the Black *dor rta nag po*  
 Dotok *mdo thog*  
 drachompa *dgra bcom pa*  
 Drakpa Gyeltsen *grags pa rgyal mtshan*  
 Drakpa Jungné *grags pa 'byung gnas*  
 Dralha Tsegel *dgra lha rtse rgyal*  
 Drangti of Mu *dmu brang ti*

Drapa Ngönshé <i>grwa pa mngon shes</i>	Düsum Khyenpa <i>dus gsum mkhyen pa</i>
Drepung <i>'bras spungs</i>	Dza Peltrül <i>rdza dpal sprul</i>
Dre-pung Lo-se-ling <i>'bras spungs blo gsal gling</i>	Dzachu <i>rdza chu</i>
Drichu <i>'bri chu</i>	Dzamling chisang <i>'dzam gling spyi bsang</i>
Drigum Tsenpo <i>gri/dri gum btsan po</i>	dzamling gyenchik <i>'dzam gling rgyan gcig</i>
Drigung Kagyü(pa) <i>'bri gung bka' brgyud (pa)</i>	Dzeng <i>'dzeng</i>
Drigung Kyopa Jiktensumgön <i>'bri gung skyob pa 'jig rten gsum mgon</i>	dzöchen nga <i>mdzod chen lnga</i>
Drigung(pa) <i>'bri gung (pa)</i>	dzokchen <i>rdzogs chen</i>
Drigung Powa Chenmo <i>'bri gung 'pho ba chen mo</i>	Dzokchen Monastery <i>rdzogs chen dgon pa</i>
Drigung-til <i>'bri gung mthil</i>	dzong <i>rdzong</i>
drip <i>sgrib</i>	Dzongkha <i>rdzong skad</i>
Dro <i>'bro</i>	dzongnyer <i>rdzong gnyer</i>
Dro Shama Kyilingma <i>gro zha ma skyi brling ma</i>	dzongpön <i>rdzong dpon</i>
drok <i>'brog</i>	Epic of (Ling) Gesar <i>(gling) ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung</i>
Drokmi Shakya Yeshé <i>'brog mi shā kya ye shes</i>	Four Tantras <i>rgyud bzhi</i>
drokpa <i>'brog pa</i>	Gadong <i>dga' gdong</i>
droma <i>gro ma</i>	gag <i>'gag</i>
Dromtön Gyelwé Jungné <i>'brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas</i>	Galdan <i>dga' ldan</i>
drong <i>'brong</i>	Galenus <i>ga le nus/nos</i>
drongdrak <i>grong drag</i>	Gampopa Sonam Rinchen <i>sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen</i>
Drongur <i>'brong ngur</i>	Ganden Phuntsokling <i>dga' ldan phun tshogs gling</i>
Dronyen Tsenpo <i>'bro mnyen btsan po</i>	Ganden Podrang/Palace <i>dga' ldan pho brang</i>
Dru <i>'dru</i>	Ganden Tri Rinpoché <i>dga' ldan khri rin po che</i>
drubgyü <i>sgrub brgyud</i>	Ganden Tripa <i>dga' ldan khri pa</i>
Drugmo <i>'brug mo</i>	Ganden(pa) <i>dga' ldan (pa)</i>
Drukchen <i>'brug chen</i>	Gang Rinpoché <i>gangs rin po che</i>
Drukpa Kagyü(pa) <i>'brug pa bka' brgyud (pa)</i>	gang <i>sgang</i>
drungyik chenpo <i>drung yig chen po</i>	Ganze <i>dkar mdzes</i>
drupdra <i>sgrub grwa</i>	Gar College <i>sgar grwa tshang</i>
drupta <i>grub mtha'</i>	Gar Tongtsen <i>mgar stong btsan</i>
druptop <i>grub thob</i>	Gar Tridring <i>mgar khri 'bring</i>
düchung <i>dud chung</i>	Gar Tsennyen <i>mgar brtsan nyen</i>
Düdül Raptan <i>bdud 'dul rab brtan</i>	Gartar <i>mgar thar</i>
Düjom Dorjé <i>bdud 'joms rdo rje</i>	Geluk(pa) <i>dge lugs (pa)</i>
dülwa <i>'dul ba</i>	Gen Lob-zang <i>rgan blo bzang</i>
durtrö dakpo <i>dur khrod bdag po</i>	Genden(pa) <i>dge ldan (pa)</i>
Düsong <i>dus srong</i>	

- gendün *dge 'dun*  
 Gendun Choekyi Nyima *dge 'dun chos kyi nyi ma*  
 Gendün Chömpel *dge 'dun chos 'phel*  
 Gendün Drupa, Dalai Lama I *rgyal ba dang po dge 'dun grub pa*  
 Gendün Gyatso, Dalai Lama II *rgyal ba gnyis pa dge 'dun rgya mtsho*  
 Ger clan *lha rigs sger*  
 Ger Namkha Gyeltsen *sger nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*  
 gerpa *sger pa*  
 Gesar *ge sar*  
 geshé *dge bshes*  
 Gö Chödrup *'gos chos grub*  
 Gölo Zhönnu-pel *'gos lo gzhon nu dpal*  
 Golok *mgol'go log*  
 Gomang College *sgo mang grwa tshang*  
 gong *gung*  
 Gongkar *gong dkar*  
 gongma chenpo *gong ma chen po*  
 gongma nga *gong ma lnga*  
 Gongpasel *dgongs pa gsal*  
 Gönlung Jampaling *dgon lung byams pa gling*  
 Gönpö Namgyel *mgon po rnam rgyal*  
 Gorampa Sonam Senggé *go rams pa bsod nams seng ge*  
 Great Fifth Dalai Lama *rgyal ba lnga pa chen po*  
 Great Progression of the Path *lam rim chen mo*  
 Gugé *gu ge*  
 Gungsong Gungtsen *gung srong gung btsan*  
 Gungtang in Mangyül *mang yul gung thang*  
 Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé *gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me*  
 gur *mgur*  
 Gurmo *gur mo*  
 Guru Rinpoché *gu ru rin po che*  
 Güshri Khan *gu shri han*  
 Gya clan *rgya*  
 Gyabo Rock *brag rgya bo*  
 Gyama *rgya ma*  
 gyanak gongma *rgya nag gong ma*  
 Gyangdo *gyang do*  
 Gyantsé *rgyal rtse*  
 Gyashang *rgya shangs*  
 Gyel Tsukru *rgyal gtsug ru*  
 Gyelmorong *rgyal mo rong*  
 Gyeltsap-jé Darma Rinchen *rgyal tshab rje dar ma rin chen*  
 Gyeltsen-kyap *rgyal mtshan skyabs*  
 Gyeltsen Norbu *rgyal mtshan nor bu*  
 Gyelwang Karmapa *rgyal dbang karma pa*  
 gyü *rgyud*  
 gyülü *sgyu lus*  
 Gyurmé Namgyel *'gyur med rnam rgyal*  
 Hepo, Mt. *has po ri*  
 Hevajra *kye rdo rje, dgyes pa rdo rje*  
 homa *sbyin sreg*  
 Hüleü Khan *hu le hu han*  
 Introduction to the Doctrine *chos la 'jug pa*  
 Jamchen Chöjé *'jam chen chos rje*  
 Jamgön Kongtrül *'jam mgon kong sprul*  
 Jampel Gyatso, Dalai Lama VIII *rgyal ba 'jam dpal rgya mtsho*  
 Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo *'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po*  
 Jamyang Zhepa *'jam dbyangs bzhed pa*  
 jangchup sempa *byang chub sems dpa'*  
 Jangchup-ö *byang chub 'od*  
 Jangtang *byang thang*  
 Jangtsé College *byang rtse grwa tshang*  
 Jarawa *sbyar ra ba*  
 Jasa *bya sa*  
 Jé College, Sera *se ra byes grwa tshang*  
 Jé Tsongkhapa *rje tsong kha pa*  
 Jebtsundampa *rje btsun dam pa*

Jewel-in-Hand *rin chen lag*  
 Jikmé Lingpa *'jigs med gling pa*  
 Jincheng, princess of *gyim sheng*  
*kong jo*  
 jinlab *byin rlabs*  
 jinpa *sbyin pa*  
 Jiwing *spyi dbang*  
 Jokhang *jo khang*  
 Jonang(pa) *jo nang pa*  
 Jowo Shakyamuni *jo bo shākya mu ne*  
 jungtsi *'byung rtsis*  
 jutik *'ju thig*  
 Jyekundo *skyes dgu mdo*  
 Kachu *k(w)a chu*  
 Kadam sarma *bka' gdams gsar ma*  
 Kadam(pa) *bka' gdams (pa)*  
 kagyü che-zhi *bka' brgyud che bzhi*  
 Kagyü(pa) *bka' brgyud (pa)*  
 Kalachakra *dus 'khor*  
 Kalimpong *ka lon sbug*  
 Kalu Rinpoché Rangjung  
*Künkhyab ka lu rin po che rang*  
*byung kun khyab*  
 Kamalashila *ka ma la shī la/padma'i*  
*ngang tshul can*  
 kang *rkang*  
 Kangyur *bka' 'gyur*  
 Karchung temple *skar cung lha khang*  
 Karluk *gar log*  
 Karma gardri *karma sgar bris*  
 Karma Kagyü(pa) *karma bka'*  
*brgyud (pa)*  
 Karma Pakshi *karma pakshi*  
 Karma Tenkyong *karma bstan*  
*skyong*  
 Karmapa *karma pa*  
 Karo *mkhar ro/rub*  
 kartsi *skar rtsis*  
 kashak *bka' shags*  
 Kashmir *kha che*  
 katak *kha btags*  
 Kathmandu *yam bu rgyal sa*  
 Kelzang Gyatso, Dalai Lama  
 VII *rgyal ba bdun pa skal bzang*  
*rgya mtsho*

Khalkha *hal ba*  
 Kham(pa) *kham pa*  
 khandroma *mkha' 'gro ma*  
 Khangchen-né *khang chen nas*  
 khangtsen *khang mtshan*  
 Khartsen *mkhar tsan*  
 Kharup *mkhar rub*  
 Khedrup Gyatso, Dalai Lama  
 XI *rgyal ba mkhas grub rgya*  
*mtsho*  
 Khedrup-jé Gelek Pelzang *mkhas*  
*grub rje dge legs dpal bzang*  
 khel *khal*  
 khenpo *mkhan po*  
 Khenpo Jikpün *mkhan po 'jigs phun*  
 Khön *'khon*  
 Khön Könchok Gyelpo *'khon dkon*  
*mchog rgyal po*  
 Khön Lüwangpo *'khon klu'i dbang*  
*po*  
 Khönrok *'khon rog*  
 Khorré *'khor re*  
 khorwa *'khor ba*  
 Khoshot *ho shod*  
 Khotan *li yul*  
 Khubilai Khan *hu bi le han*  
 Khumbu *khum bu*  
 Khutön *khu ston*  
 Khutsa Dawö *khu tsha zla 'od*  
 Khu-yé *khu ye*  
 Khyenrab Norbu *mkhyen rab nor bu*  
 Khyenri *mkhyen ris*  
 Khyentsé Chenpo *mkhyen brtse chen*  
*po*  
 Khyungpo Neljor *khyung po rnal*  
*'byor*  
 Khyungram *khyung ram*  
 Könchok Jikmé Wangpo *dkon mchog*  
*'jigs med dbang po*  
 könchok-sum *dkon mchog gsum*  
 Kongpo *rkong po*  
 Kongtsé *kong tse*  
 Kötan (Godan) *go dan han*  
 kowa *ko ba*  
 kudrak *sku drag*

Kumbum <i>sku 'bum</i>	lekshé <i>legs bshad</i>
Künga Gyeltsen <i>kun dga' rgyal mtshan</i>	Lewel, sacred lake <i>mtsho dam le dbal mtsho</i>
Künga Lodrö Gyeltsen <i>kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan</i>	Lha Belpo <i>lha bal po</i>
Künga Rinchen <i>kun dga' rin chen</i>	Lha Totori <i>lha tho tho ri</i>
Künga Trashī <i>kun dga' bkra shis</i>	lhabap <i>lha babs</i>
künkhyen <i>kun mkhyen</i>	lhabap düchen <i>lha babs dus chen</i>
Künpé-la <i>kun 'phel lags</i>	Lhabukchen <i>lha sbug can</i>
kyang <i>rkyang</i>	Lhadé <i>lha lde</i>
Kyi River <i>skyid chu</i>	Lhagang in Minyak <i>mi nyag lha sgang</i>
Kyidé <i>skyid lde</i>	Lhagyari <i>lha rgya ri</i>
Kyidé Nyimagön <i>skyid lde nyi ma mgon</i>	Lhalu <i>lha klu</i>
kyinkhor <i>dkyil 'khor</i>	Lhalung Pelgi Dorjé <i>lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje</i>
Kyishöpa <i>skyid shod pa</i>	Lhamo Döndrup <i>lha mo don grub</i>
Kyitang <i>skyid thang</i>	lhandré <i>lha 'dre</i>
la <i>bla</i>	lhapa <i>lha pa</i>
labrang <i>bla brang</i>	Lharjé Zurpoché <i>lha rje zur po che</i>
Labrang Trashī-khyil <i>bla brang bkra shis 'khyil</i>	Lhasa <i>lha sa</i>
la-chang <i>bla spyang</i>	lhasin <i>lha srin</i>
Ladakh <i>la dwags</i>	Lhatok <i>lha thog</i>
Lagyab lhojang <i>la rgyab lho byang</i>	Lhatsé <i>lha rtse</i>
lalo <i>kla klo</i>	Lhawön <i>lha dbon</i>
lama <i>bla ma</i>	Lhazang Khan <i>lha bzang han</i>
Lama Dampa Sonam Gyeltsen <i>bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan</i>	Lhodrak <i>lho brag</i>
Lama Shabkar <i>bla ma zhabs dkar</i>	Lhokha <i>lho kha</i>
Lama Tatsak Rinpoché of Kündeling <i>kun bde gling bla ma rta tshag rin po che</i>	Lhündrup Dzong <i>lhun grub rdzong</i>
Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment <i>byang chub lam sgron</i>	Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate State <i>bar do thos grol</i>
lamrim chenmo <i>lam rim chen mo</i>	Ligdan Khan <i>legs ldan han</i>
Lang clan <i>lha rigs rlangs</i>	Light Blazing King <i>'od 'bar rgyal</i>
Lang Darma <i>glang dar ma</i>	Ligmigya <i>lig myi rhya/rgya</i>
Langdün <i>glang mdun</i>	Limi <i>gli mi</i>
la-shing <i>bla shing</i>	Ling <i>gling</i>
Latö <i>la stod</i>	Ling Gesar <i>gling ge sar</i>
Latö, North <i>la stod byang</i>	Lingjé Repa Pema Dorjé <i>gling rje ras pa padma rdo rje</i>
Latö, South <i>la stod lho</i>	lingkhor <i>gling 'khor</i>
la-yu <i>bla gyu</i>	Litang <i>li thang</i>
lé <i>las</i>	Lo <i>klo</i>
	Lochen Dharmashri <i>lo chen dharma shri</i>
	Logpa <i>klog pa</i>
	lojong <i>blo sbyong</i>



Lo-ngam the horseherd *lo rngam rta rdzi*  
 Longchen Rabjampa *klong chen rab 'byams pa*  
 losum choksum *lo gsum phyogs gsum*  
 loto *lo tho*  
 Lozang Drölma *blo bzang sgrol ma*  
 Lozang Gyatso, Dalai Lama V *rgyal ba lnga pa blo bzang rgya mtsho*  
 Lozang Kelzang Gyatso *blo bzang skal ldan rgya mtsho*  
 Lozang Pema Trashidé *blo bzang padma bkra shis sde*  
 Lozang Trashi *blo bzang bkra shis*  
 Lozang Yeshé, Panchen Lama V *pan chen blo bzang ye shes*  
 lu *klu*  
 Luchu *klu chu*  
 Lukhang *klu khang*  
 Lumpawa *lum pa ba*  
 Lungshar *lung shar*  
 lungta *rlung rta*  
 Lungtok Gyatso, Dalai Lama IX *rgyal ba lung rtogs rgya mtsho*  
 Ma (clan) *rma rigs*  
 Ma (mountains) *rma ri bo*  
 Machen Pomra *rma chen spom ra*  
 Machik Lapdrön *ma gcig labs sgron*  
 Machu *rma chu*  
 Madhyamaka *dbu ma*  
 magyü *ma rgyud*  
 mahasiddha *grub (thob) chen (po)*  
 Maitreya *byams pa*  
 makpa *mag pa*  
 Malla *rmal*  
 Mangjé Lhalö *mang rje lha lod*  
 Manglön Mangtsen *mang slon mang btsan*  
 mani khorlo *ma ñi 'khor lo*  
 manipa *ma ñi pa*  
 Mañjushri *'jam dpal*  
 mantra *gsang sngags*  
 Mapam Lake *ma pham mtsho*  
 Mar Shakyamuni *smar shākya mu ne*  
 Markham *smar kham*

Marpa Chöki Lodrö *mar pa chos kyi blo gros*  
 Maryül *mar yul*  
 Mé Aktsom *mes ag tshom*  
 Menlha Döndrup *smān lha don grub*  
 Menlung *smān lung*  
 Menri *smān ris*  
 Menri Monastery *smān ri dgon*  
 Mentsi Khang *smān rtsis khang*  
 Meru, Mt. *ri rab*  
 Mewa *rme ba*  
 mibok *mi bogs*  
 mikha bumo *mi kha bu mo*  
 milam *rmi lam*  
 Milarepa *mi la ras pa*  
 Mindröling *smīn sgrol gling*  
 Mingyur Peldrön *mi 'gyur dpal sgron*  
 Minyak Chakla *mi nyag lcags la*  
 Minyak Gangkar *mi nyag gangs dkar*  
 Minyak(pa) *mi nyag (pa)*  
 Mipam Namgyel *mi pham rnam rgyal*  
 miser *mi ser*  
 Miwang *mi dbang*  
 Miwang Drakpa Gyeltsen *mi dbang grags pa rgyal mtshan*  
 mo *mo*  
 Moheyan, Chan master *hwa shang ma ha yan*  
 Mön *mon*  
 Möngke Khan *mon khe han*  
 mönlam chenmo *smōn lam chen mo*  
 monor *mo nor*  
 mopa *mo pa*  
 Mt. Kailash *gangs rin po che, gangs ti se*  
 Mu *dmu*  
 Mukpodong *smug po sdong*  
 Muné Tsenpo *mu ne btsan po*  
 Muruk Tsenpo *mu rug btsan po*  
 mutak *dmu thag*  
 Mutik Tsenpo *mu tig btsan po*  
 Nagaraja *nā ga rā dza*  
 Nagarjuna *klu sgrub*  
 Nakchu *nag chu*

Nam Tso <i>gnam mtsbo</i>	<i>shes rab</i>
Namchak Barwa <i>gnam lcags 'bar ba</i>	ngönpa <i>mngon pa</i>
namdag <i>gnam bdag</i>	Ngorchen Künga Zangpo <i>ngor chen</i>
Namgyel Drakpa <i>rnam rgyal grags pa</i>	<i>kun dga' bzang po</i>
Namgyel Dratsang <i>rnam rgyal grwa</i>	Ngorpa <i>ngor pa</i>
<i>tshang</i>	Ngülchu <i>ngul chu</i>
namkha <i>nam mkha'</i>	Niguma <i>ni gu ma</i>
Namkha Gyelpo <i>nam mkha' rgyal po</i>	Norbu Ngödrub <i>nor bu dngos grub</i>
Namri Löntsen <i>gnam ri slon btsan</i>	Nup Sanggyé Yeshé <i>bsnubs sangs</i>
Nanam Tsenzhong-gyel <i>sna nam</i>	<i>rgyas ye shes</i>
<i>btsan bzhong rgyal</i>	nya <i>gnya'</i>
Nang (clan) <i>snang rigs</i>	Nyak (clan) <i>gnyags</i>
Nangchen <i> nang chen</i>	Nyakhyi <i>nya khyi/khri</i>
Naro Bönchung <i>nā ro bon chung</i>	Nyaktri <i>nyag khri</i>
Naropa <i>nā ro pa</i>	Nyalam <i>gnya'nye lam</i>
Nartang <i>snar thang</i>	Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen <i>mnyam</i>
Nechung monastery <i>gnas chung dgon</i>	<i>med shes rab rgyal mtshan</i>
<i>pa</i>	Nyang (clan) <i>myang/nyang</i>
neljor <i>rnal 'byor</i>	Nyang Mangpoje Zhangnang <i>myang</i>
neljormagyü <i>rnal 'byor ma rgyud</i>	<i>mang po rje zhang snang</i>
Nenying <i>gnas rnying</i>	Nyang River <i>myang chu</i>
Neudong <i>sne'u gdong</i>	nyangdé <i>myang 'das</i>
Ngaba <i>rnga ba</i>	Nyangrel Nyima Özer <i>nyang/myang</i>
ngadak chenpo sum <i>mnga' bdag chen</i>	<i>ral rnyi ma 'od zer</i>
<i>po gsum</i>	Nyangro Shampo <i>nyang ro sham po</i>
ngadar <i>snga dar</i>	Nyangrong Taktse <i>myang rong stag</i>
ngagyur nyingma <i>snga 'gyur rnying</i>	<i>tshal</i>
<i>ma</i>	Nyangtö <i>myang stod</i>
ngakpa <i>sngags pa</i>	Nyarong <i>nyag rong</i>
ngakpa dratsang <i>sngags pa grwa</i>	Nyatri <i>gnya' khri</i>
<i>tshang</i>	Nyemo <i>snye mo</i>
Ngapa Chenpo <i>lnga pa chen po</i>	Nyenchen Tangla <i>gnyan chen thang</i>
Ngapö <i>nga phod</i>	<i>lha</i>
Ngapö Ngawang Jikmé <i>nga phod</i>	nyenngak <i>snyan ngag</i>
<i>ngag dbang 'jigs med</i>	Nyetang Drölma <i>snye thang sgrol ma</i>
Ngari <i>mnga' ris</i>	nyingje <i>snying rje</i>
Ngarlakyé <i>ngar la skyes</i>	Nyingma(pa) <i>rnying ma (pa)</i>
Ngawang Rinchen <i>ngag dbang rin</i>	Nyiwa (clan) <i>snyi ba</i>
<i>chen</i>	Nyugulung <i>myu gu lung</i>
Ngawang Trashi Drakpa <i>ngag dbang</i>	Nyungné Lama <i>smyung gnas bla ma</i>
<i>bkra shis grags pa</i>	Odé Bedé the Long, naga <i>klu 'o de be</i>
ngödrup <i>dngos grub</i>	<i>de ring mo</i>
Ngok Lekpé Sherap <i>rngog legs pa'i</i>	Ödé 'od lde
<i>shes rab</i>	Oirat 'o rod
Ngok Loden Sherap <i>rngog blo ldan</i>	Ölmolungring 'ol mo lung ring

- Öñ Keru temple 'on ke ru lha khang  
 Öñchangdo in Kyi skyid 'on cang rdo  
 öñ-zhang doring dbon zhang rdo ring  
 Orgyenpa Rinchen-pel o rgyan pa rin  
   chen dpal  
 ösel 'od gsal  
 Ösung 'od srung  
 Pabongkhapa Dechen Nyingpo pha  
   bong kha pa bde chen snying po  
 pachik machik pha gcig ma gcig  
 Padampa Sanggyé pha dam pa sangs  
   rgyas  
 Padmasambhava padma 'byung gnas  
 Pakmodrupa phag mo gru pa  
 Pakmodrupa Dorjé Gyelpo phag mo  
   gru pa rdo rje rgyal po  
 Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen 'phags pa blo  
   gros rgyal mtshan  
 Pakpalha of Chamdo chab mdo  
   'phags pa lha  
 Paksam Wangpo, Drukchen V 'brug  
   chen dpag bsam dbang po  
 Pala bar la  
 Panchen pañ chen  
 parchin phar phyin  
 Pari dpa' ris  
 parkha spar kha  
 Paro spa gro  
 Partrün, snow mountain gang par  
   'phrun  
 pawo dpa' bo  
 Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa dpa' bo gtsug  
   lag phreng ba  
 Pehar pe har rgyal po  
 Pelchen Öpo dpal chen 'od po  
 Peldé dpal lde  
 Pelden Yeshé, Panchen Lama VI pañ  
   chen dpal ldan ye shes  
 Pelgigön dpal gyi mgon  
 Pelpung dpal spungs  
 Pema Karpo, Drukchen IV 'brug chen  
   padma dkar po  
 Pema Katang padma bka' thang  
 Pemakö padma bkod  
 Pemé Gyeltsen padma'i rgyal mtshan  
 Penyül 'phan yul  
 Phajo pha jo  
 Phen-gi Khangön phan gyi khang sngon  
 Polhané Sonam Topgyel pho lha nas  
   bsod nams stobs rgyal  
 Pomda Tobgyé spom mda' stobs rgyal  
 Pomdatsang spom mda' tshang  
 pönchen dpon chen  
 pong spong  
 ponor pho nor  
 Potala Palace po ta la, rtse pho brang  
 powa 'pho ba  
 Powo spo bo  
 Prajñāparamita sher phyin  
 Pugyel spu rgyal  
 Puk Yeshé Wangpo spug ye shes  
   dbang po  
 Pu-kang spu khang  
 Pünkhang phun khang  
 pünkya phun skya  
 Püntsok Namgyel phun tshogs rnam  
   rgyal  
 Pünwang phun dbang  
 Purang spu hrengs  
 Purbuchok Rinpoché spur bu lcogs  
   rin po che  
 Qinwang Baatur Taiji ching wang bā  
   dur tā'i ji  
 Qugong chu gong  
 Ra Lotsawa rwa lo tsā ba  
 rabjung rab byung  
 ragyabpa rags rgyab pa  
 Ralung rwa lung  
 Ramoché rwa mo che  
 Rangjung Dorjé, Karmapa III karma  
   pa rang byung rdo rje  
 Raptén Künzang-pak rab brtan kun  
   bzang 'phags  
 Rasa ra sa  
 Ratnabhadra ra tna bha dra  
 Rebkong reb kong/skong  
 Red Mausoleum bang so dmar po  
 Red Palace (of the Potala) pho brang  
   dmar po  
 Red Rock, Mt. brag dmar

Relpachen *ral pa can*  
 Remdawa Zhönu Lodrö *red mda' ba*  
     *gzhon nu blo gros*  
 repa *ras pa*  
 Reting *rwa sgreng*  
 Reting Rinpoché *rwa sgreng rin po*  
     *che*  
 Reting Yeshé Tsültrim Gyeltsen *rwa*  
     *sgreng ye shes tshul khrims rgyal*  
     *mtshan*  
 Rhya Morhull Zhikhug *rhya mo rhull*  
     *bzhi khug*  
 rikné *rig gnas*  
 Rikpé Reldri *rig pa'i ral gri*  
 rimé *ris med*  
 Rinchen Dolma Taring *'phreng ring*  
     *rin chen sgrol ma*  
 Rinchen Zangpo *rin chen bzang po*  
 Rinpung(pa) *rin spungs (pa)*  
 Rölpe Dorjé, Karmapa IV *karma pa*  
     *rol pa'i rdo rje*  
 rong(pa) *rong (pa)*  
 Rongtön Sheja Künzi *rong ston shes*  
     *bya kun gzigs*  
 Rongzom Chözung *rong zom chos*  
     *bzang*  
 ru *ru*  
 rü *rus*  
 rulak *ru lag*  
 Rulekyé *ru las skye*  
 Sachen Kunga Nyingpo *sa chen kun*  
     *dga' snying po*  
 saga dawa *sa ga zla ba*  
 Saji village *sa dkyil*  
 Sakya(pa) *sa skya (pa)*  
 Sakya Pandita *sa skya paṇḍi ta*  
 samadrok *sa ma 'brog*  
 Samding *bsam lding*  
 Samdruptsé *bsam grub rtse*  
 Sampo *bsam pho*  
 Samyé *bsam yas*  
 Sandutsang *sa 'du tshang*  
 sang *bsang*  
 sanggyé *sangs rgyas*  
 Sanggyé Gyatso *sangs rgyas rgya*

*mtsho*  
 Sanggyé Gyeltsen *sangs rgyas rgyal*  
     *mtshan*  
 Sanggyé Kargyel *sangs rgyas skar*  
     *rgyal*  
 Sanggyé Tönpa *sangs rgyas ston pa*  
 sangha *dge 'dun*  
 sang-ngak sarma *gsang sngags gsar*  
     *ma*  
 Sangpu *gsang phu*  
 sangtab *bsang thab*  
 Sautrantika *mdo sde pa*  
 Sé (clan) *se*  
 Secret Biography of the Sixth Dalai  
     Lama *tshangs dbyangs rgya*  
     *mtsho'i gsang rnam*  
 Semakar *sad mar kar*  
 Sera *se ra*  
 Serdok Panchen *gser mdog paṇ chen*  
 serkhyim *ser khyim*  
 Serko Monastery *gser khog dgon*  
 Serta *gser rta*  
 Setsen Khungtaiji *se chen khung ta'i ji*  
 Shachung *bya khyung*  
 Shakabpa *zhwa sgab pa*  
 Shakhyi *sha khyi/khri*  
 Shakyamuni *shākya thub pa*  
 Shampo, the god of Yar *yar lha sham*  
     *po*  
 shang (cymbal) *gshang*  
 Shang (valley) *shangs*  
 Shangpa Kagyü *shangs pa bka'*  
     *brgyud*  
 Shantarakshita *zhi ba 'tsho*  
 Shen *gshen*  
 Shenchen Luga *gshen chen klu dga'*  
 Sherpa *shar pa*  
 Shigatsé *gzhis ka rtse*  
 Shira-ordo *zi ra 'ur rdo*  
 Shrisimha College *shri simha'i bshad*  
     *grwa*  
 Shuksep Jetsünma *shugs gseb rje*  
     *btsun ma*  
 Shüpu (clan) *shud bu*  
 Sikkim *'bras mo ljongs*

- sikyong *srid skyong*  
 silbü dü *sil bu'i dus*  
 Situ Pañchen *si tu pañ chen*  
 Smritijñāna *smṛi ti dznyā na*  
 sok *srog*  
 Solu valley *gshong rong*  
 Solu-Khumbu *shar khum bu*  
 Sonam Chötso *bsod nams chos mtsho*  
 Sonam Dargyé *bsod nams dar rgyas*  
 Sonam Gyatso, Dalai Lama III *rgyal  
ba bsod nams rgya mtsho*  
 Sonam Rapten *bsod nams rab brtan*  
 Sonam Tsemo *bsod nams rtse mo*  
 Songtsen Gampo *strong btsan sgam  
po*  
 sowa rikpa *gso ba rig pa*  
 Sukhavati *bde ba can*  
 Sumpa *sum pa*  
 Sumpa Khenpo *sum pa mkhan po*  
 Sutra *mdo*  
 Suzhou *sug cu*  
 Tabo monastery *ta pho dgon pa*  
 Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen *tā'i si tu  
byang chub rgyal mtshan*  
 Tai Situ Rinpoché *tā'i si tu rin po che*  
 Taintless Light (Commentary) *'grel  
pa dri med 'od*  
 Takbu Nyazi *stag bu gnya' gzigs*  
 Takdra Rinpoché *stag brag rin po che*  
 Takkyawo, Lord of Zingpo *zing po  
rje stag skya bo*  
 taklo dezar chenpo *stag lo sde gzar  
chen po*  
 Taklung *stag lung*  
 takri *stag ri*  
 Taksé *stag tsher*  
 Tale of the Cycle of Birth and  
 Death *skye shi 'khor lo'i lo rgyus*  
 tamak [Tamang] *rta dmag*  
 tamka *ṭam ka*  
 Tanak in Jé *rjed rta nag*  
 tang *thang*  
 Tangla *thang lha*  
 Tangpoché *thang po che*  
 Tangtong Gyelpo *thang stong rgyal  
po*  
 tanka *thang ka*  
 Tantra of the Wheel of Time *dus  
'khor rgyud*  
 Tara *sgrol ma*  
 Taranatha *tā ra nā tha, sgrol ma'i  
mgon po*  
 Tarap *rta rab*  
 Tarthang Tulku *dar thang sprul sku*  
 Tatsak Ngawang Pelden *rta tshag  
ngag dbang dpal*  
 ta-u *rta 'ul*  
 tawa *lta ba*  
 Tawang *rta dbang*  
 tekchen *theg chen*  
 tendzin chöki gyelpo *bstan 'dzin chos  
kyi rgyal po*  
 Tengkür *bstan 'gyur*  
 tenpa chidar *bstan pa phyi dar*  
 Tenpa Tsering *brtan pa tshe ring*  
 Tenpé Wangchuk, Panchen Lama  
 VIII *pañ chen bstan pa'i dbang  
phyug*  
 Tenzin Gyatso, Dalai Lama  
 XIV *rgyal ba bcu bzhi pa bstan  
'dzin rgya mtsho*  
 terchö *gter chos*  
 Terdrom *gter sgrom*  
 terma *gter ma*  
 tertön *gter ston*  
 Testament of Ba *sba bzhed*  
 Testament of Wa *dba' bzhed*  
 Til College *mtsil grwa tshang*  
 Tisé, glacial mountain *gangs ti se*  
 tishri (Ch. dishi) *ti shri*  
 Toghon Temür *tho kan thu mur*  
 tokcha *thog lcags*  
 Toling *tho ling, mtho lding*  
 tong *stong*  
 Tong (clan) *stong*  
 tongdé *stong sde*  
 tongnyi *stong nyid*  
 tongpön *stong dpon*  
 Tönmi Sambhota *thon mi sambho ṭa*  
 Tönpa Shenrap *ston pa gshen rab*

- torma *gtor ma*  
 Trachi *dra phyi*  
 Trak clan *bkrags rabs*  
 Trakmar *brag dmar*  
 Tramdruk *khra 'brug*  
 Trangpo *'phrang po*  
 Trashī Lhünpo *bkra shis lhun po*  
 Trashī Pelchen *bkra shis dpal chen*  
 Trashī Raptan *bkra shis rab brtan*  
 Trashī Tseringma *bkra shis tshe ring ma*  
 Trashigön *bkra shis mgon*  
 Trashī-ö *bkra shis 'od*  
 Treasury of Instructions *gdams ngag mdzod*  
 Treasury of Knowledge *shes bya mdzod*  
 trelpa *khral pa*  
 Trenka Pelgi Yönten *bran ka dpal gyi yon tan*  
 Tri Desongtsen *khri lde srong btsan*  
 Tri Detsuktsen *khri lde gtsug btsan*  
 Tri Düsong *khri 'dus srong*  
 Tri Namdé Ösung *khri gnam lde 'od srung*  
 Tri Nyaktri Tsenpo *khri nyag khri btsan po*  
 Tri Pel Khordé *khri dpal 'khor lde*  
 Tri Pel Song-ngé *khri dpal srong nge*  
 Tri Pelkortsan *khri dpal 'khor btsan*  
 Tri Relpachen *khri ral pa can*  
 Tri Songdetsen *khri srong lde'u btsan*  
 Tri Tashi Tsekpapel *khri bkra shis rtseg pa dpal*  
 Trimön *khri smon*  
 Trinlé Gyatso, Dalai Lama XII *rgyal ba phrin las rgya mtsho*  
 Tripitaka *sde snod gsum*  
 tripön *khri dpon*  
 Tritsé *khri rtse*  
 Tritsün *khri btsun*  
 trom *khrom*  
 trülku *sprul sku*  
 Trülning Temple *'phrul snang gtsug lag khang*  
 Tsalana Yeshé Gyeltsen *tsha la na ye shes rgyal mtshan*  
 Tsami Sanggyé Drakpa *rtsa mi sangs rgyas grags pa*  
 tsampa *rtsam pa*  
 Tsang *gtsang*  
 Tsang Rapsel *gtsang rab gsal*  
 Tsangma *gtsang ma*  
 Tsangpa *gtsang pa*  
 Tsangpa Gyaré *gtsang pa rgya ras*  
 Tsangpo *gtsang po*  
 Tsangyang Gyatso, Dalai Lama VI *rgyal ba drug pa tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho*  
 Tsaparang *tsha pa rang*  
 Tsari *tsā ri*  
 Tsarong *tsha rong*  
 Tsé Podrang *rtse pho brang*  
 tsé *tshe*  
 Tsechu Temple in Paro *spa gro tshes bcu lha khang*  
 tshedrup *tshe sgrub*  
 Tseling Jampel Tsültrim Gyatso *tshe gling 'jam dpal tshul khrims rgya mtsho*  
 Tselpa *tshal pa*  
 Tsemönling *tshe smon gling*  
 Tsenpo *btsan po*  
 tsépo *btsad po*  
 Tsepongza *tshe spong bza'*  
 tsering *tshe ring*  
 Tsering Trashī *tshe ring bkra shis*  
 Tsetang *rtse thang*  
 tsokdü chenpo *tshogs 'du chen po*  
 Tsoktu Taiji *chog tu han*  
 Tsongkha *tsong kha*  
 Tsongkhapa Lozang Drakpa *tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa*  
 tsuk *gtsug*  
 tsuklak *gtsug lag*  
 Tsültrim Gyatso, Dalai Lama X *rgyal ba tshul khrims rgya mtsho*  
 Tsurpu *mtshur phu*  
 Tujé Chenpo *thugs rje chen po*  
 Tujé Nyima *thugs rje nyi ma*  
 tujé sempa *thugs rje sems dpa'*

Tuken Chöki Nyima *thu'u bkwan*  
*chos kyi nyi ma*

Tümed *thu med*

tummo *gtum mo*

Tupten Gyatso, Dalai Lama

XIII *rgyal ba thub bstan rgya*  
*mtsho*

Turquoise Light *g.yu 'od 'bum me*  
*tusi thu'u si*

Two Fascicle Lexicon *sgra sbyor bam*  
*po gnyis pa*

Ü *dbus*

Uddiyana *o rgyan*

Üdumten *u'i dum brtan*

Üdumtsen *u'i dum btsan*

ulag *'u lag*

uma *dbu ma*

Urgyen *u rgyan*

uru *dbu ru*

Uru zhé lhakhang *dbu ru zhwa'i lha*  
*khang*

Ü-Tsang *dbus gtsang*

Vaibhashika *bye brag smra ba*

Vairochana (buddha) *rnam par snang*  
*mdzad*

Vairochana (translator) *be ro tsa na*

Vaishravana *rnam thos sras*

Vajrayogini *rdo rje rnal 'byor ma*

Vikramashila *rnam gnon tshul*

Vimalamitra *bi ma mi tra, dri med*  
*bshes gnyen*

Vinaya *'dul ba*

wang *dbang*

Wencheng, princess of *mun sheng*  
*kong co*

White Lustre (form of Pehar) *'od ldan*  
*dkar po*

White Palace (of the Potala) *pho*  
*brang dkar po*

Wra *dbra*

Wutaishan *ri bo rtse lnga*

Xining *zi ling*

Xixia ("Western Xia") *mi nyag*

yabzhi *yab gzhis*

Yadong *ya grong*

yak *g.yag*

Yamdruk Tso *ya 'brog mtsho*

yang *g.yang*

Yangdak Heruka *yang dag he ru ka*

Yangpachen *yangs pa can*

Yar river *yar chu*

Yarlung (valley) *yar lung*

Yarlung Tsangpo River *yar klung*  
*gtsang po*

Yatsé *ya tse*

Yazang Kagyü *g.ya' bzang bka'*  
*brgyud*

Yazang(pa) *g.ya' bzang (pa)*

Yemön Gyelpo *ye smon rgyal po*

yeru *g.yas ru*

Yeshé Gyatso *ye shes rgya mtsho*

Yeshé Tsogyel *ye shes mtsho rgyal*

Yeshé-ö *ye shes 'od*

yiktsang *yig tshang*

Yo Gejung *g.yo dge 'byung*

Yogachara *rnal 'byor spyod pa*

Yogatantra *rnal 'byor rgyud*

yönchö *yon mchod*

Yongle *yung lo*

Yongsongdé *yong strong sde*

Yönten Gyatso, Dalai Lama IV *rgyal*  
*ba bzhi pa yon tan rgya mtsho*

Yönten Gyatso, lord of the  
 doctrine (*jo nang*) *chos rje yon tan*  
*rgya mtsho*

yoru *g.yo ru*

yüllha *yul lha*

Yumbu Lagang *yum bu bla sgang*

Yumten *yum brtan*

Yungdrung-gyel *g.yung drung rgyal*

Yutok *g.yu thog*

Yutok Yönten Gönpö *g.yu thog yon*  
*tan mgon po*

Zanabazar *dznyā na ba dzra*

Zangskar *zangs skar*

zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel *zhabs*  
*drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal*

zhag *bzhag*

Zhalu Zangpo *zha lu bzang po*

Zhalu(pa) *zhwa lu (pa)*

Zhamar Chödrak Yeshé *zhwa dmar*  
*chos grags ye shes*

Zhamar(pa) *zhwa dmar (pa)*

Zhang Trizur Ramshag *zhang khri*  
*zur ram shag*

Zhang Yudrakpa *zhang g.yu brag pa*

zhanglön *zhang blon*

Zhangzhung *zhang zhung*

Zhao Erfeng *kra'o er hpheng*

zhaser *zhwa ser*

zheldam *zhal gdams*

zhentong *gzhan stong*

Zhijé *zhi byed*

zhing *zhing*

zhingpa *zhing pa*

Zhingshakpa *zhing shags pa*

Zhiwa-ö *zhi ba 'od*

zho *zho*

Zhöl *zhol*

Zhotö Tidro *zho stod ti sgro*

zhotön *zho ston*

Zhuchen Tsültrim Rinchen *zhu chen*  
*tshul khrims rin chen*

zhungzhi *gzhung gzhis*

zi *gzigs*

zorik *bzo rig*

Zotang *zo thang*

Zunghar *jung gar*

Zurchungpa *zur chung pa*



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The present bibliography follows the general outline of the book. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but offers an essential guide to reading in contemporary Tibetan studies. To save space, no title is listed more than once, though some of the works mentioned do in fact address topics discussed in a number of chapters. As the present book is intended primarily for the benefit of anglophone readers I have emphasized English-language works, but have also included important titles in other languages, particularly when there are not suitable sources available in English. Many of the books here referred to contain excellent bibliographies that can serve as the basis for further research in their respective areas. Before turning to the outline, however, a few contributions to the general study of Tibet may be noted:

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In addition to these, Alex McKay, ed. 2003. *The History of Tibet*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, volumes 1–3, provides a useful collection of more than a hundred previously published articles, many of which address in considerable detail topics discussed in Chapters 2–5 and 9 of the present work. Among the recent general histories written in Tibetan, the following are particularly noteworthy:

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## Chapter 1 The Vessel and Its Contents

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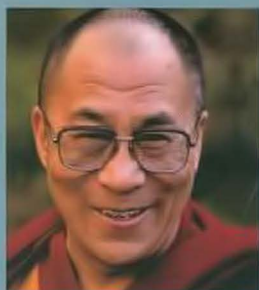
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