4 The Tibetan Nation

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4.1 National Characteristics

[46] The Tibetan nation consists of distinct groups, ranging from city dwellers and rural villagers to traders and nomads. It is difficult to determine if these different types had a common or unique character from the beginning. Yet, according to my recent observations, their dispositions vary because of the influences of the environment. For example, urban dwellers tend to be far more cunning than rural villagers. Traders, in turn, demonstrate a level of cunning that is several hundred times greater than that of nomads. Villagers may sometimes be more deceitful than nomads, but traders almost always succeed in outwitting both urban and rural populations. Among all, the most cunning and deceitful are the politicians in power. By contrast, the simplest and most honest of all are the nomadic herders of the untamed lands. The national character is originally the same. These distorted and peculiar traits arise only from differing environmental factors.

Let me illustrate this point with an anecdote. When I first visited Xikang, I befriended a member of a nomadic clan in Golok. His character was exceptionally honest and steadfast, distinguished by bravery and integrity. He accepted every task that was entrusted to him, regardless of its scale or importance, with earnest dedication. He never hesitated nor ever delayed in acting. He consistently behaved with sincerity. There were no hidden intentions influencing his thoughts or actions. Was he not the very definition of a noble and loyal friend? However, after arriving in Lhasa, he had to rely on earning a profit to make ends meet. When his fellow countrymen arrived in Lhasa for the first time, they were, naturally, even more taken

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aback than a country mother stepping into a vibrant city for the first time. The complexity of silver pricing in Lhasa, combined with the sheer variety of goods for sale, created a confusing world for them. The items showcased on the streets and within the stores left them bewildered. They were unable to distinguish between the various objects, much less figure out their uses. With some change in their pockets, they were easily drawn to buy whatever items caught their eye. **[47]** Consequently, whenever they decided to explore the shops in Lhasa on their own, the women at the street stalls would inevitably overcharge them. They only recognized the deception after facing repeated instances of exploitation – each with varying degrees of severity – which drove them to look for ways to address the situation. They had no choice but to bring along a familiar fellow countryman for their next shopping trip. Yet their inherently distrustful nature led them to always hold back full trust in their companions, no matter how familiar they were with them. Therefore, even as they sought for aid, they remained on guard and filled with apprehension. In the end, they could only solicit your assistance, but they were never able to fully entrust the buying process to another person. If you took the lead in making purchases for them, they might question whether you had paid too much or even start to feel resentful. Hence, I found their behavior to be fairly amusing.

On occasions, they turned to my friend for help. At first, he offered his support out of loyalty, expecting nothing in return. However, as the number of requests increased over time, the burden became overwhelming and at times even disrupted his ability to make a living. Pressed by these circumstances, he underwent a shift in his mindset: he began to earn money by guiding their buying process. His approach involved entering a shop alongside his fellow countrymen, where he would first negotiate an agreement with the shop owner in fluent Lhasa dialect, ensuring he received a commission for acting as the intermediary. The shop owners naturally had no reason to protest – after all, *the wool is shorn from the sheep's back*:[1] any extra expenses were transferred to the buyer, and a profitable sale was always appreciated.

Over time, he got to know almost all the shops in Lhasa. They acknowledged him as a sales agent – effectively an unpaid promoter for their businesses – and valued him greatly, placing trust in him. In the end, he **[48]** progressed to a new level by devising a different strategy. Initially, he would acquire goods from various shops, settle on a fixed price, retain any excess from transactions, and bring back items that did not sell. In this manner, he quietly took on the role of a broker for many shops. He conveyed to his fellow countrymen that he had purchased the items for his own use, extolling their superior quality and exquisite craftsmanship. Even though the price was high, he maintained that the items were a bargain. His countrymen, always believing that others were securing better deals, began to covet these goods upon hearing his praises. Wealthy buyers sought to acquire the items at the rate he proposed. At first, he acted as if he was reluctant. But he knew the temperament of the people from Golok all too well. The harder he fought against selling, the stronger their urge to buy became. Only after many of his countrymen stepped in did he begin to agree, ultimately securing both profit and prestige.

1 Here, Fazun uses the idiomatic sentence, *yangmao zongshi chuzai yangshen shang* 羊毛總是出在羊身上.

He was exceptionally skilled at handling his own people. His ability of reading the temperaments of his countrymen were so remarkable that I often found myself standing by, marveling at his shrewdness. I admit I found his ability quite impressive. Still, I was also taken aback by how quickly he had transformed. He used to be such a simple and loyal nomad, yet in a span of fewer than three years in Lhasa, he had turned into a cunning and shrewd character. Is this not undeniable evidence of the significant impact that a person's environment can have on them?

In summary, Tibetan nationals are distinguished by a resolute, brave, and decisive character They view strangers with a degree of suspicion and caution, yet once they become familiar, they show themselves to be dependable and trustworthy. The innate loyalty and purity found especially among the nomadic tribes are most endearing. Individuals in positions of authority, despite sharing comparable traits and profound religious devotion, are influenced by their surroundings to employ various cunning tactics in both mindset and method. Their inherent nature and religious convictions drive them to be earnest and zealous **[49]** in overseeing monastic affairs. However, in legal conflicts, decisions are made only after officials have received sufficient bribes. Consequently, legal cases in Tibet frequently extend for years without reaching a resolution. As a result, both the plaintiffs and the defendants find themselves unable to cope with the pressure and ultimately regret their involvement. This strange occurrence is indeed unique to Tibet. Yet, for a nation as fierce as the Tibetans, such practices serve to avert countless disputes.

By and large, the Tibetan nation retains its primal character: they venerate rulers, obey superiors, endure oppression, exploit the vulnerable, prioritize petty gains over broader principles, possess rudimentary knowledge, are easily manipulated, and also covet wealth, incline toward plunder, withstand ice and snow, persevere through hardships, cherish communal bonds, charge forward without hesitation, and have a fearless attitude toward death! Such is the exceptional spirit of the Tibetan nation.

4.2 Family

Influenced by their geographical location and productive factors, the Tibetan nation is divided into two primary segments: farmers and nomads. Due to their inability to achieve self-sufficiency and their relentless quest for surplus, merchants are active throughout the year and trade across their borders. The administration of their government and religious institutions, along with the requirement for maintaining public safety, leads to a central authority managing Tibet as a whole in conjunction with local officials scattered across various regions. Certain officials report directly to the Tibetan government, whereas others operate autonomously as local chieftains. In order to defend its territory, the Tibetan government recruits tens of thousands of civilians to serve in the military. Let me take a moment to summarize the social strata found within these groups: –

The farming communities reside primarily in regions characterized by valleys. Their financial status varies considerably, but the majority are living in poverty **[50]**. Typically, these impoverished households consist of two parents raising a number of children. They take on temporary labor whenever work opportunities arise. When things are quieter, they tend to

small plots of land, gather firewood and dung, or serve as household workers for prosperous traders. Those who possess a bit more wealth engage in small trading ventures to maintain their daily needs. Such households are a bitter prison. The wives establish a set of soft chains, linking one another in a way that reinforces their unity. In around eight or nine out of ten prosperous families, polyandry is prevalent. Usually, large household will have a number of smaller units attached to them, either as tenant farmers or servants. The majority of these wealthy families are engaged in trade. Some brothers do not always remain at home to keep an eye on things. Some of them spend years away from home engaged in trade, but there are others who leave permanently. Only the women are left in the households to handle and manage affairs.

The nomadic nationals have no stable residence. They generally migrate to the highlands in the summer and autumn, then descent to lower grounds during the winter and spring months. Their households do not have permanent structures. They create fabric by weaving yak hair into thick, coarse black threads similar to rush wicks, measuring around a *chi* 尺 in width[2] and more than a *zhang* 丈 in length.[3] These fabric segments are then connected to build semi-woolen tents. As night falls, everyone in the household, regardless of how many there are, sleep together in the same space. Larger households might contain dozens of individuals, while smaller ones usually consist of four or five. Still, the majority adhere to a system of polyandry where a single wife has several husbands. In households with multiple spouses, the distribution is determined according to custom. It is not uncommon for women to take in husbands to continue their family line. This practice extends beyond just nomadic nationals; it is also prevalent among farmers, traders, soldiers, administrators, and among prominent families of the Tibetan government as well.

There are two categories of traders. The first category encompasses those who conduct business from a stable location, where their households might participate in farming, herding, or be entirely devoted to commercial endeavors. Such households often feature wives who are legally married or private concubines, all of whom give birth to several children. Those who travel for trade are often financially better off and support their original families back home, yet they tend to establish secondary family units where they conduct business for extended periods **[51]**. These traders must also support employees and maintain a residence. The two families function as a cohesive whole, as long as there are no disagreements with the original family. Yet, in cases where disputes occur, the common resolution is to establish two separate households. Additionally, women in Tibet are not constrained by conventional notions of modesty. Not only can they have several husbands, but they might also pursue several romantic partners or have affairs with servants, which is fairly common. It is also common for unwed women to deliver their babies at home without incurring any shame or punishment from their relatives. It has been brought to my attention that such customs also exist in Japan, although I am unable to authenticate this claim.

2 The equivalent of 1 Republican-period *chi* is 33.3 cm, or 13.12 inches.

3 1 Republican-period *zhang* equals to 3.2 meters, or 3.5 yards.

Although military conscription exists in Tibet, wealthy families commonly recruit substitutes to fulfill their service obligations. As a result, a significant number of soldiers originate from poor backgrounds. My knowledge of their original families is limited, yet they frequently establish makeshift families at their stations, where they cohabit with a woman of comparable standing and settle into a modest earthen dwelling. This is what constitutes a soldier's household.

The household of a chieftain is comparable to a miniature imperial household, where all affairs are concentrated under their control. Chieftains can be found among both men and women. The commoners subjected to them are like lambs in their households. Throughout the busy farming seasons, they require the commoners to plow the fields, sow the seeds, mow the grass, and harvest the crops. Failing to respond to the chieftain's invitation even once can bring about harsh penalties for the commoners. The people who serve in their household are also drawn from the general populace, and they take turns fulfilling their duties. Those who reside in their household, including men, women, and people of all ages, hardly ever concern themselves with these matters. The management of property and the settlement of civil disputes are often placed in the hands of a few distinguished families among the commoners who are regarded as fit for these roles. In cases of great significance, the chieftain takes direct action. As a result, the chieftain's stewards often hold considerable power, relegating the chieftain to a mere **[52]** figurehead. Such practices are standard among the chieftains of the Xikang region. While most chieftains delegate tasks, there are also a handful of competent chieftains who oversee everything on their own, but they are the exception.

Scattered officials can be classified into two distinct groups. The first group comprises monastics, whose domestic setup can hardly be referred to as a household. They employ a handful of servants to take care of minor public duties, which allows them to devote the rest of their time to religious pursuits, including chanting, meditating, hiking in the mountains, or sitting by the streams in contemplation. With a small number of dependents in their household and minimal living expenses, they are always accommodated with extra vacant rooms wherever they take on an official role. When their period of service is over, they are once again left with nothing. Some of them are able to gather wealth, purchase homes, or engage others to run a small business. Yet, such entanglements often create self-inflicted complications, a phenomenon I have repeatedly witnessed in Tibet. The second kind of scattered officials consists of laypeople. These home-dwelling scattered officials originate from substantial backgrounds. Candidates for these roles either descend from ancestors who held prestigious positions or have themselves amassed considerable wealth – both of which are prerequisites for securing such appointments. The way they manage their household resembles that of a senior official of a similar status. Upon taking office, however, they generally come with only one wife and manage a few servants, without any additional entourage.

The households of Tibet's eminent authorities stand out with an imposing aura. Under the Tibetan system, high-ranking officials receive large official residences, several dozen *qing* 頃[4] of land, and control over the local

4 One *qing* equals to roughly 6.67 hectares, or 16.47 acres.

populace. Within these official mansions, they maintain wives, young lords, unmarried daughters, and daughters-in-law, all of whom necessitate a large number of servants. Various wealth stewards are in charge of finances, while land managers handle farming estates. While the lord is away fulfilling his official duties, the wealth stewards and land managers take on the most prominent roles of authority. It is common for these positions to be filled by siblings or trusted relatives. In Tibet, women hold great power, while men frequently find themselves under their influence. Men who become sons-in-law, particularly when they marry into their wife's family, frequently experience being sidelined and replaced **[53]** by new husbands. The situation is even more evident in Xikang. Moreover, members of the Tibetan nation have a strong sense of class distinction. When a son from an upper-class family has an affair with a woman from a lower-class family, his clan and relatives regard it as a stain on the family's honor, as if it had compromised the sanctity of their home. Conversely, when a woman from an upper-class family has a romantic connection with a man of lower status, the disdain is often less severe. In cases where wealthy households engage in illicit relations, they may merge into a single household or takeover another family's home. Such events are relatively common among Tibet's elites. Indeed, a number of these occurrences have come to our attention lately!

Allow me to briefly outline their approach to dividing families. I have not directly observed the manner in which high-ranking officials in the administration separate their families. However, it has come to my attention that, by means of intermediaries among relatives and friends, a portion of the principal estate or wealth is distributed as a living allowance for individuals who are being separated. When farmers divide their households, they need to split their farms, homes, and land. Traders typically divide their goods and accounts. Only in the case of nomads, the division is quite comprehensive, including cattle, horses, sheep, dogs, and even tents, cooking pots, and buckets. Even the collected fuel, which is usually desiccated animal dung, is also distributed uniformly. If parents are alive when their children establish separate households, the parents assign a tent and a few heads of livestock according to their preference, with little to no competition involved. For nomadic households, when a family member reaches adulthood and subsequently dies, it is common for the relatives to use the deceased's legitimate share of belongings to perform meritorious deeds that help them release from suffering. This practice is especially prevalent in the Golok region. However, among the people of Lhasa, when someone dies, they just die. While their family might make monetary offerings to accumulate merit, they do so only to a limited extent. There is never a situation where their rightful portion is used entirely for this purpose. This reflects the difference in mindset between urban dwellers and nomads. Another factor that contributes to the separation of households is monogamy. Nevertheless, given the widespread nature of polyandry, **[54]** cases of family separation are exceedingly rare!

4.3 Daily Life

In discussing daily life – the everyday activities and sustenance of Tibetan nationals – this, too, requires a perspective that incorporates their family systems. Let me offer a portrait of a large Tibetan farming household. The family consists of an elderly mother, two brothers, a daughter-in-law, three sisters, three children, around seven or eight servants, and also two lamas who are regularly engaged in chanting the scriptures. The family not only engages in farming but also raises several dairy cattle for milk and butter production. The structure in which they live resembles a fortress, complete with encircling outer walls and a large gate on one side. The buildings, which have two stories, surround a central courtyard, with all windows facing inward. A series of houses is positioned in both horizontal and vertical orientations within the courtyard, forming the shape of the Chinese character *tian* 田, thereby partitioning the space into four distinct smaller courtyards. The flat roof serves as a threshing floor in autumn.

The firstborn son manages the domestic affairs, the second son engages in trade, and the daughter-in-law oversees the storeroom. The sisters likewise hold a great deal of influence. The elderly mother, in her later years, enjoys a life of abundance, either reciting the *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ* mantra or delighting in the company of her grandchildren. The eldest sister supervises the servants. Her temperament is notably harsh, and she regularly appears to be chastising her underlings with a whip. The second sister, who is both loyal and conscientious, assists the maids in organizing kitchen tasks. The youngest sister tends to retreat to the shrine room during her spare time to chant the scriptures.

Over the course of my months living with the family, I observed the patterns of their daily life. Each day before sunrise, the maids would brew tea, pour it into assorted pots, distribute them around the household, position each pot on a brazier, and shield them with old cloths to preserve the warmth of the tea. Soon after, the eldest sister could be heard in the courtyard calling for the servants to get up and have some tea. At that moment, the distinct noise of milking resonated from the ground floor, specifically in the part where the cows were fastened. I am a monk, and so I too would rise, wash my face, rinse my mouth, and then take my seat, sipping tea slowly while I chanted the scriptures. The **[55]** lamas in the nearby protector deity shrine also began reciting their prayers at a similar pace. The young servants, having sipped several bowls of tea and enjoyed a bowl of tsampa – barley flour that has been roasted – would go downstairs to let the cows roam and graze. The older servants savored their tea and attended to several small tasks in the courtyard, while the maids molded flat cakes from cow dung and attached them to the wall to dry for use as fuel later. Afterward, the siblings would gather in a room to have tea and engage in conversation, each with their own distinct teapot, while they all enjoyed tsampa from a shared container.

Among Tibetan nationals, there is a clear disparity in the way they are treated. Even in one household, the tea they drink is separated into different tiers of quality. The butter that is employed for churning the tea can also differ in both its freshness and the amount used, depending on the person. The type of tsampa they eat differs significantly as well. The head of the household eats the finest white barley, which is washed, roasted, and ground. This quality is also used to entertain esteemed guests. Next, the

lower-quality black barley is processed without washing or sorting – it often contains numerous small stones and grains of sand – before it is subjected to roasting and grinding. The ordinary members of this household consumed this kind, and it was also offered to regular visitors. For the servants, there is then the tsampa made from a mixture of barley and peas. Finally, the tsampa of the lowest quality, which is made purely from peas, is the primary staple eaten by the servants and given to beggars. In that household, the allocation of food followed a structured hierarchy. Every morning at sunrise, the servants would collect containers of tsampa from each area and placed them at the entrance of the storehouse. The daughter-in-law apportioned a day's supply of tsampa based on the rank of each person.

Butter was handed out in a similar fashion. The servants later brought the containers back to where they originally belonged. Throughout the quiet winter months, the servants took on small tasks like twisting wool into rope, while the maids spun yarn from wool to weave fabric for the servants' clothing. Remarkably, men employed as servants often demonstrated superior skills in stitching clothes than women did. They consumed tea all day long; this was a regular routine for them. As midday drew near, they consumed another serving of tsampa, although this meal was not the same as what they had for breakfast. In Xikang, many would start their day by either licking dry **[56]** tsampa or mixing it with water to form a thin porridge, just to satisfy their hunger. The midday meal was accompanied by side dishes – fresh or cured meats, yogurt pastries, and an assortment of vegetables. Some also chose to have steamed buns in place of tsampa during lunch, which added a new twist to their routine.

The afternoons, when not occupied with chores, were usually spent enjoying friendly talks or visiting neighbors. As dusk approached, the herders then guided the livestock, including cattle and sheep, homeward. The maids once more would take care of the milking process. When a sufficient quantity of milk was stored in a large wooden barrel, they then employed a long wooden stick to churn it, resulting in the formation of butter. The process involved pouring the milk into leacher bags or ceramic butter-making vessels, which were then rolled on the ground to facilitate butter separation. The leftover curds were either made into cheese, dried into curd cakes, or fed to the calves, without a specific procedure in place. They generally went to sleep at around nine or ten in the evening – such was their daily routine.

Once the ground began to thaw in the second and third months, the pace of activity slowly picked up. When the sun began to rise, a servant would make their way to the rooftop and call out to the scattered tenant farmers, gathering them to ensure they fulfilled their duties of tilling the landlord's fields. The landlord supplied meals for the tenants, but there were restrictions on their consumption – the tenants were advised not to overindulge. Following their morning tea, everyone headed out to the fields to begin plowing. When every plot of land had been tilled, the time for sowing arrived. The task of sowing seeds was primarily carried out by women, particularly the family leader – in this household the eldest sister, with the third sister. The method involved an ox-drawn plow carving a deep furrow ahead, followed by the sower who deposited the seeds. During the plow's return pass, the old furrow was covered, a new one was created, and new seeds were sown. After all the seeds were distributed in the soil, they

enjoyed a period of rest. This represented an ideal time to assemble food supplies and grind tsampa.

By the fifth or the sixth month, when the sprouts had reached roughly a foot in height and weeds were beginning to proliferate, the labor of weeding started – again, this task was mainly carried out by the women. Every morning, a servant would ascend to the rooftop to summon the tenant **[57]** women, urging them to fulfill their weeding duties for the landlord. When the area of land was large and the number of laborers was small, weeding took place once a year; however, if the land was smaller and there were more workers, it happened twice a year. During this phase, every woman in the household was fully occupied, either contributing to the labor or overseeing the tasks. After the weeding was done, another period of rest began.

Affluent households usually took advantage of this period to host their tenant farmers on green pastures, where they offered exquisite food and beverage while entertaining friends and family for leisure. At the same time, they evaluated the physical condition of the tenants and their readiness for military action. The length of these celebrations was variable – lasting anywhere from three to five days and even extending beyond that at times. Certain gatherings extended for more than a month and featured horse races and theatrical performances. Indeed, they regarded these gatherings as their most joyous and serene celebrations.

As autumn arrived and the wheat was fully grown, tenant farmers found themselves again needing to harvest the fields of their landlords ahead of their own. They got up before dawn to take advantage of the moisture from the night, which helped minimize the loss of grain. Work paused at midday and resumed in the afternoon. Both men and women joined the reaping of crops, rushing to finish the harvest ahead of impending hailstorms that could damage their yield. Hailstorms are common in Tibet during autumn. Their severity increases notably when the wheat takes on a golden color. The people of Tibet attribute these hailstorms to powerful spirits that destroy the crops to draw out their vital energy. After being harvested, the wheat was laid out on rooftops to allow it to dry. Once it was dried, the grains were threshed by hand, cleaned by the breeze, and then placed in storage. This was a time when tenant farmers received several days of feasting to celebrate the bountiful yield for the year. As described above, larger farming households follow this cycle. Farmers with smaller plots, who work on land by others, are required to put in the effort for their landlords before they can attend to their own fields. When a household consists of many members, tasks can be shared among them. Although their meals, beverage, and daily routines are simpler than those of wealthier families, their lives are marked by a distinct, often chaotic rhythm.

To depict the life of nomadic nationals, I will now turn to a prominent household in Xikang. This family consisted of an elderly couple, three brothers – one of whom was an ordained monk, and the other two handled the family's affairs –, a daughter-in-law who was shared among the brothers, two sisters – one of whom was married –, four children, and more than ten servants. The family had an extensive collection of livestock, including over a hundred yaks,[5] more than **[58]** six hundred dri,[6] fifteen thousand sheep,

5 C. muniu 牡牛; T. g.yag. Here, Fazun specifies the male gender of the Tibetan bovine; male yak.

6 C. pinniu 牝牛; T. 'bri; the 'dri' is the female bovine; female yak.

a dozen horses, and five Tibetan mastiffs.[7] Moreover, they owned a set of three tents made from the hair of yaks. The largest tent measured around two *zhang* in height[8] and three *zhang* in width.[9] Inside, two wooden poles at both ends supported a thick rope made of yak hair, which extended well past the tent and was anchored securely into the ground. This rope constituted the tent's most crucial structural element. At the upper edge of the tent, extra yak-hair ropes were pulled tight, each supported by a wooden pole and anchored into the ground at a distance of two to three *zhang*.[10] The roof of the tent had a single skylight. Its dimensions matched the tent's width, and it had a width of about one *chi*.[11] This opening functioned to expel smoke and to allow light to filter in. It was the tent's only source of light, and when it was closed, the interior was cast into total darkness. A curtain fashioned from yak hair covered the skylight, attached at one end with stitches and anchored on the other with thin ropes. With the first light of day, the ropes were loosened, and a stick was used to open the curtain. In the evening, it was drawn close by hand. The skylight remained closed during storms. The entrance of the tent featured an unsewn gap at one end, complemented by extra fabric panels that allowed for a secure overlapping closure. The lower edges of the tent were anchored to the ground using wooden wedges, iron nails, or horns from cattle and goats. Encircling the inner perimeter of the tent was a low wall constructed from stones and dirt, with numerous layers of animal hide bags heaped above it. The gaps were sealed with a combination of cow dung and mud to keep out both wind and dust. The animal hide bags were filled with stored provisions – including barley, peas, and dried dairy products – reaching a total of more than two hundred units. Positioned above them were saddles, bridles, and dried meats.

A large stove, measuring about one *zhang* in length and three *chi* in width,[12] was built in the center of the tent. The stove was topped with three large cooking pots. Tiny gaps between them contained teapots and clay jars. Positioned to the right of the stove – on the left side as one entered – was the seat of the master, where the daughter-in-law and the maidservants carried out their tasks. This area housed a collection of tea barrels **[59]**, buckets for water, churns for butter, containers for milk, and a variety of cooking tools. Positioned to the left of the stove – on the right side as one entered – was the area designated for guests. Arranged along the tent's rear and lateral walls, cushions were arranged in front of low tables that designated the space reserved for guests. At the far end of the tent, there was a buddha shrine that reached the height of an average person. Numerous buddha statues

7 C. mangou 蠻狗; T. 'brog khyi. Fazun employs the sinograph *man* 蠻, meaning 'barbarous' or 'savage', a Chinese ethnonym that refers to Tibet. Fazun uses it here to render '*brog khyi* from Tibetan, literally 'herdman's dog', i.e., the Tibetan mastiff. In later passages, Fazun also uses *man* as a qualifier for Tibetan products such as salt and tea.

8 The equivalent of 2 Republican-era *zhang* is 6,4 meters, or 7 yards.

9 3 *zhang* measure nearly 10 meters, or just over 10 yards.

10 The length of the rope would be the equivalent to approximately 6.5 to 10 meters, or 7 to 10 yards.

11 33.3 cm, or 13.12 inches.

12 In the measurement system of the Republican period, one *zhang* is defined as 3.2 meters, or 3.5 yards, and one *chi* is equivalent to 33.33 centimeters, or 13.12 inches. Hence, the dimensions indicated by Fazun for the stove are close to 3.2 meters (10.5 feet) in length and 1.33 meters (4.4 feet) in width.

were enshrined upon it. Water bowls and butter lamps were also arranged before them as offerings. The altar was adorned with bells and drums that were specifically used for chanting.

In terms of their external structure, the two smaller tents were similar to the main one. Their furnishings inside were largely the same, but they were missing the large stove. Their low walls along the perimeter were stacked with sundry items. One tent accommodated the servants, whereas the other, maintained immaculately clean, welcomed more than a dozen lamas who had been invited to recite the scriptures. Situated at the rear of the tent was a separate buddha altar. Inside the niche of the shrine, there were numerous old bronze buddha statues, accompanied by more than a dozen recently gilded ones. In front of the niche, a row of roasted flour offerings was set up, adorned with multicolored butter sculptures. Several rows of cups, each containing one of the eight offerings, were arranged in front of the other offerings. Before these, there were also several rows of vessels with saffron-infused water, along with three large butter lamps.

The lamas took their place on the cushions on both sides of the shrine. On one occasion, I was among them. They were aware that, as a Han monk, I rarely performed scripture recitations for others. This time, however, it was out of a sense of social obligation, since they offered me exceptional courtesy. We made it there at about seven or eight in the morning, and their whole family came out from a distance to welcome us. It was summer. The grass beneath our feet felt like a dense, vibrant green felt carpet. It was dotted with bright wildflowers. The blades of grass were still wet with morning dew, and as the first rays of sunlight rose over the mountains, they cast a radiant glow across the landscape, resembling a wide blue floral rug scattered with **[60]** pearls and jade – a truly delightful sight. Spotting visitors from far away, their burly mastiffs erupted into furious barking. With all their might, their bodies fought against the thick yak-hair ropes in a fierce struggle.

The older member of the family wore a fur coat that lacked an external lining, featuring a blue fabric strip along its edge. When fully opened, the coat could wrap three or four people and measured four to five *chi* in length.[13] In order to wear their long coats, they begin by placing the collar over their head, inserting both arms into the broad sleeves, and then pulling the lower half upward until the hem reaches the knees or a *chi* lower.[14] A horizontal belt is securely fastened around the waist. The top half is then pulled down to forms a large pouch that envelopes the torso, capable of storing everyday necessities – remarkably, even two lambs can fit inside without any noticeable bulging. Their custom involves keeping the right arm bare for ease of work. Still, upon meeting a person worthy of respect, they pull the right sleeve from the back and let it rest over the right shoulder, hanging across the chest to cover the right arm. They then bow slightly, stick out their tongue, and used the right hand to tug at the hair around their temples – this constitutes their gesture of profound respect.[15]

13 In the Republican-era system of measurement, a length of four to five *chi* corresponds to approximately 1.33 to 1.67 meters, or 4.4 to 5.5 feet.

14 See above. One *chi* is 33.33 centimeters, or 13.12 inches.

15 Here, Fazun describes but does not explain the Tibetan custom of sticking out one's tongue as a form of greeting. According to tradition, this custom traces back to the time of King Langdarma. A well-known tale describes Langdarma as having sinister, otherworldly features:

As soon as we arrived, the elderly mother went to hush the barking mastiffs. Her two sons followed their father in greeting us. The daughters-in-law and their younger sisters pulled back the tent flap to let us come in. A group of four lively and innocent little ones scampered around us. The second child, who seemed to be roughly seven or eight years old, had a particularly spirited and endearing personality. Two or three servants hurriedly went to brew tea, prepare tsampa, and deep-fry some pastries for our meal. I **[61]** engaged in light conversation, asking them how many cows and sheep they owned. Soon after, I began reciting the scriptures. And before long, they served a meal. We all relished a sumptuous meal and drank heartily for a while, then resumed our recitations after the meal concluded. Although the lunch was opulent, it did not include any vegetables. And so, since I abstain from meat, I enjoyed some pastries prepared with a blend of butter, brown sugar, and dried curds, accompanied by tsampa.

Following our meal, we enjoyed some playtime on the grassy area outside the tent. I invited the children to come over for a little chat. I inquired whether they were interested in giving up the household life. The eldest did not want to, but the younger ones were all enthusiastic about the idea. However, when they were asked about their reasons for wanting to become monks, they found themselves without an answer. The adults standing nearby prompted them, explaining that being ordained allows individuals to study the scriptures, cultivate practice, propagate the Dharma for the benefit of living beings, attain buddhahood, and escape the cycle of birth and death. Yet the children, who were inexperienced and unfamiliar with me, felt too shy to rehearse what the adults had said. So, they simply offered a smile. Once we finished our playtime, we resumed our recitations, and they returned to their respective tasks.

As dusk settled in, the herders were the first ones to come back. They drove the yaks to a designated area and tethered them, while the dris were tied in the open space before the tent. They also allowed some calves to roam free from the servants' tent. They let the calves suckle briefly before they tethered them again. The herders then began collecting the milk from the dris. After milking – during which a portion of milk was reserved for the calves –, they set the calves free to graze. They then brought forth more calves, and the milking was conducted in the same manner. Once they had finished extracting milk from each of the dris, they bound them all together. When the sheep returned, they gathered the ewes in one place. The lambs were allowed to nurse before the sheep were milked. These herders assert that sheep's milk is more delicious than dri's milk, but I have not had the opportunity to taste it. Nevertheless, the cheese produced from sheep's milk was indeed more flavorful compared to that made from dri's milk. They

animal horns sprouting from his head and a black tongue, both seen as marks of his demonic nature. To conceal these traits and avoid suspicion, he was said to have grown his hair long and braided it tightly, wrapping the braids around the spots where his horns emerged. This act of disguise became a widespread practice in his court. Langdarma's ministers, fearful of their king and eager to conform, adopted the braided hairstyle. Over time, this tradition became institutionalized, requiring lay officials to wear their hair in braids, a custom rooted in this legend. The story also inspired a distinct Tibetan custom. When greeting someone of higher rank, Tibetans bow deeply, stick out their tongues, and rub the tops of their heads with one hand. This gesture declares they neither have a black tongue nor horns like Langdarma. It is both an expression of courtesy and, as Fazun leaves unexplained, a symbolic rejection of Langdarma's legacy. Cf. Shakabpa 2010, 163-4.

spent roughly two hours to complete the whole milking process. And during the nighttime hours, they churned butter in the same location.

After we had our dinner, we recited the scriptures **[62]** again, a session that went on until about eight or nine o'clock. Their attentiveness towards guests was remarkable. During breaks in the recitation, they would inquire about how we felt about the tea and whether it suited our taste, all the while engaging in light conversation. In the late hours, the father, his three sons, and the four children would meet with us for a chat. They invited me to share stories from the Inner Lands or offer updates on current events to keep them entertained. Once I started talking, it proved hard to stop. We often stayed up talking until eleven or twelve before we finally went to bed. Everyone listened with great interest. I did not realize at the beginning that even the women outside the tent would pay attention to our conversations. On a particular night, I told a joke that sent them into such fits of laughter that they ended up rolling on the ground. The chuckles heard from outside were just as uncontainable. It was at that moment that I realized that they had all been eavesdropping all along.

Each morning before dawn, they would call upon the herders' servants to have tea. The maidservants and daughters-in-law all got up early to milk the cattle. There was always someone who prepared butter tea for us. By daylight, the milking was done, and the cattle along with the sheep were herded up the mountain for grazing, while the calves and lambs were kept close on leashes. We got up, cleaned ourselves up, completed our scripture recitations, and enjoyed our tea. The daughters-in-law along with the maidservants then collected the cow dung that was set aside from the night before. The mixture was shaped it into patties and spread on the ground to dry, so that it could be used as a fuel source. The droppings of the sheep were also gathered together and dried out in one designated spot. Their activities kept them busy for about one or two hours before they wrapped up their chores.

Around nine or ten o'clock, the dris, swollen with milk to the point of discomfort, came back. They bellowed on the grass beside the tents. It was time to collect the milk from them once again. The soil in that area is rich in minerals, which allows the cattle to produce milk effortlessly while grazing. They claimed that this was due to the soil's rich fertility. In the summer and fall, when the soil is fertile, they milk three times a day. In the winter and spring, when there is no lush grass, they milk twice daily. And even so, the livestock never grow thin. In other regions, herders tend to milk their cattle only twice a day in summer and fall, while in the winter and spring, they do it only once a day. They also said that their one-year-old calves grew as large in one year as two-year-old calves elsewhere. They claimed that their sheep were also bigger **[63]** and fatter, which suggested that their land was of a superior quality. Once the milking was done, it was time to have lunch. Two servants were charged with the task of gathering wild vegetables from the water's edge, which they then stir-fried in yak butter for me. The taste was rather enjoyable. I was truly grateful for their thoughtfulness. Knowing how much I enjoyed being around children, they brough the four little ones to play with me.

On a particular night, a heavy rain poured down. A light spray of water filtered through the tent, but as the material soaked up the moisture, it became completely impermeable. The rain continued through the night, which complicated the tasks of the milking maids in the morning. They

dressed in woolen garments to keep dry from the rain and stood in the muddy ground while milking the animals. The weather in that location was cold, especially during days with rain or snow. On that particular morning, the cold was intense enough to make even the cows and sheep shake from the chill. Yet, they still needed to put in two hours of effort before completing their task. A group of cattle herders, each wearing a felt hat and draping a white woolen coat over their shoulders, carried a small pouch filled with dried milk powder, mixed with two handfuls of tsampa, a piece of butter, and a wooden bowl. They strolled barefoot while carrying a whip designed for hurling stones at livestock. Each herdsman led a bunch of cattle up the slopes of the mountain. The shepherds continued their daily tasks as they usually do. Meanwhile, the daughters-in-law, along with several maidservants, found themselves battling the cow dung in the rain-soaked fields. The dung had already absorbed moisture, and after the rainfall, it turned so runny that it was unmanageable. I caught sight of them trying to scoop it up with their hands, but it quickly slipped back to the ground, which left their hands and feet entirely covered in dung. I found the sight both amusing and tragic. They did not finish their work until around eight or nine that night. As we enjoyed a cup of tea and tossed some firewood into the flames, the dris on the mountain began to bellow from afar.

Once the rain stopped, the sky cleared up, and the sun illuminated the grasslands, showcasing their true splendor. Some butterflies and wild bees made an appearance, gathering and feeding on nectar, while small field mice **[64]** raced over the sunlit fields. Curiously, there were no sounds of frogs croaking, and there were no snakes in sight either. This was likely due to the high elevation. The Tibetan mastiffs were now used to having me around. As long as I did not walk too close, they no longer jumped around wildly. The children had likewise grown used to being around me. On their own accord, they collected wildflowers for me to offer to the Buddha. I made them laugh with my jokes, which they relished, and it was clear that they were very fond of my company. As the seven-day prayer ritual wrapped up and we got ready to leave, their reluctance to part ways was evident – especially in the four innocent and lively children, who were truly endearing.

As for the men from the household, I seldom caught sight of them while they were at their jobs. From time to time, they sat with spindles and hefty piles of yak fur, crafting yarn from the dark hair of yaks. They explained to me that every year, fresh pieces of felt were sewn into the middle of the tent, while the older pieces were shifted to the edges, taken down, and given new purpose. Alternatively, rather than taking them away, they would slowly increase the size of the tent. I also learned that they took on official duties from time to time. Still, due to the remoteness of the location, this happened only a handful of times each year. During the fall season, they loaded the yaks with butter, dried curds, animal pelts, and hides, then traveled to the lowlands to trade them for barley, peas, tea, and various other goods. During those periods, they would also trade their cattle and sheep.

In the winter months, they moved the livestock to pastures at lower altitudes; in summer, they were taken to higher ground. Since their household was too large to relocate entirely, they remained in an area that was situated between the elevated and the lower terrains. This household was considered the most prominent in the region. Nomadic nationals living in smaller family units had fewer members, utilized smaller tents, and owned less livestock. Yet, the inner layout of their tents, the division of spaces for

hosts and their guests, along with their daily activities, remained largely the same. The Golok nomads were the only group known to rely on raiding for their subsistence. I heard that every household had to provide men for these raids. Each man was equipped with two horses, one designated for riding and one the other for leading, along with a rifle in hand. When venturing to places such as Nakchu, they hid by day and traveled by night **[65]**. The intricacies of these raids differed somewhat and are too elaborate to explain in detail here.

Traders can be categorized into two distinct groups. One group runs a stationary business that is very similar to the functions of shopkeepers in the Inner Lands. In an average-sized shop, a household with multiple members gets up at dawn. Each morning, the men engage in chanting the scriptures – all Tibetans are devout Buddhists. While the children are still asleep, the women light the hearth to make tea. When present, servants carry out their assigned tasks. The mistress may either visit the temple, carrying a butter lamp to honor the buddhas, or she might attend to the home shrine by refreshing the water offerings. The women of Tibet enjoy enhancing their looks with adornments. They commonly embellish their hairstyles with coral and turquoise, and when they leave the house, they take great care in perfecting their clothing – might this simply reflect a quality of women? Just before dawn breaks, the family comes together to sip on butter tea leisurely and start their daily tasks. It is usual for children to have their tea while they are lying down in bed. They place a pinch of tsampa at the bottom of their bowls, and after they finish their tea, they lick the softened tsampa, which serves as their first meal of the day.

A close friend of mine is fervently devoted to Buddhism. Every morning, as he rises, he performs a number of prostrations in his shrine room. As soon as the tea is boiling in the kitchen, his wife or his daughter delivers a cup to him. Once he finishes his tea, he resumes his prostrations, and shortly after, he is served another cup. This morning ritual involves drinking five or six cups of tea. This illustrates the daily routine of someone who is a lay Buddhist householder.

Later, the men depart from their homes to manage other business, while the women take charge of the shops. They spin fibers into wool, knit warm socks, and take part in assorted crafts, ensuring they have a jug of butter tea close by to quench their thirst throughout the day. Women in Tibet are notably prone to drinking alcohol, often to excess. While inebriated, they might erupt into exuberant outbursts – including both tears and song – . Men often strive to curb this type of behavior, but they rarely succeed. In Tibetan society, the consumption of alcohol is simply too commonplace. Served around ten o'clock, the trader's breakfast is a simple affair, comprising stir-fried vegetables and meat, a bowl of tsampa, and a few cups of butter tea.

[66] Tibetan trade is rife with deception. Generally, prices are established at two to three times their real value, unless it involves close connections. Traders never disclose the real price. They maintain that they are incurring losses, even when they are making a profit. Thus, falsehood is always on their lips – this is the distinctive creed of their trade. As nightfall draws near, they begin to dismantle their stalls. Lunch and dinner are combined into one meal, usually consisting of rice or noodles, accompanied by one or two side dishes. Evenings are spent in relaxed conversation, discussing trivial matters, telling stories, or sharing jokes. There are some who participate

in dice games, but this is rare. Most people usually turn in for the night by eleven. There are others who recite the scriptures during the nighttime hours, although this practice is uncommon in Lhasa.

The second group consists of traders who travel from place to place. For instance, traders from Xikang who journey to Sichuan to buy tea keep connections with the same landlords, some of whom have been associated with their families for multiple generations. Mules and horses are restrained close to their living spaces or in the courtyards, tended by servants. Alternatively, the animals are left to graze on nearby hills, under the watch of their caretakers. Morning tea is prepared by the servants as the traders slowly rise and perform their daily recitations – a practice that is seldom neglected, even when traveling on business. The tea and tsampa they have for breakfast is identical to what they have at home. Once they finish their morning meal, they go to tea establishments to engage in business negotiations, mostly avoiding cash payments. In addition, they visit retail outlets to buy miscellaneous goods.

Once the tea has been bought, it requires repackaging. Take, for example, the Golden Jade tea from Xikang.[16] This tea is packed in large bundles of twelve bricks, with each brick weighing around fifty to sixty *jin*.[17] Leather workers wrap these bundles in untreated cowhide. Two bundles come together to form a single load. The process of packing requires careful supervision. For indeed, leather workers often steal the tea. Whenever the owner is absent, they often take out one or two bricks from every bundle. They then swap out a large portion for lower-quality tea leaves or other types of waste. When the packs are properly dried, they are transported by a relay system involving mule, horses, or cattle. Every year, traders purchase approximately 1,000 to 2,000 bundles. As for how they compensate the landlords, I have not inquired about it.

At around six or seven o' clock in the evening, traders routinely recite the scriptures after dinner, **[67]** just before they turn in for the night. In the early hours of the morning, while on the road, some boil tea over a fire while others saddle the mules for the journey. After completing their preparations, they come together to enjoy tea and have a little bit of tsampa, or occasionally some meat, before moving on. Following this, they load the goods and move forward on their route. At around one or two in the afternoon, they pause to rest. They will remain at a station if one is available; if not, they will set up camp in the open. There, the mules and horses are allowed to roam and graze, while the group gathers once more for tea and a simple meal of tsampa. After the meal, the servants look after the saddles and other equipment that falls under their supervision. The traders either rest, chant the scriptures, or explore the area around them. When night begins to settle, the livestock are called back – they return immediately, excited for their feed – and are restrained to the ground. Like this, if they are at a station, they can receive additional fodder; however, in the wilderness, there is no grass available for sustenance. The members of the group then have a meal that consistently includes extra vegetables or meat. They never eat tsampa alone. After eating their meal, they take a

16 C. Jinyu cha 金玉茶.

17 C. wuliushi jin 五六十觔, literally, 'fifty to sixty *jin*'. One *jin* weighs about half a kilogram, so fifty to sixty *jin* equal to twenty-five to thirty kilograms.

short break before coming together to recite the scriptures. To safeguard against theft, especially of horses, guards are always scheduled in rotation before they retire for the night. Occasionally, if a station is still far, traders may pause en route to brew tea, although such instances are rare. If there is no station in sight, they create their campsite earlier to ensure the horses have sufficient sustenance.

In the winter months, traders purchase tea from the Sichuan borderlands and head back home at the beginning of spring to allow their horses to rest and recuperate. They only set out for Ü-Tsang at the end of the summer. They usually opt for the northern route, but the cold conditions mean that the quality of pasture for the horses is accessible only in early fall. They do not reach Ü-Tsang until the winter season begins. There is always a level of uncertainty regarding whether the tea that is sent onward for transport will reach Ü-Tsang by the end of the year. In Tibet, leading traders create their own trading establishments. During the spring season, they reside in Lhasa, return home at the end of summer, and travel to the Sichuan borderlands in the winter months. On average, it takes them about two years to complete an entire round trip. Such is their way of life.

A few prominent Tibetan traders are also involved in trading wool. They set up their establishments in Kalimpong, Phakri, and Lhasa. During the summer months, they deploy teams to Posterior Tibet **[68]** and Nakchu for the purpose of buying wool. They contract porters to deliver the goods to Lhasa – wool collected from the northern region is predominantly sent to Lhasa – in contrast to wool from Posterior Tibet, which is moved to Gyantsé. From these sites, the wool is carried to Phakri by either mules or donkeys. It is common for porters to steal wool while on the road. When the wool gets to Phakri, it is repackaged, and each bundle ends up weighing sixty *jin*.[18] After that, the repackaged wool is transported by mule to India for selling. In the last few years, there has been a sharp rise in wool prices, which has led to considerable gains for traders. Nevertheless, with the increasing number of wool traders, I am concerned that a significant drop could be unavoidable down the line.

Another variety is 'brick tea', which originates from Yunnan. During the final years of the Qing dynasty and the onset of the Republican era, this tea was transported and distributed along the route to Lhasa, passing through Xikang. The way of life of traders along this route resembled that of tea traders in the Sichuan borderlands. Later on, a Yunnan-based trader pioneered a new route from Yunnan to Myanmar, which passed through India before entering Tibet. The costs associated with traveling this route are very similar to those of the route from Xikang into Tibet. Yet, in terms of convenience, it offers greater advantages. This resulted in the formation of a tea route that traverses Yunnan, Myanmar, India, and Tibet. In terms of business size, Yunnan tea traders matched their counterparts in Xikang. Lately, there has been a growing preference for Yunnan tea among local Tibetans, particularly those in the lower and middle classes. Members of the upper classes also enjoy Yunnan tea, but they often blend it with tea from Sichuan. Sichuan tea has a stronger flavor but a lighter color. And so, when blended with Yunnan tea, both color and taste are enhanced.

18 Approximately 30 kilograms.

It is possible to gain insight into the daily lives of Tibetan soldiers and their families. Here, I will recount briefly what I have observed firsthand. Soldiers conscripted by the Tibetan government mainly inhabit a military encampment about a *li* north of Lhasa,[19] in a place referred to as Drazhi.[20] Every morning and evening, their platoon leaders escort them to the adjacent grasslands for essential drills, including marching and rifle training, finishing these activities by breakfast time. Besides fulfilling their duties in the armed forces, these soldiers also engage in manual labor, especially in construction and maintenance tasks. When the large mansions in Lhasa are in need of refurbishment, their residents and local authorities often reach out to these troops for support. The owners of the mansions supply their meals, yet it remains uncertain if they are compensated for their labor. In their leisure hours **[69]**, numerous soldiers craft shoe soles as a secondary occupation. It is not uncommon to spot them wandering the streets, with a bundle of wool tucked under one arm, a woolen sole held in the left hand, and a thick needle, threaded with wool, in their right. Even while talking, they remain focused on sewing.

Once, on my return trip to Ü-Tsang from Nakchu via the northern route, I encountered a group of soldiers on their way to Xikang. Their baggage and equipment were transported by yaks provided by the government. The caravan included about a dozen yaks, five or six soldiers, and a handful of women, likely their wives. The women mounted the yaks, whereas the men proceeded on foot, stitching shoe soles as they traveled. As they moved along, they sang folk songs, and judging from their demeanor, they appeared to have no sadness about leaving their home. The people of Tibet naturally exhibit a joyful spirit, and even in the face of poverty, they maintain a positive outlook and show little concerns. Is this perhaps a special quality unique to them? Certain people say, "the poorer one is, the happier one becomes". Yet, I fear this might not hold true in every situation.

In summary, these soldiers seldom receive structured military training, as their days are primarily spent working, either for their own needs or under the directions of their commanders. I once witnessed the restoration

19 The equivalent of 1 *li* in the Republican period system of measurement is 500 meters, or 546.8 yards.

20 C. Zhaxi 札奚; T. Grwa bzhi; in Tibetan, 'Four Corners'. Located between Lhasa and Sera Monastery, the area known as Drazhi (also Drapchi) has served various military and carceral functions over time. Following the 1728 Manchu intervention in Tibet, the Qing court stationed an imperial garrison in Lhasa, initially numbering 2,000 troops. In 1733, this was reduced to a 500-man contingent, relocated to a purpose-built barracks on the nearby plain of Drazhi (T. Grwa bzhi) to ease tensions with the local population. During the late Qing and into the Republican period, the site became the base of the *khadang* (T. kha dang), the Second Regiment of the Tibetan army. After the 1959 uprising, it was converted into a temporary detention center for monks and laypersons arrested at Sera and Drépung Monasteries. In 1965, it was officially designated as Zhaqi Jianyu 扎奇监狱 (Drapchi Prison), formally called *Xizang Zizhiqu Diyi Jianyu* 西藏自治区第一监狱 (Tibet Autonomous Region Prison No. 1), and later expanded into a 'Reform Through Labor' facility. Detainees from across Tibet were assigned to various labor brigades. While inmate statistics remain undisclosed, it is widely believed that many are political prisoners, including monks, nuns, and former Tibetan officials. For the history of the military garrison, see Travers and Fitzherbert 2020, 15-18. On Drapchi Prison, cf. Barnett 1996; Christianson 2004, 176-82; Tubten Khétsun 2008, especially 90-118.

of General Yutok's[21] manor house,[22] which was being repaired by laborers drawn from the personal guard of the Dalai Lama. Likewise, when senior *kalön*s[23] constructed their residences, a significant number of soldiers took part in the labor. Thus, it is clear that the everyday lives of these soldiers are quite similar to those of tenant farmers or laborers.

Serving as an itinerant official offers a remarkably comfortable position. When disputes arise among citizens, or when traders pass through their area, issues are brought directly to their doorstep. These officials wield significant authority over the common people under their jurisdiction. At the slightest hint of annoyance, they commonly resort to using horsewhips, and imprisonment in cangues is a frequent occurrence as well. Still, the law does not mandate capital punishment, for taking a life carries considerable consequences. During periods of inactivity, they take pleasure in their leisurely pursuits. There are even individuals whose have been in official positions for years **[70]** yet have never carried out their assigned duties. Instead, they designate stewards to handle the operations. If an issue cannot be resolved, they release an official request for guidance. In the event that the issue stays unsolved, it will be passed on to a higher level of authority. Provided that the steward fulfills their duties effectively and adheres to the requirements set by the authorities, the place where the official resides is irrelevant, and senior officials do not view their absence a violation.

There exists a kind of itinerant officials who are committed to religious practice. Rising at dawn, they chant scriptures while the kitchen staff, waking later, prepare tea – in Tibet, cold water is commonly used for washing. After completing their recitations and enjoying a cup of tea, they tackle official affairs. If there are no pressing duties, they walk outside to inspect their horses and survey the barley fields. A typical lunch includes meat alongside either rice or steamed buns. Dinner consists of an assortment of dishes that accompany their main meals. Morning meals, on the other hand, might consist of meat and noodles served with tsampa, and during the summer months, tiny radishes are incorporated – there is no set pattern to their dining habits. Before they turn in for the night, they recite more scriptures. The itinerant officials I came across generally adhered to this routine each day.

I resided for seven months in the household of Kalön Trimon.[24] Each day, the father, who held the title of *kalön*,[25] would leave the house between

21 C. Yutuo daiben 宇陀代本; T. G.yu thog mda' dpon; Fazun is referring to Yutok Tashi Döndup (T. G.yu thog bkra shis don grub; 1906-1983). From 1935 to 1938, he was nominated Commander of the Bodyguard Unit of the Dalai Lama, with the title of *dapön* (T. mda' pon), 'General'. For a biography of General Yutok, cf. Dickie 2016; cf. also Travers 2021; Petech 1973.

22 C. gongguan 公館; T. G.yu thog gzims shag. The Yutok family's manor house was located near the Jokhang (T. Jo khang) temple in Lhasa.

23 C. gelun 戉倫; 'Cabinet Minister'.

24 C. Chimen gelun 墀門戉倫; T. Bka' blon khri smon nor bu dbang rgyal (1874-1945).

25 C. galun 戉倫; T. bka' blon; The term *kalön* refers to one of the four ministers in the Kashag (T. Bka' shag), the governing Cabinet of Tibet. The Kashag was established in 1721 as part of the Tibetan government's reorganization under Emperor Kangxi 康熙 of the Qing dynasty. In 1751, it became the primary advisory body to the Dalai Lama following the Thirteen-Point Ordinance issued by Emperor Qianlong, which formalized the Dalai Lama's role as the head of the Tibetan government. The *kalön*s ranked third (T. rim gsum) in the Tibetan hierarchy and were addressed as *shapé* (T. zhabs pad). Of the four *kalön*s, three were lay officials, while the fourth was traditionally a monk. The head of the *kalön*s, known as the Kalön Tripa (T: Bka' blon

eight and nine in the morning to attend to his duties at the administrative bureau, and returned home only around four in the afternoon. In spite of his senior years, he maintained a high level of efficiency and a deep devotion to the Buddha. Each morning, he would get up early to recite scriptures while sitting on his bed. He was knowledgeable about the food offering rituals and consistently performed them. After six in the evening, he received visitors who arrived to see him in his private chambers. Once he got home from the office, he invited a high lama to explain the scriptures in his house. In the evening, he also performed offerings to the Dharma Protectors. Beyond the Kalön himself, the household included his wife, four or five sons, a daughter-in-law, two or three grandchildren, a chief steward, two or three cooks, and a large retinue of servants. The family maintained five or six horses – still, how many more they kept in the countryside was anyone's guess.

[71] The [Kalön's] eldest son held an official rank. Several of the younger sons had taken monastic vows, while others were still advancing their studies. They, too, rose early to recite the scriptures. The daughter-in-law oversaw kitchen duties, while servants swept and cleaned across the household. During our scripture recitations, the servants would offer us tea. After completing our prayers, we had breakfast, which included a bowl of noodles, a small side dish, a serving of tsampa, and extra meat options for the senior lamas. After the morning meal, we either studied the scriptures or focused on grammar. The sons of other noble families also often joined us. Whenever he was free from obligations, the Kalön attended as well. After the Kalön left, junior officials would also leave for their posts, and the monks requested more teachings regarding other texts. Around ten o' clock, another noodle meal was served, after which we reviewed our lessons. The midday meal was served at about two in the afternoon, comprising meat, rice, and an assortment of other dishes. In the early evening, they attended supplementary classes on the scriptures. When the Kalön came back, teachings on scriptures and treatises were given for his benefit. We ended our day and went to bed at eleven in the evening. The stewards were responsible for the preparation of food and basic necessities. From the estate, they provided manure for fuel, feed for the horses, and ground barley for making tsampa. In the outer courtyard, the well was the source of water that was collected by the older women and maidservants. Two or three seamstresses, assigned specifically to the family, produced all the clothing needed for the household. Besides dressing up and seeking entertainment outside, they had minimal activities to engage in at home. I found them to be rather disengaged. The older generation took pleasure in chanting religious texts, whereas a lot of the youth found joy in lounging around. It is reasonable to conclude that they enjoyed a well-settled and comfortable lifestyle.

khri pa), served as the equivalent of a Prime Minister, managing the Kashag's operations and overseeing its role in Tibetan governance.

4.4 Faith

Tibet stands out as a religious country, specifically, a Buddhist country. Every household, regardless of its economic status, rank, or occupation, whether it belongs to an official, farmer, artisan, or trader, is devoted to the Buddha. – In border regions, those who adhere to Christianity may still show devotion towards the Buddha or embrace both Christianity and Buddhism – . In rural areas, as long as they have a shelter, even the poorest of families will have a small shrine. Even if **[72]** they live in a single room, they will still maintain a table or an altar for the buddhas. Made from either bronze or clay, these artifacts always depict various figures like Avalokiteśvara or Tārā. When leaving their homes, they bring along a tiny buddha-box strapped to their backs. While the specific figure inside may change, it always includes the image of a buddha or fragments from religious texts given by a high lama. Everyone agrees that these offer a form of protection. They believe that all fortunes and misfortunes arise from the law of cause and effect. They all recognize the value of inviting others to recite scriptures or to accumulate merits. During the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month, as well as during major Buddhist celebrations, they buy butter to use for lighting lamps as a gesture of reverence to the Buddha. Having a son who chooses to renounce the world to cultivate the path is considered entirely appropriate. Those who are unable to do so themselves recognize that this inability arises from an absence of good fortune. They hold significant reverence towards ordained monastics, particularly for high lamas distinguished by their learning and virtues. In Tibet, they say the household is a prison, the spouse a shackle, wealth a dream, and status an illusion, like a bubble; all of these are, in essence, impermanent, marked by suffering, emptiness, selflessness, and bound by the afflictions. In this life, they say, death is not the end, as future lives exist. They claim that, after death, a person may fall into a lower destiny, rather than simply cease to exist altogether. They also universally accept that, after death, certain individuals may become humans again.

By the time they reach the age of three, children already know how to chant *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. Most of them can also recite the *Twenty-One Praises to Tārā*[26] and common aspiration prayers. Some individuals can even recite elaborate ritual texts and understand profound scriptures and commentaries. In the Xikang region, nearly all the sons of prominent households receive some form of religious education. The reason for this is that, outside the Buddhadharma, there is no other type of formal education in Tibet. Ordinary schools can only teach writing, pronunciation, basic correspondence, and arithmetic. For their routine recitations, such as the *Praise to Sarasvatī*[27] and the *Praise to Mañjuśrī*,[28] they must seek explanations from a member of the saṅgha to understand the texts. As for the study of grammar and phonetics, they must rely on highly learned and virtuous teachers. It is quite common and ordinary for Tibetan officials to make spelling or writing mistakes.

Within the homes of Tibetan aristocrats or senior officials, it is common to find four or five altars, and many of them own **[73]** the Tripiṭaka. In the

26 C. *Dumu nianyi lizan* 度母廿一禮讚.

27 C. *Miaoyin tiannü zan* 妙音天女讚.

28 C. *Wenshu pusa zan* 文殊菩薩讚.

households belonging to the middle class, one can find solemn shrines and protector chapels. Owning the Tripiṭaka, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, or the writings of the patriarchs is not rare either. Buddhist shrines and scriptures can also be found in the households belonging to the lower class. Among the nomadic nationals, their faith feels purer and stronger, even without the presence of dedicated shrines. Notably, several Han traders who operate in Tibet are Buddhists, as are some of the Hui people. Within his home, a trader from Yunnan 雲南 maintains a large shrine and boasts a remarkably extensive library of scriptures. Not only is he the owner of the complete Tripiṭaka, but he also possesses the writings from various Buddhist schools and patriarchs – a comprehensive collection that is truly rare. A friend of mine, a trader from Beiping, has a buddha niche in every room of his home. The offerings displayed in these niches are lavishly arranged and reflect a standard superior to that found in any other home. His children have all renounced the household life to cultivate the path, and he too is making arrangements to step away from secular life.

Tibetans regard this as the most appropriate course of action. However, for people from the Inner Lands or foreign countries, this is truly astonishing. Thus, both Han officials and Western commentators claim that monasticism is a calamity that will bring about the extinction of the Tibetan race. Nevertheless, Tibetans reject this assertion. They think that, aside from the possibility of being wiped out by natural catastrophes or human-made tragedies, having several family members enter the monastic order would not necessarily threaten the family line. Moreover, they argue that if monasticism were to lead to their extinction, it would be entirely appropriate, for true liberation from the cycle of birth and death is far preferable than the suffering endured in the endless cycle of wandering. The level of steadfastness and accuracy in their belief system is rarely found in other countries and among other nations.

4.5 The Saṅgha

The religious fervor of the Tibetan nation, as discussed before, prompts them to regard monasticism an entirely justifiable and reasonable pursuit. This vocation is highly esteemed and eagerly sought after by the masses, which accounts for the notable amount of saṅgha members in Tibet. For example, the tiny area of Dartsédo, located on the border of Sichuan **[74],** is home to eight lama monasteries.[29] While not all of them are thriving, the three that are most prosperous – Ngachö, Lhamotse,[30] and Dorjé Drak[31] – collectively accommodate more than a thousand people. Still, the vast majority of them are either of Tibetan descent or have a blend of Tibetan and Han ancestry, whereas those who are purely Han rarely pursue a life in the monastery.

29 C. lama si 喇嘛寺. The expression *lama si*, translating to 'lama temple' in English, was prevalent in the Republican era and remains in use today to denote Tibetan monasteries (T. dgon pa) in the People's Republic. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the word 'lamasery', originating from the Chinese term *lama si* and now regarded as outdated, often appeared in European and American works on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.

30 C. Lamo 拉摩; T. Lha mo rtse.

31 C. Liangye zha 梁業札; T. Rdo rje brag.

To the west of Mount Gyü,[32] there are only a few inhabitants, consisting of both farmers and herders, who reside in tiny settlements. In comparison, their monasteries are large and numerous, and temples and monks are prevalent everywhere. Notably, the counties of Dawu, Drango, Drewo,[33] and Karze, are home to imposing monasteries that have the capacity to shelter one to two thousand lamas.[34] Karze County alone is home to two or three major monasteries, each with a population of two to three thousand individuals, in addition to several smaller monasteries located throughout the region.

I have heard that areas in the south, such as Nyachuka,[35] Litang, Batang, and Chatreng, are likewise teeming with monastic institutions. Numerous large monasteries are also present in Rongdrak,[36] Zungchu,[37] Tsenlha,[38] and Li.[39] In Qinghai Province, some monasteries can host congregations that reach into the tens of thousands. I have personally observed many large monastic complexes in Dergé, Chamdo, and along the route through Kongpo.[40] Along the northern route – Drigung, Nyachuka, and Phenpo;[41] the western route – Gyantsé, Shigatsé, and Sakya; the southern route – Samye, Tsetang,[42] and Ölkha;[43] and the southwestern route Nakartse,[44] Phakri, and Dremojong:[45] temples and saṅgha flourish everywhere.

Near Lhasa, the three great [Geluk] monasteries, the two Gyüpa[46] Colleges, the Four Regency Seats – Tsechok,[47] Meru,[48] Tsemönling,[49] and Kündéling,[50] and the Namgyal Monastery[51] on the slopes of the Dalai's

32 C. Zheduo 折多; T. Rgyu.

33 C. Zhuwu 諸陽; T. Sgre bo.

34 C. lama 喇嘛; T. bla ma; 'Tibetan monks'. In this passage by the term *lama* Fazun refers not to a Tibetan lama (T. bla ma) intended as a master (S. guru), but to all Tibetan monks and novices. See the note above on the term *lama si*.

35 C. Hekou 河口; T. Nyag chu kha.

36 C. Danba 丹巴; T. Rong brag.

37 C. Songpan 松潘; T. Zung chu.

38 C. Maogong 懋功; T. Btsan lha. Fazun uses the Republican-era name Maogong to refer to Tsenlha County, now part of Sichuan Province. During the Qing dynasty, the region, then known as Jinchuan 金川, became the site of a garrison bureau following two military campaigns during the Qianlong era. In 1914, after the establishment of the Republic of China, it was reorganized as Maogong and placed under Sichuan's jurisdiction. In 1953, following the Communist occupation, Maogong was renamed Xiaojin 小金.

39 C. Lifan 理番; T. Lis; present-day Li Dzong (T. Lis Rdzong; C. Li Xian 理縣).

40 C. Gongbo 公薄; T. Kong po.

41 C. Panbo 盆薄; T. 'Phan po.

42 C. Zitang 孜塘; T. Rtses thang.

43 C. Aka 阿喀; T. 'Ol kha.

44 C. Nanggeze 曩格則; T. Sna dkar rtse.

45 C. Zhemengxiong 哲孟雄; T. 'Bras mo ljongs; Sikkim.

46 C. Juba 舉巴; T. Rgyud pa; 'Tantric College'.

47 C. Xide 喜得; T. Tshe mchog gling.

48 C. Muru 木如; T. Rme ru.

49 C. Zemuling 則木凌; T. Tshe smon gling.

50 C. Gundeling 滾得凌; T. Kun bde gling.

51 C. Zunsheng si 尊勝寺; Rnam rgyal dgon pa.

Mountain,[52] collectively represent the most resplendent and imposing centers of practice. Beyond these, there are countless smaller shrines nestled amidst the nearby mountain valleys and villages, making them impossible to tally.

Although Tibetan monks are many, they all differ from those in the Inner Lands in one key aspect: they do not fully sever ties with their secular families. The majority of monks residing in monasteries located in Kham and Ü-Tsang originate from nearby communities. Whenever responsibilities within the monastery come up, they go back to the monastery to carry out their obligations, chant scriptures, attend teachings, or pursue doctrinal studies. When they are free from obligations, many of them go home to help with household tasks. Their families hold them in high regard due to their status as monastics **[75]** devoted to practice. They receive inquiries about minor household matters, and managing prayer activities falls well within their area of expertise. As a result, they become an indispensable refuge for their home, a presence that no family can manage to be without, even for a day. During their time at the monastery, their relatives pay frequent visits, usually once every three to five days, and they bring along meals and beverages. When a monk rises to a position of stature in the monastic hierarchy, their family view this achievement as the highest form of honor. Certain monks, who have less strong ties to their families and a greater inclination to engage in practice, might choose to retreat to the mountains or travel elsewhere for their studies. Even so, their families maintain contact, seeking updates about their well-being through messages whenever possible.

In Tibet, I observed that monks rarely sever ties with their families entirely. For instance, scholars in the three great monasteries often depend on their families to help them make up for their inadequate yearly allowances. Indeed, monastery revenues cover only half a year's expenses. Scholars coming from distant regions like Xikang, Posterior Tibet, Qinghai, and Mongolia, who are engaged in long-term or working towards the *géshé* degree, largely depend on financial backing from their families. Without such backing, they have to either perform religious services or engage in small-scale trade to survive.

Still, there are those who withstand difficulties and deprivation in their quest for learning. Consider the current Jangtsé Chöje as a case in point. He is from a poor family in Posterior Tibet, which could not offer him the necessary support. While studying at Sera Monastery,[53] he often found himself without tsampa for three to five days at a time – a situation that was quite common. Even in the face of hunger or cold, he remained determined, and ultimately earned the title of *géshé lharampa*. He currently occupies the position of *chöje*[54] and is expected to ascend to the position of Ganden

52 C. Dalai shan 達賴山. Fazun refers to the Potala Palace as the Dalai Mountain, or Dalai's Mountain.

53 C. Sela 色拉; T. Se ra.

54 C. fawang 法王; T. chos rje; in English, 'Dharma King'. To become the Ganden Tripa (T. Dga' ldan khri pa), a monk followed a traditional path of advancement within the Geluk sect. First, he completed the required course of study at one of the three major Geluk monasteries near Lhasa and earned the highest academic degree, *géshé lharampa* (T. dge bshes lha ram pa). He then joined one of the two tantric colleges in Lhasa, Gyütö (T. Rgyud stod) or Gyümé (T. Rgyud smad) to earn the title *géshé ngakrampa* (T. dge bshes sngags ram pa). Only monks with this qualification could serve as disciplinarians (T. dge skos) in a tantric college. Each year, Gyütö and Gyümé appointed three disciplinarians. The chant leader (T. bla ma dbu mdzad) was selected from among the former

Tripa in the coming years. Likewise, the celebrated Phurbu Chok Jampa Gyatso Rinpoché,[55] according to the biography of his first incarnation, was once a destitute and homeless monk from Chamdo, for whom hunger was of little concern. Eventually **[76]**, he emerged as one of the most respected figures in Tibet. His main teacher, Master Drubkang Gelek Gyatso,[56] during his early training in the *Lamrim* teachings, had no shelter, merely a hole dug into the ground, no blankets but a pile of barley straw, and made use of a carefully cleaned wooden bowl for tsampa as a replacement for a ritual offering cup. Gelek Gyatso would later serve as the National Preceptor under the Tibetan Regent. Master Yongzin Yeshé Gyaltsen,[57] who was the most prominent disciple[58] of Jampa Rinpoché, was not born into poverty. Under the guidance of Jampa Rinpoché, he was advised to enter a period of retreat lasting several months, during which he consumed only a small quantity of leftover offerings each day. After parting ways with his teacher, he sought refuge in the icy heights of Posterior Tibet. He survived here on just one small bag of tsampa, which his disciples brought him each year from the base of the mountain. When heavy snowfall made it difficult to travel during winter, he refused to let anyone come to visit him. Later on, Yeshé Gyaltsen would serve as a teacher to the Dalai Lama.[59] The thirteenth Dalai Lama, while seeking a tutor, turned to the reclusive master Tsültrim Gyalwa.[60] While at Drépung Monastery, Tsültrim Gyalwa was so engrossed in his scriptures that he often failed to kindle a fire, and it was not unusual for him to skip food and sleep. In a similar fashion, while studying in Tibet, the revered Drakar Rinpoché from Karze and his disciples often found themselves without food and resorted to the tsampa that had been offered to the buddhas. These venerable figures remained unaffected by their circumstances.

This concise summary offers only a general overview of life within Tibetan monasteries. The monastic system, the daily lives of monks in the three great monasteries, and the education of the monastic community will be discussed in Chapter 7.

disciplinarians to become vice-abbot and serve for three years. After this, the chant leader became the abbot (T. mkhan po) of the college for another three years. The most senior former abbots, known as Jangtsé Chöje (T. Byang rtse chos rje), if he came from Gyümé, or Shartsé Chöje (T. Shar rtse chos rje), if he came from Gyütö, alternated in serving as the Ganden Tripa.

55 C. Pubujue jiangba renboqie 蒲補覺絳巴仁波卿; T. Phur bu lcog byams pa rgya mtsho rin po che (1825-1901); a tutor to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. In this passage, Fazun quotes from the biography of the first Phurbu Chok Rinpoché, Ngawang Jampa (T. Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa, 1682-1762).

56 C. Shanhai 善海; T. Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho (1641-1713).

57 C. 智幢; T. Tshe mchog gling pa Yongs 'dzin ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713-1793).

58 C. gaozu 高足.

59 Yongzin Yeshé Gyaltsen was a tutor to the eighth Dalai Lama Jampal Gyatso (T. 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho, 1758-1804).

60 C. Jiesheng 戒勝; T. Tshul khrims rgyal ba (d.u.). I was unable to identify this individual.