

6 Administration, Military, and Finance

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6.1 Organization

[86] Gaining insight into Tibet's administrative, military, and financial systems requires an initial understanding of the structure of its diverse governmental institutions. The political organization of Tibet is quite simple, and I will provide a concise overview of it here. In Tibet, authority over politics and religion is centralized in the hands of the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama is responsible for making all major decisions across different spheres. Thus, the authority of the Dalai Lama in Tibet is comparable to that of an emperor during the time of absolute monarchy in our country.¹ During the reign of the third Dalai Lama, although he was the ultimate authority in both political and religious matters in Tibet, he delegated all matters to the Regent of Tibet and did not have much power on his own. After the passing of the fifth Dalai Lama, the Regent of Tibet, Sangyé Gyatso,² maintained the secrecy of his death for over ten years. This resulted in disputes throughout Tibet and with the rulers of Mongolia. In the end, the Regent was assassinated, which led the sixth Dalai Lama to escape into exile. It was only with the rise of the seventh Dalai Lama that the tensions

¹ C. woguo 我國.

² C. Sanjie jiacuo 桑傑絳錯; T. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705). The third and final Regent, or Desi (T. Sde srid) of the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (T. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682), who served as the regent of Tibet from 1679 until his death.



began to ebb and flow like surging waves. During that period, the Dalai Lama sought refuge in Xikang, while the Qianlong Emperor sent troops to Tibet to restore order amidst the turmoil. Following this, the Qianlong Emperor conferred singular authority upon the Dalai Lama regarding Tibet.

To address political concerns, the Dalai Lama also selected four members of the nobility as his assistants, while the Qing court appointed a resident Amban³ in Tibet to supervise and facilitate all operations. While the Dalai Lama held the official position governing both religious and political matters, the actual authority was exercised by the Amban. Every action taken by the Dalai Lama required prior notification and approval from the Qing court through the Amban before it could be executed. A remarkable case in point is the death of the twelfth Dalai Lama. The cold and leg pain he endured from the high altitude at the Dalai's Mountain prompted him to seek a move to the Norbulingka,⁴ yet the Qing court denied his request, which ultimately resulted in his death. The Dalai Lama [87] gained actual control over the administration only after the expulsion of the Han officials and the division between the Han and the Tibetans in the early years of the Republic of China [1912]. When a Dalai Lama passes away, and until the next incarnation formally assumes power – a Dalai Lama must first pass the *gëshé* exams before taking charge of political matters – the interim administration of both religious and political issues is held by the Regents from five different establishments: 1) Tengyeling,⁵ 2) Radreng, 3) Tsemonling,⁶ 4) Kundeling,⁷ and 5) Dédruk.⁸ An incident caused the abolition of Tengyeling, which has left only four still in place.

When the Dalai Lama is in power, these four figures, even with their honorable titles, do not wield any true authority. At present, Radreng is designated as the representative of the Dalai Lama. A Tibetan Regent, who may be a monk or a layperson, operates under the leadership of the Dalai

3 C. Dayuan 大員; T. am ban; M. amban. The Manchu term Amban refers to the commissioners, mainly of Manchu origin, appointed by the imperial court in Beijing to represent the Qing emperors in Lhasa. From 1727 to 1912, when Chinese officials were expelled, ambans were typically assigned in pairs and claimed extensive authority in Tibet. However, their influence declined significantly after the mid-nineteenth century.

4 C. Moni yuan 摩尼園; T. Nor bu gling kha. The Norbulingka, or 'Jewel Park', was the summer residence of the Dalai Lamas and a seasonal administrative center for the Tibetan government. Situated about two miles west of Lhasa's traditional city center, the site was established in 1755 by the seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso (1708-1757), around a medicinal spring. The main palace was completed in 1783 under the eighth Dalai Lama. Over time, the Norbulingka expanded to include residences, administrative offices, gardens, pools, and an arboretum. From the eighth Dalai Lama onward, it served as the Dalai Lama's summer retreat, with the government moving there annually on the eighteenth day of the third lunar month. The grounds also hosted the Shotön (T. Zho ston) festival, famous for its Tibetan drama performances.

5 C. Dunjie ling 敦吉凌; T. Bstan rgyas gling.

6 C. Zemu ling 則木凌; T. Tshe smon gling.

7 C. Gunde ling 滾得凌; T. Kun bde gling.

8 C. Dezhu 得諸; T. Sde drug.

Lama. The present Regent is a nephew of the former Dalai Lama.⁹ While the Regent holds both religious and political power, his main focus tends to be on religious matters, while the political responsibilities are handled by the Kashag.¹⁰ The Kashag is the office where the Four Kalöns¹¹ convene to discuss and oversee administrative matters. The executive body consists of one monk and three lay officials. One member is stationed in Chamdo to handle all political matters related to Xikang. This position, referred to in Tibetan as ‘Dome Chikhyap’,¹² means ‘Governor General of Xikang’. The other three members reside permanently in Lhasa.

Following the Dalai Lama’s passing and the reinstatement of legitimate rule to Tibet, a single representative along with a small group of administrative staff has been assigned to Chamdo, whereas all four *kalöns* continue to operate from Lhasa. Beneath the *kalöns*, there are various secretaries who help handle political inquiries, along with a number of clerks. This office functions under a strict code of discretion. No information is disclosed to external parties until a formal statement is issued. Those clerks who are aware of the issues are too afraid to disclose any information. Directly opposite the Kashag, located on the Dalai’s Mountain, one can find a religious institution. The Tibetan Regent oversees this institution, which is staffed with a number of secretaries and clerks. The Kashag administers a range of entities, including military, financial, and local political institutions. Still, each institution operates independently and has little direct connection with the Kashag. Two financial agencies exist: one located at the base of the Dalai’s Mountain and the other situated atop the Jokhang Temple.¹³ Their distinct functions will be elaborated on later.

Numerous types of local administrative offices exist as well. The largest of these is the main administrative center located in Chamdo, which is responsible for supervising Xikang [88]. Following closely in importance are the offices in Dergé and the agency located in Khyungpo Tengchen,¹⁴ where officials appointed as chief administrators are required to possess at least the rank of fourth class. Below are county officials, whose ranks range from the fifth to the seventh class and are not rigidly specified. A fourth-rank position is necessary for both senior military leaders and battalion commanders. The ranks of platoon leaders can vary, however, as they typically fall from the fifth to the seventh class. In addition, the telegraph bureau in Tibet is managed by a director, who is designated as

9 Here, Fazun is referring to Langdün Künga Wangchuk (T: Glang mdun kun dga’ dbang phyug, 1907-1985), a nephew of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, Tupten Gyatso. Born into the influential Yapzhi Langdün (T. Yab gzhis glang mdun) family, Künga Wangchuk began serving in the Tibetan government at the young age of fourteen. By 1926, he had become Prime Minister of the Tibetan government, a position he held until 1940. After the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933, Künga Wangchuk worked closely with Regent Radreng Rinpoché, guiding Tibet through a period of political uncertainty. In 1939, amid internal conflicts, he stepped down from his position as Prime Minister but retained an official role in the government. Cf. Harris and Shakya 2003, 40-2.

10 C. Gaxia 戛霞; T. Bka’ shag.

11 C. Si galun 四戛倫; T. Bka’ blon bzhi. *Kalön shi* is a collective name for the four Cabinet Ministers of the Tibetan administration.

12 C. Duomei jiqiao 垛梅吉喬; T. Mdo smad spyi khyab; ‘Commissioner of Amdo’, where Dome (T. Mdo smad) is another term for Amdo (T. A mdo), hence ‘Governor General of Northeastern Tibet’.

13 C. Dazhao si 大招寺; T. Jo khang.

14 C. Qiongbo dengqin 窮薄登勤; T. Khyung po steng chen.

holding a fifth-rank position. There is then a medical institute, led by a director who holds a fourth-rank level position and is responsible for both astronomical computations and calendar compilation. When it comes to reserve talents, whether they are monks or laypersons, they are far too many to enumerate. A later chapter will address religious matters and the positions of high-ranking lamas in various monasteries. Within the Tibetan aristocracy, those with the titles of *gong* 公 and *taiyi* 台己 merely have noble designations, yet they do not wield real power, despite their considerable wealth. Moreover, the attendants of great *tulkus*¹⁵ are often ranked with the fourth class. Usually, they have neither political influence nor a salary, but they are accountable for the administration of wealth and people within the sphere of their *tulku's* reach.

6.2 Administration

As stated earlier, the administration of Tibet is entirely under the control of the Dalai Lama. Consequently, the Dalai Lama's decisions dictate all matters related to administration. During the lifetime of the former Dalai Lama, I learned that when major situations occurred in Tibet, local administrative offices would first relay them to their direct superiors. These cases would in turn be forwarded by these offices to the Kashag, and the Kashag would then submit them to the Dalai Lama. The directives from the Dalai Lama outlined which office was responsible for handling the issue, as well as whether a meeting needed to be arranged for deliberation. The designated office needed to submit the suggested protocols to the Dalai Lama for his consent prior to putting them into action. If a meeting was sanctioned, it was led by the Tibetan Regent along with the Four Kalöns [89], followed by the Chikhyap Khenpo¹⁶ - who managed all religious matters and ranked above all four social classes - and only then by the senior secretaries. Officials holding positions of the fourth rank or lower were required to wait outside until given instructions and were not allowed to join the assembly. Following thorough deliberations among the Tibetan Regent and the *kalöns*, the opinions of officials ranked below the fourth class were then solicited. Those who had opinions were permitted to share their thoughts as well. If an agreement was reached, the suggested resolution would be formally written up and presented to the Dalai Lama for his endorsement. Still, it was required to provide at least three different proposals for the Dalai Lama's consideration, as it was strictly against the rules to submit only one or two options. In the event that the Dalai Lama was dissatisfied with all the options offered, they would be sent back for reassessment. This prompted the need for new alternatives that did not rely on the previous options. After receiving approval, the resolution was put into action.

15 C. huofu 活佛; T. sprul sku; Fazun resorts to the term *huofu*, literally 'living buddha', to refer to *tulkus* (T. sprul sku), incarnate lamas. The term *tulku* is the Tibetan translation from the Sanskrit *nirmāṇakāya*, 'emanation body', and refers to the first of the three bodies of a buddha.

16 C. Jiqiao kanbu 機喬堪布; T. Spyi khyab mkhan po. The Chikhyap Khenpo, 'Chief Abbot', was the leader of the monastic division of the Tibetan government in Lhasa. This role included overseeing monastic officials, managing the Dalai Lama's household, and supervising the Dalai Lama's private storeroom.

After the Dalai Lama's passing, Radreng acted as the intermediary. In significant matters – like the suppression of the Communists the year before – when suggestions were put forward, it was often mandated that a National Assembly¹⁷ be convened for deliberation. The entity referred to as National Assembly comprised the Tibetan Regent, officials from various institutions, the *khenpos*¹⁸ of the three great monasteries, along with other prominent figures. All members were required to convene, engage in mutual discussions, and offer their individual insights. The outcomes achieved [90] were later presented to Radreng, who would provide the necessary approvals for advancing the proceedings. If the convocation of a National Convention¹⁹ was not approved and only a meeting for deliberations was authorized, the procedure would continue as it was during the lifetime of the Dalai Lama. When faced with critical situations that local administrative offices could not resolve – such as murder or theft – it was necessary to resort to the Kashag. In situations involving murder, when the perpetrator was not a figure of authority in the local administration, the Kashag would specify the protocol that needed to be followed. With the exception of the Dalai Lama or his representative, the Kashag had supreme authority.

The Kashag managed all legal disputes involving both officials and civilians, which encompassed matters such as promotions, demotions, requests for extended or temporary leave for officials, and extending even to the granting of horse passes for official journeys. In the Tibetan administration, when officials of aristocratic rank were appointed to specific sites for particular duties, they would never dare to directly refuse the Kashag's directives, even if they faced hardships or other challenges. In the event that they tried to convey their refusal through their superiors, or made a small procedural mistake, they would likely face serious repercussions – usually a financial penalty – or even dismissal from their position. The proper course of action was to call upon the residences of the Kashag members and softly appeal for reconsideration. Still, unless money was involved, the chances of success were minimal. This constituted the singular avenue for the Kashag, among others, to build their fortune.

Last year, while the eldest son of a noble family was unwell in India, his younger sibling was assigned to Dergé. The younger brother wished to visit his ailing sibling in India but dared not directly resign from his appointment with the Kashag. Instead, he covertly lobbied Radreng. Radreng agreed and instructed the Kashag to give him a new assignment. Enraged by the interference, the Kashag brought in the younger sibling, chastised him sharply, and turned a blind eye to his plea. Thus, they prohibited him from traveling to both India and Kham. Concerned about the consequences, the family called upon the residences of the Kashag members, offering bribes and pleading for leniency. While these members were willing to lend a hand in private discussions, none took the initiative to advocate for them when it involved the entire Kashag. Thus, the family grew increasingly anxious.

17 C. Guomin dahui 國民大會; T. Tshogs 'du rgyas 'dzoms. The Tsondu Gyéndzom is the largest assembly of the Tibetan administration prior to the Chinese occupation. For the composition of the National Assembly, cf. Goldstein 1989, 19-20.

18 C. kanbu 堪布; T. mkhan po; S. upādhyāya; P. upajjhāya. The *khenpo* is a senior monk authorized to confer both novice and full ordinations. To serve in this role, a monk must have held higher ordination for at least ten years.

19 C. Guomin huiyi 國民會議.

Eventually, with a more significant amount of bribery involved, the *kalöns* became more forgiving. They reprimanded and imposed penalties on the family, yet still they allowed the younger brother to proceed to Kham. While he wished to travel to India to assess his brother's condition, [91] he ultimately had to forsake his sick brother under the pressure of those in power.

There was then the attendant of a certain *khenpo*, who sought an official appointment within the Tibetan government. He traveled to the Inner Lands to advocate for his cause and also appealed to Radreng, who consented and instructed the Kashag to assign him a position. The members of the Kashag were infuriated by this infringement of their protocol. Still, the *kalöns* had covertly received numerous bribes. Even though the Kashag found this violation of protocol unacceptable, they had no choice but to grant the attendant the position. They postponed the issue for some time, but in the end, it was settled. There was then someone with a low-raking, sinecure position under the seventh rank who falsely claimed to be at the fourth or fifth rank. When told, this incident is indeed somewhat comical.

Ultimately, the Kashag's power in Tibet can sometimes overshadow that of the Tibetan Regent. In times of conflict, the Kashag makes all critical decisions concerning where to deploy troops, who will command them, and how to confront or protect against enemy attacks. The Kashag even holds the power to designate individuals responsible for collecting grain or taxes in specific areas. Thus, even though the Kashag is formally responsible for political governance, it actually possesses considerable control over military issues.

6.3 Regional Administration

In Tibet, the various regions are governed by county commissioners, yet not every region necessarily corresponds to a large county; some may only include a handful of villages. In regions where nomadic lifestyles prevail, the territories are vast, yet the inhabitants are few and far between. Even so, these commissioners perform functions comparable to those of a county administration, which is why they are referred to as county offices in name only. In the Tibetan language, this position is referred to as *dzongpön*.²⁰ The residence of the commissioner, a tower-like structure, is called *dzong*,²¹ while the commissioner living there is referred to as *pön*.²² Therefore, the combined term *dzongpön* translates to 'commissioner of the tower fortress'. Their main responsibilities involve resolving civil disputes, which also represent the majority of their earnings. Their responsibilities also extend to the collection of grain and the assignment of corvée labor. Commissioners in charge of the main routes are also responsible for tax collection. This specific type of *dzongpön*, responsible for managing these three duties, holds one of the most lucrative appointments. Still, if a designated tax commissioner [92] is also appointed, a portion of the profits generated by the *dzongpön* is allocated to this special commissioner. Tax collection offices, for

20 C. songben 聳奔; T. rdzong dpon.

21 C. song 聳; T. rdzong.

22 C. ben 奔; T. dpon.

example, include Khyungpo Tengchen located in Xikang, Nakchu along the western route, and Phakri situated on the southern route. Reports suggest that both Nakchu and Phakri are managed by two commissioners each, yet it remains unclear if their tax responsibilities are distinctly or collectively handled. Khyungpo Tengchen has only one commissioner, which makes this position the most financially lucrative.

Usually, this post is held by someone of the fourth or fifth rank - a seventh-rank commissioner can only dream of being in such a post. In other regions, the main responsibilities of *dzongpöns* include settling disputes and collecting grain. In remote villages, where visits from commissioners are uncommon, their responsibilities are minimal, which results in restricted opportunities for making a profit. Local commissioners govern the masses with the ferocity of a tiger amidst a flock of sheep. Even though they are unable to carry out the death penalty, they bind, beat, detain, and discipline as they please. It has been noted earlier that women in Tibet possess a minimal sense of shame. Still, local commissioners behave as they wish while chasing after romantic or sexual opportunities. A young woman, be she a virgin or otherwise, may find herself marked with a whip if she catches their eye. As night falls, she has no choice but to comply. This is yet another peculiar custom found in the regions of Tibet.

6.4 Military Equipment

The phrase 'military equipment' appears to be best employed to designate a military organization that is properly equipped. Yet, Tibet's military consists of merely a few tens of thousands of undisciplined troops, barely trained in basic drills, along with a loosely assembled mob of local recruits - truly a mockery of what one would consider "military equipment". To call "soldiers" individuals who can only manage to fire a gun, feign a charge, or accept rations while wearing a makeshift uniform, regardless of their aptitude, numbers, or training; to call whatever rudimentary firearms, meager ammunition, or locally scavenged supplies that support these troops "provisions and armaments"; or to classify items such as Tibetan daggers, bamboo arrows, primitive firelocks, and even wooden guns [93] as military equipment - to do so is to redefine these terms beyond all reason. Under such a standard, Tibet can only barely claim to possess a military force. I have already discussed the home life and living standards of these soldiers in Chapter 4.

The Tibetan military was founded in the early years of the Republic of China, after the Han army's defeat and subsequent retreat from Tibet, as well as the Dalai Lama's return from India, which prompted the swift gathering of a small, temporary military force. It is recounted that at that time, their total strength was no greater than twenty thousand men, and their arsenal consisted in part of some firearms bought, on occasion, from India, along with antiquated ammunitions left by the Han army. In the eighth or ninth year of the Republic [1919-20], during the conflict in Xikang, they continued to employ the old strategy, that is, they hastily assembled men

from the three locations of Shotalhosum²³ to confront the Han forces. In the end, the Han army suffered defeat, while the Tibetans claimed victory. The Han army's defeat is said to have resulted from discord between the frontline units and the rear guard. As the frontline faced a siege, the forces in the back refused to send reinforcements. This resulted in their downfall. The discord arose between the frontline forces and the rear units due to the actions of a deputy officer, who was the brother-in-law of a prominent figure at the forefront. While seeking supplies in Xikang, this deputy officer, emboldened by the influence of his brother-in-law, behaved with unchecked arrogance. His remarks, laced with scornful sarcasm and contempt, offended key figures from the rear units. This led to the creation of an unspoken rift between the two sides. Therefore, when the besieged front lines appealed for help from the rear, the rear retaliated by employing public relations to settle their private grudges. In doing so, they dismissed the frontlines' cries for help with derisive mockery. As a consequence, the front lines broke down, which in turn led to the fall of Chamdo, the surrender of arms, and the detention of troops. That military leaders often disregard the welfare of their country and nation, acting out of sheer impulse and using their official positions for private vengeance, a behavior that can lead to the loss of territory and even threaten the collapse of the nation, this issue, I fear, has been a pervasive affliction that has plagued the world's countries throughout history.

In the eighteenth or nineteenth year of the Republic [1929-30], during the battle at Dargyé²⁴ monastery in Xikang, the Tibetan authorities adopted an approach with three distinct components. Firstly, they employed their customary method of assembling troops at sites like Shotalhosum to confront the enemy. Secondly, they [94] conscripted and trained additional troops near Lhasa in order to gear up for battle. Thirdly, they dispatched agents to India to secure firearms and ammunition supplies. Moreover, the British proffered further resources. This combined effort formed the current force of some thirty to forty thousand men. Among these troops, some were garrisoned along the border between Chamdo and Dergé in Xikang, while others were recovering in places such as Chamdo. A contingent remained in Lhasa, and others enjoyed temporary leave at their homes. There was a significant lack of defensive deployments along the routes connecting Posterior Tibet to India. This suggests that the Tibetan authorities prioritized their defense against the Han over any threats posed by the British. This difference illustrates the degree of trust that Tibetans had in the Han as opposed to the British. Today, the esteemed individuals that have been positioned in Tibet appear to be in a deep slumber, showing a complete lack of vigilance. So, I find myself caught in a dilemma. Expressing admiration for the Tibetans could potentially irritate some folks. Still, failing to speak up my opinion would undermine my conscience. Therefore, I will avoid discussing the virtues or faults of the Tibetans at this moment and will instead acknowledge the effectiveness of the British, possibly!

23 C. Xia da luo 霞達羅; T. Sho star lho gsum; the toponym Shotalhosum refers to a region in the Chamdo Prefecture, which comprises three main districts (T. rdzong): Shopando (T. Sho pa mdo), Pembar (T. Dpal 'bar), and Lhodzong (T. Lho rdzong). Known for its strategic and administrative importance, the region served as the recruitment base for a local militia during the 1917-20 Tibetan-Chinese conflict in the Kham province. See Kobayashi 2018, 139-71.

24 C. Daji si 大吉寺; T. Dar rgyas dgon; on the Dargyé incident, see Kobayashi, 157-60.

Funding for Tibetan troops is largely sourced from taxes - I could not figure out the specific annual total. The funding for soldiers deployed to various regions is primarily raised on a temporary and local basis by administrative bodies, most notably in the Dergé district. This approach to raising funds enabled individuals in higher roles to claim the majority of the earnings, which left ordinary soldiers with negligible benefits. Such practices will almost always result in a catastrophic outcome for any army lacking discipline, correct? In Lhasa, the management of military funds is primarily managed by the Kashag, while the financial office situated under the Dalai's Mountain is responsible for direct accounting and disbursements. The financial governing body is known as Phogkhang,²⁵ where *phog*²⁶ refers to 'salaries' or 'rations', and *khang*²⁷ denotes a 'building' or an 'office'. This institution is responsible for allocating stipends for notable figures and provisions for military personnel. A branch of the Phogkhang is also located in Chamdo, as the bulk of military forces are stationed in Xikang.

[95] To protect themselves from the common threat of bandits in Tibet, soldiers will have generally learned to handle firearms well ahead of their military service. Each household is allowed to possess firearms, and it is customary to carry them in public spaces. Thus, they gain expertise in shooting from a young age. The training they receive as soldiers, however, consists mostly of forming lines, calling roll, arranging ranks, and marching routines. I have not come across any instruction or practice regarding shooting techniques from either a kneeling or prone position. When it comes to assessing terrain, arranging ranks, digging trenches, or building defensive structures, such notions remain entirely out of reach, and exist only in their wildest dreams, much less in any structured instruction or training. For this reason, I contend that their approach to military practices is unworthy of being called "military equipped". My fellow countrymen who have visited Tibet would likely concur, would they not?

6.5 Finances

In Tibet, there are two financial institutions. Nestled at the base of the Dalai's Mountain, the first is the Phogkhang. This institution receives funds from grain taxes and disburses them as salaries and rations. The detailed annual revenue and expenditure figures are unclear to me, since I made a point to avoid discussions about political or sensitive issues during my studies in Lhasa. Indeed, Tibetans are highly suspicious. Fostering a sense of mistrust in them would disrupt even the most serene study of holy scriptures, let alone any other pursuits. It took a great deal of effort and hardship for me to gain entry into Tibet, which led me to resolve to avoid any actions that might draw attention, especially before I had fully mastered my own studies. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Master Dayong was denied entry to Tibet because his imposing demeanor provoked alarm. He spent his last days [96] in Xikang, where he eventually died. How, could I, a junior scholar,

25 C. Pokang 坡康; T. Phogs khang; 'Payroll Office', with *phog* (T. phogs) meaning salary, annuity, emolument.

26 C. po 坡; T. phogs.

27 C. kang 康; T. khang.

be so bold as to repeat this misstep? Therefore, in relation to the military and financial matters of Tibet, I have recorded only what I received from reliable informants, avoiding any conjecture or unverified details.

The second financial institution is situated on top of the Jokhang Temple. This institution administers funds generated from alms given by donors²⁸ during the Great Prayer Festival in the first month and the Lesser Prayer Festival in the second month. Moreover, it also manages silver coins offered from various regions to the image of Śākyamuni Buddha located at the Jokhang. Reportedly, the Dalai Lama has financial deposits there as well. This financial institution is the wealthiest, and its sole enterprise revolves around lending money at interest. The funds that are left over after the collection of interests and the distribution of alms money are retained by those responsible for managing the institution. Currently, as the number of borrowers decreases and interest rates increase, the leftover funds have grown significantly, which enables anyone who is affiliated with that institution to accumulate fortunes in less than a year. Therefore, every prominent figure in Tibet is making efforts to secure a position there. When a vacancy arises [97], it is reported that fierce lobbying and substantial bribery ensue in a frenzied competition for selection. Ultimately, however, the process of selection tends to favor only those who have the closest ties to the Tibetan Regent. Others who rely on bribery alone still inevitably fail.

I was told that two years ago, in the latest round of official appointments, a *tsédzung*²⁹ from a hereditary family – a monastic official of the seventh rank or lower – was summoned by His Holiness Radreng owing to his familial connections. His Holiness directed him to write a formal letter of request for the position, which Radreng would subsequently endorse on his behalf. Yet, this *tsédzung* was of simple and few desires, and also possessed an understanding of the law of cause and effect. Thus, he refused to make profits from the funds of the greater saṅgha. His foster father, a man of modest desires, was renowned for his generosity and honesty and enjoyed a strong reputation in Tibet for his integrity and loyalty. The *tsédzung* sought advice from his foster father concerning the position. His foster father strongly advised against it, reasoning, “You are still quite young, your family business is already large, and you have few dependents. What compels someone to chase after that position?”. Heeding the advice of his foster father, the *tsédzung* opted against submitting a request, prompting Radreng to appoint someone else instead. This episode exemplifies the old adage, “Having connections at court makes securing an official post easy”, a principle that has consistently held true in Tibetan history.

The institution’s lending regulations allow for loans only when backed by equivalent assets in the form of goods or property, or by endorsements from two affluent officials. If these criteria are not met, applicants will not be eligible to receive a loan. Should the borrower miss the deadline for interest repayment, they will face additional penalties on the interest owed. If the borrower cannot fulfill the repayment, the institution will confiscate the collateral or insist that the guarantors pay off the debt. Hence, the institution is never faced with financial losses. It grows wealthier and

28 C. shizhu 施主; S. dānapati; T. sbyin bdag. From the Sanskrit *dāna*, ‘giving’, and *pati*, ‘master’, hence, ‘master of giving’, ‘donor’, ‘patron’, ‘benefactor’.

29 C. zizhong 咨仲; T. rtse drung; ‘monastic official’.

expands by the day. I have not verified whether the funds can be allocated for military expenditures. It appears unlikely that such allocations would take place unless [98] they are deemed absolutely essential! This institution employs numerous staff, including accountants, secretaries, and others who report to the director, yet I lack information regarding the exact number of employees and the total amount of funds under their management.

