7 Religion, Education, and Culture

Summary 7.1 Religious Institutions. – 7.2 Culture. – 7.3 Center of Gravity.

All Tibetans have a religious consciousness, and they regard Buddhism as their state religion. The majority are unaware that Buddhism also exists in our Inner Lands, as well as in Japan, Southeast Asia, and various other foreign lands – except for a small minority who know about it. They assert that after the demise of Buddhism in India, it was only Tibet that preserved it. They hold the view that Buddhism is the highest and unsurpassed teaching, and that its tenets are profound and incomparable. Even those who know about the existence of Buddhism in places like the Inner Lands or Japan tend to view its study there as lacking in completeness, and assert that Tibet is the only place that has thoroughly investigated its depths. For those on the

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outside, this may smack of provincial arrogance.[1] And yet, when investigated further, it becomes clear that contemporary Buddhist scholarship elsewhere does not match their level of thoroughness. Yet still, after all, this is just like a blind cat unexpectedly coming across a dead rat – they just stumbled upon it.[2] If you have a conversation about Buddhist learning with a certain Tibetan *géshé*s, it appears that no question, however intricate, lies beyond their capacity to elucidate. Moreover, they possess the ability to rapidly present examples and counterexamples, which leaves no room for rebuttal. This is a phenomenon I have never encountered in our Inner Lands before. Likewise, I observed several Buddhist speakers from Japan who visited the Inner Lands to give talks. Still, their scholarship did not impress me **[99]** as being especially noteworthy.

When Tibetan *géshé*s engage in debate, if they discuss the Abhidharma they must adhere to the Abhidharma, and so all discourse on the nature and scope of phenomena must be predicated upon the Abhidharma. Should someone take part in an Abhidharma debate and respond by digressing to the tenets of the Cittamātra or Madhyamaka, it is regarded as a defeat. Similarly, debates on Sautrāntika[3] tenets must be consistent with Sautrāntika positions on the nature and characteristics of phenomena. And so, when discussing the Cittamātra and the Madhyamaka, one must likewise remain consistent with the tenets of the Cittamātra and the Madhyamaka.

1 Here Fazun uses the *chengyu* 成語 or idiom *Yelang zida* 夜郎自大, "Yelang thinks highly of itself". The idiom originates from the *Han Shu* 漢書 (Book of Han), which documents the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The idiom refers to the historical anecdote of Yelang, a small, isolated kingdom in present-day southwestern China. Its ruler, unaware of the Han Empire's vastness, infamously asked a Han envoy whether Yelang or Han was larger. This episode became emblematic of provincial hubris – the delusion of grandeur caused by ignorance of the wider world. Figuratively, the idiom critiques individuals or groups who inflate their significance due to limited views, mistaking insularity for superiority. Here, Fazun invokes this idiom to characterize the perceived cultural chauvinism of some Tibetans who regard their Buddhist traditions as uniquely profound and exclusive, particularly in contrast to Buddhist traditions in China, Japan, and beyond. While Fazun acknowledges that such attitudes may appear to outsiders as self-aggrandizing – similar to Yelang's arrogance – he simultaneously concedes a paradoxical truth: Tibetan Buddhist scholarship *is* unusually rigorous in many respects. Still, he attributes this distinction less to intentional superiority than to historical accident. In the following paragraph, Fazun likens this irony to a "blind cat stumbling on a dead rat". He suggests that the thoroughness of Tibetan Buddhism was a fortunate accident rather than a product of intentional merit. By deploying *Yelang zida*, Fazun critiques provincial arrogance while tempering his censure with an admission of Tibet's accidental scholarly eminence. In so doing, he weaves a soft critique of Tibet's cultural exceptionalism.

2 C. *Xia mao zhuang zhe si lao shu* 瞎貓撞着死老鼠; translating to "A blind cat stumbles upon a dead rat". This Chinese proverb mocks success that is achieved by chance or without merit. This phrase illustrates a picture of a blind cat – unable to hunt – encountering a lifeless rat by sheer chance. This encounter represents success that comes from luck rather than from skill or effort. The proverb examines results that are not rooted in merit, mostly in scenarios where success is attributed to random factors. In contrast to the English saying "even a blind squirrel finds a nut", which has a more humorous connotation, the Chinese proverb typically suggests ridicule towards the unskilled individual who benefits. Here, Fazun points out the contradiction in Tibet's thorough doctrines, proposing that their notable qualities stem more from auspicious historical developments than from conscious mastery of the fate of Buddhism after its demise in India.

3 C. Jingbu 經部; T. Mdo sde pa; 'Followers of the sūtras'. The Sautrāntika is one of the schools of the mainstream Buddhist tradition in India. This school is distinguished from the Ābhidharmikas, referred to as 'Followers of the Abhidharma', who derive their teachings from Abhidharma texts like the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā*. The Sautrāntikas, often viewed as a breakaway from the Sarvāstivāda tradition, opposed the Abhidharma, asserting that it did not reflect the words of the Buddha (S. buddhavacana). Instead, they aligned themselves with the doctrine of momentariness (S. kṣaṇikavāda), which contends that only actions taking place in the present moment are truly existent. This viewpoint further separated them from the Sarvāstivādins.

When one strays from the topic or provides answers that avoid addressing the question, all such instances amount to a defeat. Additionally, during debates in Tibet, all statements must follow the reasoning modes of the science of dialectics,[4] which involves both refutation[5] and establishment.[6] Hence, random statements are not permitted. Respondents are expected to conform to the logical framework outlined in major treatises on dialectics,[7] constrained to one of four responses:[8] unestablished,[9] uncertain,[10] contradictory,[11] or accepted.[12] Any other response outside of these four alternatives[13] is inadmissible.

Not only is this rigorous style of debate missing in the Inner Lands, but it seems to be lacking even in Japan, which boasts of being the place where Buddhism thrives the most! The situation is even less noteworthy in the Southeast Asian island regions, where Hīnayāna Buddhism is the norm. Therefore, I believe that the way in which they organize their studies within the Buddhadharma, the themes they investigate, and the conclusions they reach – right knowledge and right view – are unrivaled when set against

4 C. Yinming 因明; T. Gtan tshigs kyi rig pa; from the Sanskrit Hetuvidyā, the 'science of reasoning'.

5 C. nengpo 能破; S. pratiṣedha; T. dgag pa. In English, 'negation', 'refutation'. In Buddhist logic, *pratiṣedha* represents the negation or refutation of a position put forth by an opponent.

6 C. nengli 能立; S. sādhana; T. sgrub pa; 'proof'. In syllogistic reasoning, the term *sādhana* conveys the sense of a proof statement, namely that which establishes the syllogism.

7 Unlike the earlier sentence in the manuscript, where the term *Yinming* 因明 is not underlined, and, therefore, must be intended in a general sense, in this sentence Fazun underlines the term, which, in this case, identifies a genre of works on Buddhist Dialectics: "Yinming lunli de geshi 因明論理的格式", which I translate here as the "logical framework outlined in major treatises on dialectics".

8 In this passage, Fazun explains that debates in Tibet must follow established dialectical methods, particularly refutation (S. dūṣaṇa) and proof (S. sādhana). Random or imprecise responses are not permitted. Instead, respondents are bound by a particular theoretical framework, which allows for only four types of replies to a *prasaṅga*, the Sanskrit term for 'consequence' (T. thal 'gyur): 1) Unestablished (T. ma grub pa; S. asiddha): When the reason fails to prove the proposed property;)2) Uncertain (T. ma nges pa; S. anaikāntika): When the reason neither proves nor refutes the property; 3) Contradictory (T. 'gal ba; S. virodha): When the reason directly implies the opposite of the intended property; 4) Accepted (T. 'dod pa; S. abhyupeta): When the respondent agrees with the conclusion; Fazun notes that this systematic approach to debate, which Tibet has inherited from India, is entirely absent in China and seemingly nonexistent in Japan, despite its long Buddhist history. Tibetan debate draws heavily on Indian Hetuvidyā, particularly its classification of faulty reasoning (S. hetvābhāsa). By formalizing these four types of responses, Tibetan scholastics transformed debate into a clear and rigorous exercise, ensuring that arguments remained logical and theoretically sound. This strict adherence to dialectical norms illustrates the importance of debate within the Tibetan scholastic tradition and, Fazun argues, sets it apart from other Buddhist cultures. On the four types of responses to a *prasaṅga* cf., in particular, Onoda 1988, 36-41.

9 In Fazun's Chinese, *da bucheng* 答不成, 'the response is unestablished' (S. asiddha; T. ma grub pa).

10 Fazun employs the phrase *da buding* 答不定, "the response is uncertain" (S. anaikāntika; T. ma nges pa).

11 For the third response, Fazun offers *da xiangwei* 答相違, "the response is contradictory" (S. virodha; T. 'gal ba).

12 The fourth response is finally rendered as *da shi xu* 答是許, "the response is accepted" (S. abhyupeta; T. 'dod pa); the phrase *shi xu* 是許, with *shi* 是 adding emphasis and conveying certainty, translates the Sanskrit *abhyupeta*, meaning agreed upon, authorized, permitted, allowed.

13 C. siju 四句; 'four items'.

the studies of Buddhism in the Inner Lands and various other countries. Presently, the propagation of the Buddhadharma in the Inner Lands and Japan is characterized by bringing together people who hold a Buddhist faith in various venues, offering them superficial discussions about essential knowledge, and then promoting this as a global movement. Among the examples in India are the Buddhist Studies Academy[14] in Sārnāth and the Maha Bodhi Society[15] situated in Kolkata. Those who live in remote locations may have the impression, after reading their announcements in the press, that there are thriving centers of Buddhist practice, apparently engaged in daily lectures and in the propagation of the Buddha's teachings. Yet, if someone were to actually visit and look into the matter, they would discover that these statements **[100]** are simply intended to encourage and inspire people.

By contrast, the propagation of the Buddhadharma in Tibet follows an entirely different course. It must involve the establishment of large centers of practice dedicated to debate and study – monasteries or designated sites – where the essential meanings of treatises like the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* are routinely ascertained. To effectively propagate the Dharma, it is crucial to undergo intensive training that focuses on cultivating a group of talented people who have a genuine understanding of the Buddhadharma. Building temples in different areas, maintaining monasteries with large monastic populations, gathering considerable material resources for these institutions, or arranging for a lama to give teachings and bestow initiations, none of these actions qualify as propagating the Buddhadharma. Even if millions of mules and horses were presented as offerings, they would still be called just offerings, and not a method to propagate the Buddhadharma. Therefore, even when it is referred to as the propagation of the Buddhadharma, it would still be nothing but an empty designation.

Throughout Tibet, aside from Buddhism, they have no other form of education or culture. Thus, their system of education, except for elementary school that provide basic teaching in Tibetan writing and phonetics, has no schools that offer instruction in grammar. To receive instruction on subjects like composition, poetry, and the Sanskrit language it is necessary to rely on the ordained saṅgha for teaching. As for the profound and vast aspects of doctrine, the monastic community alone is capable of understanding them. My teacher[16] in Tibet was a great scholar, deeply versed in the science of sounds.[17] Every day, a large group of Tibetan officials would arrive to learn grammar from him. Moreover, a select group of high-ranking officials gathered to listen to his teachings on the *Lamrim Chenmo*, doing so twice daily, during the morning and evening hours. In this manner, they developed

14 C. Foxue *yuan* 佛學院.

15 C. Da puti hui 大菩提會.

16 Here, Fazun is referring to Amdo Géshé Jampel Rölpai Lodrö.

17 C. shengming 聲明; S. śabdavidyā; T. sgra rig pa. From the Sanskrit *śabdavidyā*, the "Science of Sounds" is one of the five sciences (S. pañcavidyā) in ancient Indian and Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Beyond Sanskrit grammar, it includes related fields such as poetics (S. alaṃkāraśāstra), prosody (S. chandas), lexicography (S. kośa), and performing arts (S. nāṭyaśāstra). Along with *śabdavidyā*, there are four other fields of classical learning: (1) *śilpavidyā* (T. bzo rig pa), the science of arts and craftsmanship; (2) *cikitsāvidyā* (T. gso ba rig pa), the science of medicine; (3) *hetuvidyā* (T. gtan tshig rig pa), the science of reasoning; and (4) *adhyātmavidyā* (T. nang rig pa), the science of inner awareness. An individual who achieves expertise across all five sciences is bestowed the title of *mahāpaṇḍita* (T. pan chen), which may be rendered as "great learned master".

a sincere and pristine faith towards the Buddhadharma. Afterward, they demonstrated their faith through their conduct and in their roles as leaders of the people. The present Regent of Tibet is my teacher's unparalleled disciple. Out of the four *kalön*s, three took refuge under him. Other figures **[101]**, including the Chikhyap Khenpo,[18] had turned to him for instruction for a long time and used to belong to his habitual circle that listened to the Buddhadharma.

Therefore, I propose that education in modern Tibet is intrinsically linked to the Buddhadharma. Beyond the Buddhadharma, they simply have no alternative system of education. If this holds true for education, how might their culture be otherwise? All cultural artifacts in Tibet are inextricably linked with Buddhism. Consider the material forms of their culture – handcrafted items, artistic creations, and architectural styles. Their expertise is defined by their mastery of sacred art, including the creation of Buddha images, skillful carvings, metal castings, and paintings of deities, along with the majestic and grand Buddha halls they have built. From this perspective, Tibet can indeed be seen as an exemplary realm governed by Buddhist principles. With that in mind, I will now outline the religious institutions and their related aspects in short sections.

7.1 Religious Institutions

We will now shift to Tibet's religious institutions, which are primarily centered in the Buddhadharma. When the Dharma has a flawless structure, the monastic community can rely on it and engage in proper practice. Our forebears often said, "A person can enlarge the Way, but the Way cannot enlarge a person".[19] The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* also states, "There are those persons who uphold, expound, and cultivate it. Thus, it remains present in the

18 C. Jiqiao kanbu 笈喬堪布; Fazun employs different sinographs here for his phonetic rendering of Chikhyap Khenpo.

19 This is a quotation from *The Analects of Confucius* (15.29). For this stanza, cf. Watson 2007, 109.

world".[20] These statements imply that although the Buddhadharma exceeds perfection,[21] if there are no individuals who study it, comprehension will not arise; without comprehension, teaching cannot take place; without teaching, practice is impossible; and without practice, the reward of enlightenment remains elusive. By consequence, an impeccably organized doctrine is not enough by itself. To implement this perfect teaching, it is essential to have individuals who can uphold the Saddharma; it is only under such conditions that it will be effective.

Those **[102]** capable of upholding the Saddharma can be categorized in two distinct groups: one that relies on true faith and another that depends on right understanding and right practice. In epochs of imperial rule, the Tathāgata entrusted the preservation of the Dharma to kings, ministers, revered elders, and lay practitioners who embodied true faith. In our modern age, where nations are built by the people, this responsibility has been taken on by prominent figures and lay practitioners from various backgrounds who embody true faith. Those who uphold the Dharma through right understanding and right practice are the monastics who bear the emblem

20 In this paragraph, Fazun discusses how the survival of the Dharma in Tibet depends on individuals who actively sustain it. To illustrate this, he cites two lines from Xuanzang's Chinese translation of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (C. *Apidamo jushe lun* 阿毘達磨俱舍論). Drawn from the *Samāpattinirdeśa*, the eighth chapter of the *Bhāṣya* on the "Exposition of Attainments" (8:39), the stanza states:

Fo zhengfa you er 佛正法有二,	The Buddha's True Teaching is twofold.
wei jiao zheng wei ti 謂教證為體,	It consists of scripture and realization as its essence.
you chi shuo xing zhe 有持說行者,	There are those who uphold, expound, and cultivate it.
ci bian zhu shijian 此便住世間。	Thus, it remains present in the world.

Here, the *Kośa* explains the relationship between textual preservation and lived practice in maintaining the Dharma through the ages. Fazun reflects on the religious institutions of Tibet, exploring the twofold essence of the True Teaching (S. Saddharma, C. Zhengfa 正法), which consists of scripture (S. āgama) and realization (S. adhigama). He does so by asserting that theory and practice are inseparable, for neither can sustain the Dharma alone. In particular, *āgama* refers to texts that preserve the Buddha's teachings and provide guidance on the path. However, Fazun warns, "Without study, there can be no understanding; without understanding, no teaching; without teaching, no practice; and without practice, no one to achieve the reward of enlightenment. A perfectly organized doctrine, by itself, is insufficient. It must be upheld and applied by individuals who can sustain the Saddharma". The survival of *āgama* depends on individuals who are dedicated to studying, teaching, and transmitting these texts across generations. *Adhigama*, on the other hand, refers to the realization of the Dharma through meditation and the cultivation of the constituents of enlightenment (S. bodhipākṣikadharma). Fazun discusses the fragility of *adhigama*, noting that realization thrives only within a lineage of practitioners committed to disciplined cultivation. Without such individuals, the Buddha's Dharma risks stagnation. To sustain the Saddharma, then, Fazun identifies three essential activities: (1) preserving the teachings through memorization and recitation, (2) making them accessible through explanation, and (3) embodying them through the cultivation of morality, meditation, and wisdom. Based on these activities, he divides practitioners into two categories: (a) those who support it with true faith and (b) those with abide in it through correct understanding and practice. In his analysis, Fazun also reflects on the historical shifts in the material structures supporting the Dharma. In earlier periods, Buddhism relied on imperial patronage. In the modern world of nation-states, however, its survival depends on collaboration between monastic and lay practitioners. Fazun concludes by warning of the precarious state of *adhigama*. While scriptures may endure for centuries, realization is far more vulnerable as it requires an unbroken lineage of practitioners. On this passage of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, cf. de la Vallée Poussin 1925, 219-20; Pruden 1991, 1281; and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo 2012, 2436.

21 Here, Fazun employs a hyperbole: *Fofa sui shi yibai ershier fen de wanmei* 佛法雖是一百二十分的完美. This rhetorical overstatement translates to "although the Buddhadharma is one hundred and twenty per cent perfect".

of the Tathāgata, for they have relinquished their worldly ties and have freed themselves from family bonds.

I will not discuss the topic of lay practitioners here. Monastics, however, can be divided into two separate categories. The first category features those who dwell in solitude or in tiny, widely spread groups. These monastics, having been associated with a *kalyāṇamitra* for a long time, have heard the teachings extensively, and have minimal distractions. They reside in forest retreats or marginal dwellings and cultivate cessation and realization. They are genuinely regarded as the supreme adornments of the Buddha's teachings. This is precisely what is stated in the Vinaya: those who find the greatest joy are the ones who are endowed with extensive learning and who calmly abide in the forest. It is this category of monastics that primarily upholds and realizes the Saddharma, a topic I do not intend to explore here. The second category includes monastics who reside in large, well-supported communities. A saying goes, "Where many people **[103]** gather, minds are not together". In places where numerous people live together, it is essential to establish a strong organizational structure and shared regulations. Without these components, there would be ceaseless disorder, aimless comings and goings, squandered time, and no meaningful achievement. It is not a strange thing for monasteries in Tibet to house communities of several thousands of monks. Certainly, the monasteries in Tibet cannot be compared with the ones present in our Inner Lands. Thus, their approaches to organization are also somewhat different from those employed in monasteries in the Inner Lands. These aspects will be outlined in the sections below:

7.1.1 The Organization of the Saṅgha in Tibetan Monasteries

At the time when Buddhist monasteries and the saṅgha were first being established in Tibet, their earliest structure was somewhat unlike the forms that are preserved in various regions today. For example, Tibetans claim that contemporary monasteries in Lhasa, such as the Great and Small Jokhang Temples and Samye Monastery, have preserved their original form. Still, historical records indicate that these sites were either rebuilt following destruction by fire or renovated after they had fallen into disrepair for a long time, which naturally resulted in changes to their original designs. I do not possess enough information to discuss the structure of the early saṅgha. Therefore, when describing the structure of the saṅgha within Tibetan monasteries, I will only focus on what is commonly observed in the present day.

7.1.1.1 The Structure of Tibetan Monasteries

In terms of their architectural layout, monasteries do not adhere to a definitive model. Based on what is stated in the Vinaya, the central structure should be the main hall, and the main gate should be placed directly opposite to it. Extending from both sides of the gate, the saṅgha's quarters should be arranged in a symmetrical manner to either side of the main hall. At the center of the courtyard, there is a large square platform paved in crimson

red,[22] which resembles the design of Longchang Temple located on Mount Baohua in the Inner Lands. However, Longchang Temple features a large altar, and not a gate, which deviates from the prescriptions found in the Vinayapiṭaka. Most medium-sized monasteries in Tibet and Xikang feature this architectural style – with the exception of certain ones like Drépung. The largest monasteries, such as Drépung and Sera **[104]**, employ markedly different designs. A central assembly hall is usually erected in a strategic location to host the entire saṅgha for morning prayers and scripture recitation. There is a kitchen for brewing tea, but aside from it, the hall is generally isolated from other kinds of residences for the saṅgha.

Still, large monasteries are necessarily divided into several central units termed *dratsang*. Each *dratsang* is further subdivided into numerous smaller units called *khangtsen*.[23] Each *dratsang* possesses its own main hall, which serves as the site for its members to chant the scriptures at noon. Similarly, each *khangtsen* has a main hall, which is usually encircled by the saṅgha's quarters and centered around a square platform, in line with the layout that is described in the Vinaya. In addition, each *dratsang* within these large monasteries features a designated space allocated for doctrinal teaching and debate sessions. For example, there are four *dratsang* in Drépung Monastery, three in Sera Monastery, and two in Ganden Monastery. The variety in the number of *khangtsen* is extensive and cannot be fully documented here.

In terms of organization, every monastery in Kham and Ü-Tsang, regardless of sect, is under the oversight of a larger monastery. To meet the necessary monastic qualifications, the saṅgha from minor monasteries must spend time residing and training at a major monastery before going back to their home monastery. This system is akin to the system of central and branch temples that exists in Japan. Moreover, the smaller residential units inside the large monasteries are primarily divided according to the monks' native regions. For example, in order to avoid any conflicts, monks from the Chuchen[24] district who join one of Tibet's three great monasteries must reside in the Gyelrong Khangtsen[25] – a specific residential unit – . Monks who come from regions to the west of Dartsédo extending to Minyak are required to live in the Minyak Khangtsen.[26] And again, monks from the Dawu, Drango, Karze, and Nyakrong regions are to be allocated to the Zhungpa Khangtsen.[27]

The details regarding the management of these monastic communities will be outlined in the following sections:

22 C. danchi 丹墀; literally, 'crimson stairs'. In China, *danchi* originally described the stone terrace in front of imperial palaces, characterized by its red lacquer finish that inspired the term. As time passed, the definition expanded to encompass the entrances of government structures and shrines or temples.

23 C. kangcun 康村; T. khang tshan.

24 C. Jinchuan 金川; T. Chu chen.

25 C. Jiarong kangcun 甲絨康村; T. Rgyal rong khang tshan.

26 C. Muniang kangcun 木孃康村; T. Mi nyag khang tshan.

27 C. Zhuwo kangcun 諸窩康村; T. Gzhung pa khang tshan.

7.1.1.2 The Structure of the Monastic Community

[105] In Tibet, the structure of the monastic community can be classified into two main categories: the (A) organization of administrative roles inside the monasteries, and the (B) organization of high-ranking lamas outside the monasteries.

7.1.1.2.1. The Organization of Administrative Positions Inside the Monasteries

There are two key positions in managing the monasteries. The first position, which involves managing the assets of the entire complex, is referred to as *chiso*,[28] meaning 'administrator'. These individuals serve as the general managers of the saṅgha's entire property and resources. This role is held by a chief manager and a deputy manager, supported by numerous assistants. Their main responsibility is managing the assets; they refrain from getting involved in matters concerning the discipline and behavior of the saṅgha. The second position is called *shelngo*,[29] meaning 'steward'. It refers to the individuals responsible for overseeing the decorum of the entire complex. They are tasked with inspecting and correcting the conduct and manners of the saṅgha. While they have some degree of authority over the assets of the entire complex, they rarely get involved in such dealings. This position holds the highest level of authority throughout the entire monastery. Whether it is the *khenpo*s at the top or the assemblies of monks[30] at the bottom, everyone avoids them upon sight, as there is absolutely no instance in which one would walk alongside them or hinder their path. This role has a principal and a deputy, supported by multiple assistants. The entire management of the monastic complex is handled exclusively by these two positions. The *umdze*[31] in charge of the main hall is only responsible with leading the assemblies in their chanting activities.

Each *dratsang* is managed by three main positions:
1) *khenpo*;
2) steward;[32]
3) disciplinarian.[33]

The *khenpo*, meaning 'abbot',[34] is responsible for the education and management of the monastic community situated in a specific *dratsang*. They are also accountable for managing discipline and handling property matters. In practice, the *khenpo* is entrusted with the task of guiding the saṅgha's education in the entire monastery, for the *khenpo* leads the

28 C. jixu 機緒; T. spyi bso.

29 C. yi'e 義鄂. Fazun's phonetic rendering, *yi'e*, does not seem to correspond to any of the official positions. Here I will tentatively use *shelngo* (T. zhal ngo). I would like to thank Brenton Sullivan for suggesting this possibility.

30 C. qingzhong 清衆.

31 C. weinuo 維那; T. dbu mdzad; in English, 'leader of the chant', i.e. vice-abbot.

32 C. dangjia 當家; this is most likely Fazun's translation of the role of *shelngo* (T. zhal ngo). See the footnote on *yi'e* above.

33 C. geguo 格果; T. dge skos, 'gekö'.

34 C. zhuchi 住持.

saṅgha in debate sessions. He has the authority to monitor and inspect the assemblies of the saṅgha occurring in the monastery. He instructs and corrects the saṅgha, ensuring that their knowledge and discipline are both correct. Additionally, the *khenpo* also serves as the primary liaison with the government on institutional matters. This position demands authentic scholarly expertise. Indeed, this position cannot be held by anyone who lacks the required qualifications. In Tibet's major monasteries, *khenpo*s are appointed from among the *géshé*s, except in special cases. Every **[106]** *dratsang* is led by one *khenpo*, while the count of their assistants can vary.

The second position, that of the steward, serves as a representative of the monastic assembly within a specific *dratsang*. The steward manages all properties, handles their revenue streams, and distributes the expenses accordingly. This position is not part of the saṅgha's scholarly curriculum. When they come across each other, the steward and the saṅgha simply show mutual respect and make way for one another. There are several stewards in each *dratsang*, and they are assisted by a host of others.

The third position is that of the disciplinarian, known in Tibetan as *gekö*, meaning 'upholder of virtue'. The disciplinarian is responsible for ensuring that the saṅgha maintains proper conduct and remains disciplined. They supervise the conduct of the saṅgha in the main hall and on debate grounds, yet they do not possess any authority over educational or financial issues. For this reason, neither the stewards nor the disciplinarians, regardless of whether they oversee the entire monastery or just one *dratsang*, are required to be *géshé*s or scholars. Even ordinary members of the saṅgha can hold these positions. Besides the various positions found in each *dratsang*, including the rector,[35] there exist additional roles. However, these roles do not carry significant weight and do not require further discussion here.

The management of each regional unit within a monastery is divided into two main categories: 1) those who are responsible for property; 2) those who are responsible for the conduct of the monastic community. Those who belong in the first category are also called stewards, and manage the assets of a specific regional unit. It is important to clarify that the property of a large monastery can be classified into three broad categories:

a. assets that are collectively owned by the saṅgha as a whole, managed by the general supervisor;
b. assets that are jointly held by the saṅgha of a specific *dratsang*, managed by its respective stewards;
c. assets that are shared by the saṅgha of a particular regional unit, managed by the stewards within that subunit.

The second position, responsible for overseeing monastic discipline, is known as *khangtsen gegen*.[36] The *khangtsen gegen* serves a mentor for newly arrived monks in a regional unit during the current year. Generally, the length of a monk's residency at the monastery determines the appointments of these two positions, although certain *khangtsen*s might implement distinct selection methods. Monks that have fulfilled their positions as *khangtsen gegen* become part of the upper echelon of the student body. Upon joining

35 See note above on *weinuo* 維那 (T. dbu mdzad).

36 C. kangcun gegeng 康村格梗; T. khang tshan dge rgan; a *khangtsen gegen* is the head teacher of a regional unit.

this group, individuals gain the privilege to engage in deliberations, share suggestions, and offer critiques on issues related to their regional unit. Newly arrived monks, however **[107]**, are not permitted to express their views or engage in deliberations, nor do they possess the qualifications to be involved in these conversations. The remaining lesser administrative positions are too fragmented and numerous to outline in full detail.

7.1.1.2.2. The Organization of High-Ranking Lamas Outside the Monasteries

The phrase 'outside the monasteries' here does not imply that these individuals reside outside monastic grounds. Rather, it means that they do not hold formal administrative positions within a specific monastery. Nevertheless, they retain protective or instructional authority over the saṅgha, either in part or as a whole.

These individuals may be classified into two broad categories: (1) those who are appointed through perpetual incarnation lines, and (2) those who are appointed through formal examinations.

1. Those selected through incarnation lines are represented by the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. These masters are identified when they are children. They are chosen either based on recollections of their past lives, by being selected by others, or by means of signs revealed by a deity. After an elaborate enthronement ceremony, a lama distinguished by exceptional learning and virtue is appointed as their preceptor, with the support of several other erudite tutors. Their daily activities, like studying and reciting the scriptures, are very much like those of ordinary monks. However, their living conditions are slightly more comfortable. They have companions who help them every day in matters of study, discussion, and debate, which fosters a more favorable environment compared to the rest of the community. By the time they turn twenty, their education has reached a considerable level, at which point they receive the *bhikṣu* precepts and sit for the *géshé* examination. Upon successfully passing the *géshé* exam, they formally assume the duties and privileges associated with their previous incarnation. For instance, the Dalai Lama holds authority over all religious and political issues in Tibet, which allows him the power to investigate, adjudicate, regulate, and initiate new policies. The Panchen Lama exercises comparable authority over a designated portion of Posterior Tibet. Other incarnate lamas, such as *nomin han*s[37] and *hothokthu*s,[38] have comparable levels of authority in their respective territories, yet this never extends to the whole of Tibet. Thus, among the entire population of Tibet, the Dalai Lama alone occupies the supreme position in both religious and political spheres.
2. The category of those appointed through formal examinations is most notably represented by the Ganden Tripa, the most prestigious

37 C. nuomenhan 諾門汗; T. no mon han; The Mongolian equivalent of the Tibetan *chos kyi rgyal po* and the Sanskrit *dharmarāja*.

38 C. hudutu 呼都圖; T. ho thog thu; The Mongolian title *hothokthu* (T. ho thog thu, or hu thug thu) designates high-ranking incarnate lamas who received formal recognition and were officially registered by the Manchu court.

> title that denotes the holder of Tsongkhapa's seat **[108]** at Ganden Monastery. This master rises from the ranks of ordinary saṅgha members. The progression follows this sequence. First and foremost, after gaining a thorough understanding of the sūtra teachings, one will sit for the *géshé* examination. One then enters the Gyüpa[39] for intensive study of the tantric techniques. Following a tenure in multiple positions, such as *gekö* in the Gyüpa, one ascends to become the Gyüpa's *khenpo* – which is regarded as the most prestigious rank among all *khenpo*s. After achieving the status of *khenpo*, one can advance to become one of the two *chöje*s, and ultimately, from the position of *chöje*, one may rise to the rank of Ganden Tripa. The Tripa holds authority to govern and regulate the teachings of the Buddha throughout Tibet. While he may deliberate on political matters, he has no real power in that sphere. The *chöje*s below him fulfill honorary positions, as they are not significantly involved in either religious or political governance. Lower in the hierarchy, the *khenpo* of the Gyüpa retains practical authority over all financial and doctrinal matters pertaining to the Gyüpa. Positions that report to the *khenpo*, such as the *gekö* of the Gyüpa, carry duties comparable to those of the *gekö*s in large monasteries.

Let me provide a brief outline of the Gyüpa system here. The college's architectural style resembles that of a medium monastery, providing space for around five to six hundred individuals. The monastic body is divided into two categories: (1) those who enter the Gyüpa directly without first passing the *géshé* examination at any of the three great monasteries, and (2) those who join after successfully passing the *géshé* qualification. In order to gain admission into the Gyüpa, candidates must initially rely upon a mentor to learn and memorize the *Śrī Guhyasamājamahātantrarāja*[40] and its *sādhana*,[41] with the requirement that they can recite it from memory. Entry is granted only when openings become available – each Gyüpa has a cap of five hundred monks, with a total of one thousand when combining both the upper and lower Gyüpa. Upon admission, monks spend their first five years as *śrāmaṇera*s.[42] Throughout this period, they assist fully ordained *bhikṣu*s by handling various responsibilities, including preparing meals and gathering water. In the sixth year, they receive the *bhikṣu* vows and are then assisted by the newer *śrāmaṇera*s. The main emphasis of this group is on perfecting the *sādhana*s associated with the tantra class,[43] while there

39 C. Juba 舉巴; T. Rgyud pa; The two Gyüpas, or 'Tantric Colleges', are central institutions of the Geluk tradition in Lhasa, established to preserve and teach advanced Secret Mantra practices. The Gyümé Dratsang (T. Rgyud smad grwa tshang), the Lower Tantra College, is located in southern Lhasa, while the Gyütö Dratsang (T. Rgyud stod grwa tshang), the Upper Tantra College, is located in the north of the city. Admission traditionally depended on the student's region of origin.

40 C. *Jimi jingang dajiaowang jing* 集密金剛大教王經與儀軌; T. *Dpal gsang ba 'dus pa rgyud kyi rgyal po*; in English, 'The Glorious Hidden Assembly Great King of Tantras'.

41 C. yigui 儀軌; by *yigui*, corresponding to *sādhana*, Fazun likely refers to the *Śrīguhyasamājalokeśvarasādhana* (T. *Dpal gsang ba 'dus pa 'jig rten dbang phyug gi sgrub pa'i thabs*), compiled by Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna and translated by Rinchen Sangpo (T. Rin chen bzang po, 958-1055).

42 C. shami 沙彌; T. dge tshul; in English, a male 'novice'.

43 C. Mibu 密部; Rgyud sde.

is minimal engagement in doctrinal study. Those who enter after passing the *géshé* examination, follow a conduct similar to that of the first-year *śrāmaṇera*s, attending all classes in the hall without exception, although they are exempted from performing service for the *bhikṣu*s as the *śrāmaṇera*s are. From their second year onward, they become like a *sthavira*[44] and are afforded **[109]** accommodations in every regard. Those who display exceptional scholarship and virtuous behavior may become eligible for higher positions, such as *khenpo*. Other positions, such as the rector,[45] follow the same structure as those found in other large monasteries. The remaining monastics who hold official and influential positions are as numerous as the hairs on a yak. I will outline them briefly in the following sections.

7.1.2 Lifestyles of the Saṅgha in Tibet

The term 'lifestyle' necessarily involves the three principles of clothing, food, and shelter. In the context of worldly fame and profit, these three belong to the category of material resources. Yet, based on the Vinaya, one should subsist entirely on alms and refrain from accumulating possessions, in compliance with the Buddhadharma's system of discipline. Thus, monastic communities in places like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma, still retain many traits of the original Buddhist monastic system. However, in regions characterized by vast lands, sparse populations, and snow-covered, icy terrains, this system often cannot be implemented in full. For this reason, in the Vinayapiṭaka, the Buddha granted certain concessions for *bhikṣu*s in frontier regions – for example, allowing the use of animal hides for bedding and clothing in cold climates. Ultimately, the rules spoken by the Buddha are meant to serve practical purposes. Where they cannot be followed, the Buddha set no obligation to enforce them in a strict manner. Tibet, situated among the highest elevations in today's world, endures a bitterly cold, wind-swept climate, much like that of the polar regions. Here, the selection of clothing and shelter is dictated by the need for warmth, and the food options are determined by what is available locally. The lifestyles of laypeople have already been explored in depth. We will now discuss the everyday lives of monastics, dividing them for the sake of simplicity into two categories: the ordinary and the distinguished.

Within the confines of the monastery, ordinary monks primarily sustain themselves on highland barley, also known as pearl barley, which they prepare by roasting and grinding the barley into flour. This staple, called tsampa in Tibetan, is their main source of nutrition **[110]**. Every day, at around four or five in the morning, all saṅgha members come together in the main hall for chanting. During the chanting session, three bowls of tea are served. Each monk brings their own bowl and their supply of tsampa. The first bowl of tea is used for mixing the flour that will be used for breakfast.

44 C. shangzuo 上座; P. thera; T. gnas brten; from the Sanskrit, 'elder'. The term *sthavira* identifies a senior monk, generally one who has maintained full ordination (S. upasaṃpadā) for a period of at least ten years. Ordination duration, rather than age, is what establishes a person's seniority. The Chinese term *shangzuo* specifically denotes the monk who holds the top position in the assembly, and it is equivalent to the term *shouzuo* (C. shouzuo 首座). Accordingly, the term refers to a 'senior monk' (C. zhanglao 長老), or, in certain situations, it can mean 'head monk', or 'abbot'.

45 See note above on *weinuo* 維那 (T. dbu mdzad).

Bringing butter, meat, and vegetables into the hall is strictly prohibited. After the monks have eaten their tsampa, they drink two more bowls of plain tea. Between nine and ten in the morning, monks from each college gather in their respective halls to engage in the recitation of the scriptures. During this session, they are served three or four more bowls of tea. Once again, they come with their own bowls and supply of tsampa, without any other food. In the early afternoon, around three or four, monks from each regional unit come together in their residence halls for tea and chanting, with the choice to eat tsampa or abstain from eating altogether. Beyond the three daily gatherings, particularly during debate sessions or study activities, there is no serving of food or tea. Monks who have accumulated some savings could, after several days, opt to buy a small amount of butter. After the noon session wraps up, they make their way back to their room, boil a pot of butter tea,[46] and drink it heartily – in this way, they attain a level of bliss beyond words. Those who can buy rice or flour for their food are regarded by others as thriving, and their reputation for wealth is circulated throughout the monastery.

For clothing, a robe of pure wool is worn on the outside, a woolen lower garment underneath, and a wool vest as the base layer. The combined cost of these three items is no more than about ten *yuan* 元. For hall ceremonies or teachings, they add a woolen cape, with items of mid-quality priced around five to six *yuan*. The more affluent individuals could also own a long inner robe and a woolen underskirt, but the wearing of trousers is categorically banned. During nighttime, they wrap themselves in their clothes as if they were blankets and sleep on one or two layers of worn felts. On the exterior, their dwelling residences bear resemblance to Western-style buildings. Yet, their interiors are devoid of any natural light and consist of narrow earthen cells. Overall, the daily life of ordinary monks dwelling in Tibetan monasteries is remarkably simple. They store their tsampa, food stocks, and heating fuel within their own rooms. Elderly monks or those who have spent a longer time in the monastery **[111]** often have two rooms, an outer room and an inner room. The outer room functions as a kitchen. The inner room serves at the same time as a living space, a studio, and a storeroom, and it may additionally house several holy images and scriptural texts.

Beyond managing this simple lifestyle, they devote their time to studying the scriptures and debating the treatises. The schedule for study periods is irregular and depends on the teacher's availability, while debates take place after the three daily assemblies. There are also specific intervals for debate, called Dharma Assemblies,[47] which span about six months of the year. During the remaining six months, in the absence of such assemblies, the saṅgha from across all colleges gets together to gather firewood and collect alms.

They obtain their livelihood from three primary sources:

1. distributions from donations received in the monastery and earnings from the communal property of the *saṅgha*, which is sufficient for about half a year;
2. family provisions sourced from their home regions;

46 C. sucha 酥茶.

47 C. fahui 法會.

3. for those who do not have family support, financial gaps can be bridged through Buddhist rituals and services offered during times when Dharma Assemblies are paused.

In addition, there are also individuals who engage in trade activities. Their main priority is making money, which leads them to squander precious time that could otherwise be dedicated to studying the Dharma. Although they are formally affiliated with the monastery, they spend their time outside its walls.

Distinguished monks within the monastery, like those who serve tea to the assembly or those associated with incarnate *hothokthu*s, have access to better quality clothing, meals, and living conditions than their ordinary counterparts. Notably, they might choose to skip hall recitations if no alms are offered, opting instead to relax and brew butter tea in their own rooms. Still, they study the scriptures in the same way as ordinary monks. Members of the saṅgha who hold official roles are granted additional privileges: they do not participate in hall gatherings or teach classes, as their attention is directed exclusively towards their designated responsibilities. Their living allowances are only slightly elevated compared to those of ordinary monks, which prevents them from indulging in a diet that consists purely of meat, as their main sources of nutrition remain tsampa and butter tea.

7.2 Educational System

[112] In Tibet, the system of education can be divided into two primary categories. The first pertains to children living at home, who initially spend several years attending elementary school. To illustrate the curriculum of such schools, I will outline one particular example. The eldest son of someone I know attends the school associated with the Tibet Telegraph Bureau.[48]

Each morning, as they arrive in the classroom, the students begin by reciting praises to Mañjuśrī bodhisattva[49] and the goddess Sarasvatī,[50] followed by readings for repentance and prayers for aspiration. The instructor begins teaching Tibetan cursive script only after the sun has risen. The initial phase of training focuses on extended, linear strokes to enhance wrist strength. After students demonstrate consistent strokes with no bending, uneven thickness, or inconsistent pressure, they move on to practicing slightly shorter strokes. Eventually, they reach the stage of writing in full Tibetan cursive script. In this manner, their strokes slowly condense into standard Tibetan cursive script.

Students are then instructed in extremely fine cursive writing, which resembles the Chinese *dacao* 大草 style. This stage is regarded as the pinnacle of mastery in calligraphy. As they practice on a range of scripts, students utilize a wooden board that is layered with ash powder. They snap a string across the board to mark horizontal lines and write the

48 C. Xizang dianbao ju 西藏電報局.

49 C. Wenshu pusa 文殊菩薩; T. 'Jam dpal; in Sanskrit, 'Gentle Glory'. One of the most important figures in the Mahāyāna tradition, Mañjuśrī is the bodhisattva that embodies wisdom.

50 C. Miaoyin tiannü 妙音天女; T. Dbyangs can ma. Sarasvatī is traditionally regarded as the goddess of music, poetry, and learning.

letters within these guidelines. Once they have written down the verses assigned by the teacher – often praises of eminent sages – they submit their completed assignments for evaluation. The teacher checks and corrects any inaccuracies before he instructs them to erase the board, reapply the ash, and rewrite the text. This cycle of writing and erasing continues throughout the day.

By the end of the school day in the evening, the teacher appraises their performance, arranging them in a sequence from first to second, and last. Following the ranking order, the first-ranked student strikes the second-ranked student's face with a bamboo sliver. The second then strikes the third, the third the fourth, and so forth down the line. Upon reaching the lowest ranked student, they vent their frustration by striking the bamboo sliver against the ground, which causes their classmates to burst into laughter **[113]**, and afterward, the school day wraps up, and everyone goes back home. After students have achieved proficiency in writing on the wooden board, they are directed to hone their skills on paper. Once they have mastered writing on paper, they are taught to compose standard letters, including correct ways to address recipients, along with fundamental math skills like multiplication and division.

At this point, the curriculum for primary school is considered complete. Those who aspire to government positions or financial success are required to advance to the accounting department situated beneath the Dalai's Mountain, where they learn the mathematical skills necessary for public service. Having completed the full course of instruction there, they are deemed eligible for official seventh-grade appointments. When it comes to advanced studies in Tibetan grammar and related fields, students need to identify knowledgeable teachers for sustained education. Since this has been briefly addressed earlier, further discussion is unnecessary here.

Secondly, the educational system for the ordained saṅgha, while briefly referenced earlier, deserves deeper elaboration. In Tibetan Buddhism, the monastic system is extensively recognized, and the devotion shown by families has deep roots. Outside the Buddhadharma, there are no other forms of education available; thus, sending a child to a monastery is equivalent to providing them with an education. The laity universally regards monastic life as both a noble and commendable path. There is no fixed age for taking the monastic vows. Certain children are placed in monasteries as soon as they are no longer dependent on breastfeeding and can manage on their own, while their families continue to provide for their basic needs.

The process differs slightly for adults who seek to enter one of the three major monasteries. Upon enrolling in a specific regional division within the monastery, a novice must first secure a senior monk to act as their guarantor. Only with this guarantor's endorsement can they officially reside and register at the monastery. If the novice lacks an acquaintance within the monastery, the *khangtsen gegen* for that year will appoint a guarantor on their behalf. This guarantor manages the novice's income and expenses, guides them in adhering to monastic discipline and conduct, and holds significant responsibility for their personal integrity. Once the **[114]** designated number of novices is accepted into the monastery, they must study and debate the scriptures and treatises under the guidance of a teacher. If the guarantor is knowledgeable, they will teach the novices themselves. If the guarantor lacks sufficient learning or is otherwise occupied, another qualified teacher can be appointed to instruct them. The

current educational curriculum focuses on the five great treatises, which will be explained in detail in the following sections.

When one reaches the age of twenty, they are eligible to take the *bhikṣu* vows from the Dalai Lama or other qualified preceptors. The proper timing for taking the *śrāmaṇera* precepts is not uniform. Some take their vows before they enter the three great monasteries, while others opt to first join a monastery, find a teacher to study the scriptures, and only later receive the *śrāmaṇera* precepts from the Dalai Lama or another master. In most cases, those who join a monastery have not all taken vows. Certain individuals wear monastic robes and join in communal chanting in the main hall, all without ever undergoing the formal ordination ritual. Is this an outcome of the considerable size of the Tibetan monastic community? Or could it be a skillful means permitted within the Buddhadharma? Such questions are best left for the wise to discern.

Ordination in Tibet follows a process that differs in many ways with that of the Inner Lands. For those who are preparing to take the monastic vows, the teacher first leads the candidate through a ceremony for accepting the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts, after which he examines any impediments and performs the hair-cutting ritual. The candidate is required to take on three commitments – (1) to refrain from wearing lay attire, (2) to refrain from abandoning the outer signs of monastic life, and (3) to refrain from forsaking the guidance of a monastic teacher. This allows for temporary monastic status even without taking the *śrāmaṇera* precepts – This appears to differ slightly from the rules of morality as they are observed in the Inner Lands – . If one proceeds to take the *śrāmaṇera* precepts, a virtuous *bhikṣu* is requested to serve as the *ācārya*. The vows are received after formally requesting the preceptor three times and taking refuge in the Three Jewels. The preceptor then explains the characteristics of the Ten Precepts that the candidate is expected to uphold. Before leading them into the monastic assembly, the screening *ācārya* checks for any impediments that the candidates who are taking the *bhikṣu* vows may have. As prescribed in the Vinaya, the *karmācārya*[51] bestows the vows by performing the *jñāpticaturthakarman*.[52]

In Tibet, individuals do not receive the bodhisattva precepts[53] together with either the *śrāmaṇera* or the *bhikṣu* vows. Instead, the bodhisattva

51 C. jiemo asheliye 羯摩阿闍黎耶; T. las kyi slob dpon; in English, 'ceremony master'. The *karmācārya* is one of the three preceptors, or three teachers (C. sanshi 三師; S. triācāryā; T. slob dpon gsum) required for ordination. The three teachers are: 1) The preceptor monk (C. jie heshang 戒和尚), who grants the precepts; 2) The master of the act (C. jiemo shi 羯磨師, or jiemo asheli 羯磨阿闍梨), who recites the announcement and the text of the precepts; 3) The instructor (C. jiaoshou shi 教授師, or jiaoshou asheli 教授阿闍梨), who teaches the ritual to the recipient of the precepts.

52 C. baisi jiemo 白四羯磨; P. ñatticatutthakamman; T. gsol ba dang bzhi'i las). In Sanskrit, *jñapticaturthakarman* refers to a formal act within the saṅgha. Also known in Chinese as *bai si fa* 白四法, the 'white four', or *yibai san jiemo* 一白三羯磨, 'one motion and three acts', it derives from the Sanskrit terms *jñapti* (C. gaobai 告白), meaning 'motion' or 'declaration', and *karman* (C. jiemo 羯磨), meaning 'act' or 'formal procedure'. The process begins with an initial declaration, the 'white motion', followed by three proclamations to secure agreement. This procedure, described in the Vinaya, is central to the saṅgha's most solemn and significant decisions, such as ordaining a monk, conducting major confessions, excommunications, or reconciling disputes. The deliberate repetition reflects the careful, consensus-driven nature of monastic decision-making. In Vinaya commentaries, such as the Karmavibhanga, the *jñapticaturthakarman* is recognized as the most meticulous and formal procedural standard in Buddhist monastic law.

53 C. pusa jie 菩薩戒; S. bodhisattvasaṃvara; T. byang chub sems dpa'i sdom pa.

precepts are most often given at the end of a teaching or transmission during a Dharma Assembly that is led by a highly **[115]** respected lama. The ordination ceremony for these vows generally adheres to one of two transmissions: the lineage of Nāgārjuna[54] and Śāntideva,[55] or the ritual described in Asaṅga's[56] *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra*.[57] These procedures are intricate and detailed, so I will refrain from going into further explanation here. At present, the transmission of vows according to Nāgārjuna's system is more prevalent.

Additionally, within the great monasteries, many activities of the saṅgha, including *upoṣadha*,[58] *varṣā*,[59] and *pravāraṇā*,[60] are conducted according to the Vinaya. These practices align precisely with the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya[61] texts as translated by Master Yijing. Hence, a detailed explanation is unnecessary here.

54 C. Longmeng 龍猛; T. Klu sgrub.

55 C. Jingtian 靜天; T. Zhi ba lha.

56 C. Wuzhao 無著; T. Thogs med.

57 C. *Yujia shidi lun* 瑜伽師地論; T. *Rnal'byor spyod pa'i sa'i bstan bcos*; in English, 'Treatise on the Stages of Yogic Practice'.

58 C. busa 布薩; P. uposatha; T. bso sbyong; 'fortnightly confession'. The term *upoṣadha*, often rendered in English as 'dwelling near', refers to a Buddhist ceremony held on the new moon and full moon days. The *upoṣadha* is a day of purification, confession, and renewal of moral commitment in the saṅgha. During the *upoṣadha*, monks and nuns gather within a designated boundary to confess their faults and recite the Prātimokṣa, the monastic code of discipline contained in the Suttavibhaṅga of the Vinayapiṭaka. Fully ordained monks recite the *bhikṣuprātimokṣa*, while fully ordained nuns recite the bhikṣunīprātimokṣa. Novices and laypeople do not participate in this recitation. However, on these days, laypeople often observe the eight precepts (S. aṣṭāṅgaśīla), abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual activity, lying, intoxicants, eating after noon, bodily adornment, and sleeping on high beds, which allows them to effectively live like monks or nuns for a day. The term *upoṣadha* originally referred to fasting or abstinence, with roots in Vedic rituals performed on the day before a soma sacrifice. Several types of *upoṣadha* exist, the most important being the saṅghaupoṣadha, held when at least four monks are present to recite the Prātimokṣa. If fewer than four monks are present, the ceremony is still observed, but the Prātimokṣa is not recited. According to the Pāli Vinaya, the *upoṣadha* cannot be conducted in the presence of certain individuals, including novices, laypeople, and persons guilty of grave offenses (S. pārājika).

59 C. anju 安居; P. vassa; T. dbyar gnas; 'rain retreat'. The term *varṣā*, which means 'rain' in Sanskrit, denotes a three-month period during which monks reside in a monastic setting, referred to as the rains retreat. The retreat usually starts the day following the full moon in the eighth month of the lunar calendar (generally in July) and concludes with the full moon in the eleventh lunar month (usually in October). Monks must remain stationary during this period and avoid any form of travel. According to tradition, this practice was created to ensure that monks do not inadvertently harm plants and insects in the monsoon season, and to offer a dedicated time for deeper study, reflection, and shared discipline.

60 C. Jiezhi 解制; P. pavāraṇā; T. dgag phye; 'invitation' or 'presentation'. In Sanskrit, *pravāraṇā* denotes the ceremony that is held at the conclusion of the rain retreat (S. varṣā).

61 C. *Yiqieyou bu lü* 一切有部律. By using the Chinese phonetic transcription for the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, Fazun is referring to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (C. Genben Shuoyiqieyou bu pinaiye 根本說一切有部毘奈耶; T. Gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba'i 'dul ba), translated into English as the 'Original Monastic Code of the Sarvāstivāda School'. This text is one of the six extant recensions of the Vinaya that was adopted in Tibet.

Moreover, monastic communities in Tibet hold several major Dharma gatherings each year. The Mönlam Chenmo[62] festival, which is the most solemn and grandiose of all the events, is held in the first month of the lunar year. The ceremonies generally begin on the third or fourth day of the month – despite variations in the exact date, they start no later than the fifth day. During this time, all members of the saṅgha from the three great monasteries are required to gather in the streets of Lhasa. With all temples shut down, there are just a few lay guardians left to manage them. On a designated afternoon, the monks belonging to the three great monasteries meet in the courtyard and the upper corridors of the Jokhang Temple. Each group of monks is assigned a particular position to prevent disruption. At around four o'clock the following morning, the assembly comes together for scriptural recitations, during which two servings of tea and a bowl of thin porridge are offered to the participants. Once the chanting sessions are finished, the monks go on to recite the precepts and carry out a provisional *upoṣadha* ceremony aimed at generating good fortune. The setting then shifts to an outdoor debate courtyard, where the *géshé*s preparing to graduate that year engage in debates on the *Pramāṇavārttika*.[63] Every day, a *géshé lharampa* is designated as the main defender of a thesis. At around seven o'clock, the Ganden Tripa takes his seat on the throne to deliver a discourse to the saṅgha gathering. The discourse may cover a range of topics, from the *Lamrim Düdön* to other texts, and does not adhere to a fixed schedule. Following the discourse, all participants gather at the Jokhang Temple to engage in chanting, enjoy tea, and partake in porridge. After a short break **[116]**, the *géshé*s convene beneath the temple's porch to establish the doctrinal positions of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, engaging in debates with those who are currently studying these texts at the three great monasteries. At around three in the afternoon, the assembly meets again for chanting and tea, but no meal is served in the afternoon. Later on, the *géshé*s establish their doctrinal positions on the Vinaya and Abhidharma, taking part in debates with *géshé*s from both the upper and lower Gyüpas, in addition to senior *géshé*s from the three great monasteries. These debates continue until midnight. A platform for teaching is set up in a central street location, situated to the right of the Jokhang Temple. Here, a learned lama shares insights on foundational aspects of the Buddhadharma with the general public, attracting a large audience. Numerous others can be seen throughout the area, actively engaging in teaching and discussion. During this period, devout men and women[64] circumambulate the Jokhang Temple, reaching their peak numbers. This assembly is also a festive occasion for traders. Activities take place each day until around the twentieth of the first month, at which point the gathering disperses.

62 C. Dazhao 大招; T. Smon lam chen mo. Here, Fazun offers a portrait of the Mönlam Chenmo, 'Great Prayer', during the early 1930s. The Mönlam Chenmo is a grand prayer festival traditionally held in Lhasa to mark the Tibetan lunar New Year. Established in 1409 by Tsongkhapa, the festival commemorates the Buddha's victory over heretical teachers at Śrāvastī. While rooted in religious practice, the festival has also been a powerful symbol of Tibetan cultural and political identity, especially during periods of unrest. The Mönlam Chenmo was suspended following the Tibetan uprising in 1959. It was briefly revived in 1986 during a period of reform after Chairman Mao Zedong's death, only to be banned again in 1990 amid renewed restrictions.

63 C. *Yinming lun* 因明論; T. *Tshad ma rnam'grel*; Dharmakīrti's 'Commentary on Valid Knowledge'.

64 C. shannan xinnü 善男信女; literally, 'virtuous men and faithful women'.

The next Dharma Assembly is the Tsongchö[65] gathering, which is scheduled in the second month and maintains the same number of participants and rituals as the previous one. Still, at this assembly, key personalities who wish to skip attendance can submit a request for leave, while the *géshé*s assessed are of the second rank. Another notable event occurs on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month, which marks the anniversary of Tsongkhapa's passing. Although this event does not feature a gathering of all three great monasteries in Lhasa, the ceremonies that take place at each one are still quite impressive. On this particular night, individuals from all walks of life, whether laypeople or monastics, set up lamps in and around their homes, casting light into the surroundings until the clock strikes midnight. This sight brings to mind the bright lights of a bustling commercial district. On the fifteenth day of the first month in the lunar calendar, every monastery is required to craft butter sculptures or ornamental displays as offerings to the Buddha. The craftsmanship displayed in these butter sculptures resembles that of dough figurines made in the Inner Lands, yet their dimensions, which can vary from a few *chi* to several *zhang* 丈, greatly exceeds those found elsewhere. This is a unique art form of the Tibetan people. Other Dharma Assemblies focused on teaching and chanting come in different lengths, with some lasting ten days, others for half a month, twenty days, or even a full month. The rituals adhere to the everyday routines specified in the guidelines for the saṅgha. Regarding other **[117]** commemorative days, no Dharma Assemblies of any sort are observed.

As noted earlier, there are currently no other forms of education in the Tibetan regions other than the Buddhadharma. Thus, the educational system in Tibet can be broadly described as one that is centered around monastic institutions. When it comes to selecting talent from the monastic community, the process can be said to operate entirely as an examination system, apart from the reincarnation lines like the *hothokthu*s. Highly learned *géshé*s attain their esteemed status through examinations, and notable figures like the *khenpo*s are primarily selected through this procedure. Even secular officials must successfully pass examinations before they can be entrusted with any authority. The structure of education in a monastic setting can be divided into three categories: (1) education prior to the examinations, (2) the examination system itself, and (3) the appointments that follow the examination process.

7.2.1 Learning Before the Examinations

Monks who have not taken their examinations and are pursuing their studies in the monastery need to spend an initial two years under the supervision of a teacher, honing their skills in beginner-level *pramāṇa* and debate. During this period, they are expected to build a foundational understanding of the key concepts and technical language of the *Pramāṇavārttika*.[66]

65 C. Xiaozhao 小招; T: Tshogs mchod; from Tibetan, *tsongchö* can be translated as 'feast offering'.

66 C. *Yinming lun* 因明論; T. *Tshad ma rnam'grel*; Dharmakīrti's "Commentary on Valid Knowledge".

Over the next five to six years, they will engage in extensive study of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, a treatise that, from a conventional[67] perspective, explains the progressive stages of the Three Vehicles[68] in the context of practice as outlined in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*s. By mastering this treatise, they are capable of attaining a clear and accurate conceptual understanding of the stages of the three vehicles, especially regarding the Mahāyāna path. Therefore, this treatise is of primary importance for those who study the Mahāyāna.

For the next two to three years, the focus shifts to an intensive study of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*,[69] a treatise divided into ten chapters that elaborate on the ten grounds and ten practices. Specifically, the sixth chapter offers a thorough refutation of the four modes of birth and elucidates the doctrine of dependent origination, demonstrating that all phenomena are by nature empty and illusory. The correct view of emptiness can only be attained through an understanding of the Middle Way. This training in the view of emptiness allows individuals to eradicate the afflictions and transcend saṃsāra. Thus, students of Buddhism are encouraged to engage thoughtfully with this treatise in order to cultivate the correct view.

In the next two to three **[118]** years, as they near their twentieth birthday, they focus on a rigorous study of the Vinaya[70] in preparation for receiving the full set of precepts. A poor understanding of how to uphold the precepts – or avoid violating them – renders the act of taking the vows meaningless. This, in turn, increases the risk of transgression, thereby creating the causes for suffering. Morality is the root, the foundation, and the guide in all forms of practice. Maintaining discipline is the foundation for developing all other virtues, for without it, one cannot escape the lower realms, nor can one hope to attain liberation or buddhahood.

Finally, in preparation for the *géshé* examination, they must extensively study the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, which provides a thorough analysis of topics such as saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and causality, in both general and specific ways. The rationale behind this is that the Abhidharma provides the primary framework for making sense of the Dharma. Moreover, every year during the winter, a full month is reserved for the study of the *Pramāṇavārttika*. Without the ability to employ valid reasoning in debate and discernment, then regardless of their field of study, practice, or instruction, their efforts will be as ineffective as a nail driven into mud – utterly unstable and lacking firmness. Therefore, in the three great monasteries, these five

67 C. shisu 世俗; P. sammuti; T. kun rdzob). In Buddhist thought, *saṃvṛti* denotes the conventional or relative aspect of reality, which includes the perceptions, ideas, and beliefs held by an ordinary person (S. pṛthagjana). It represents the worldly, conceptual framework through which ordinary beings understand the world. This notion is set against *paramārtha*, the ultimate or absolute truth, which transcends conceptualization and is realized by the enlightened.

68 C. sansheng 三乘; S. triyāna; T. theg pa gsum. In Sanskrit, *triyāna* denotes the 'three vehicles', that is, the three individual paths presented in the Mahāyāna that guide practitioners toward achieving liberation. The standard classification recognizes the paths of the *śrāvaka*, 'hearer', *pratyekabuddha*, 'solitary buddha', and *bodhisattva*. The first two paths culminate in the achievement of arhatship, whereas only the path of the bodhisattva leads to full buddhahood. Several Mahāyāna treatises introduce unique categorizations for these paths. In this case, Fazun remarks how the sequential stages of these paths is described in the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, with a notable emphasis on the bodhisattva path as presented in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*s.

69 C. *Ruzhong lun* 入中論; T. *Dbu ma la 'jug pa*; Candrakīrti's "Entrance to the Middle Way", also known in English as "Supplement to the Middle Way".

70 Fazun here is referring to Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya sūtra*.

major treatises – selected for their diverse approaches and their focus on both theoretical understanding and practical application – are considered essential classics for the education of the saṅgha.

7.2.1.1 The Examination System

The examination system begins as [members of] the saṅgha within the monastery advance to the study of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. At this stage, the *khenpo* from each college evaluates their level of knowledge in order to determine the appropriate *géshé* category for them. In the summer preceding their *géshé* exam, candidates aiming for the *géshé lharampa* must complete an extra requirement. Before anything else, these candidates are required to visit the Norbulingka,[71] the Dalai Lama's residence. There, a total of sixteen candidates – drawn from the three great monasteries and representing the sixteen Arhats – engage in structured debates as part of the *géshé* examinations, which will be held in the first month of the following year. On day one, for example, the first *géshé* candidate, labeled 'A', establishes a thesis, which is later challenged by the next three *géshé* candidates 'B', 'C', and 'D', based on arguments from the *Pramāṇavārttika*. Another group, 'E', 'F', and 'G', engages in debate on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. On day two, *géshé* candidate 'B' establishes a thesis, which is then challenged by candidates 'C', 'D', and 'E' drawing on topics in the area of *pramāṇa*. This systematic process continues with all candidates rotating in groups of three. In the course of these debates, the *khenpo*s who assist the Dalai Lama serve as observers, while the Dalai Lama often watches from behind a curtain. The rankings for the *lharampa* and *tsokrampa*[72] *géshé*s are **[119]** finalized during this phase – although they are not publicly announced, the results are broadly recognized.

In the winter Dharma Assembly, the *géshé* candidates preparing for their exams that year establish their theses within their respective colleges and engage in debates with the entire monastic community. The *khenpo*s, along with other appointed senior monks, act as observers for these debates. On the first day of the first month, the two leading candidates convene at the Dalai Lama's official residence, where they engage in a debate centered on doctrinal interpretation.[73] This debate is attended by the Dalai Lama, *khenpo*s from the three great monasteries, and representatives from the government and other prominent figures. Later, at the Mönlam Chenmo, the candidates formally establish their theses and take part in debates before the full congregation of the three great monasteries. When the festival ends, the rankings are made public, and the candidates are formally conferred the title of *géshé*.

This particular *géshé* [*lharampa*] degree is regarded as the most rigorous of all. In contrast, the *géshé tsokrampa* establish their theses at their respective colleges during the winter, and then again in front of a larger assembly in the second month of the following year. In the summer, they

71 C. Moni yuan 摩尼園; T. Nor bu gling kha.

72 C. dier deng geshi 第二等格什; T. dge bshes tshogs rams pa; Fazun's wording is, *geshi zhi diyier deng mingci* 格什之第一二等名次, 'the hierarchies of the *géshé*s of first and second rank'.

73 C. fayi 法義; S. dharmārtha; T. chos kyi don; 'the meaning of Dharma'.

also visit the Dalai Lama's Norbulingka to present their theses, even though this process lacks the rigor found among the top-ranked *géshé*s. The *géshé dorampa*s[74] establish their theses within two or three colleges at their monastery only, rather than debating them in front of the full assembly of the three great monasteries. Lastly, the *géshé lingsé*s[75] establish their theses only for a short time in front of the main hall of their monastery, or they might delegate someone else to defend on their behalf. Stated another way, several of these individuals have just reached the necessary age to hold the title of *géshé*, without having any real scholarly achievements. Others may have studied a single treatise but may have not yet reached the appropriate age. These individuals simply hold the designation of *géshé* and can be regarded as 'expedient' *géshé*s.[76]

7.2.1.2 Appointments Following the Examinations

The successful completion of the *géshé* examination marks a key transition in their study of the sūtra teachings. From this point, candidates generally follow one of two paths: the first is to retreat to the mountains to engage in ascetic practices, while the second is to enter the Gyüpa for advanced training in tantra. The main trajectory for those who join the Gyüpa is to ultimately rise to the position of Ganden Tripa. Other individuals, having spent several years in the Gyüpa, could be assigned to branch monasteries to serve as *khenpo*s or in equivalent positions. Individuals who opt to retreat into the mountains for their practice may occasionally be required by the government to take on official positions. This bars them from remaining in seclusion, **[120]** and they are assigned as *khenpo*s instead. This phenomenon primarily affects individuals who belong to the highest two ranks of *géshé*s. In comparison, *géshé*s belonging to the third and fourth ranks generally stay in seclusion, engaged in their pure practices, and are less likely to be selected for official positions by the government.

I would also like to address the involvement of the Tibetan saṅgha in political affairs. In Tibet, Buddhism is synonymous with culture itself; therefore, many of those who hold key positions in cultural life are often both learned and virtuous Saṅgha Jewels.[77] Consequently, the saṅgha must engage in both religious and political affairs. The Dalai Lama serves as the chief figure in the monastic leadership for both the religious and political spheres, followed by the Regent of Tibet, a role that can be assumed by either a monastic or a layperson. In terms of title, the Panchen Lama may seem to rival the Dalai Lama. In reality, however, his actual power at times fell short even of that held by the Regent. The Ganden Tripa, despite his prestigious position, largely refrains from engaging in political issues. Under the Regent's authority, the administration is led by four chief ministers, one of whom is always a monk who oversees political affairs directly. Under

74 C. disan deng geshi 第三等格什; T. dge bshes rdo rams pa.

75 C. disi deng geshi 第四等格什; T. dge bshes gling bsre.

76 C. fangbian geshi 方便格什.

77 C. sengbao 僧寶; S. saṅgharatna; T. dge 'dun dkon mchog. In this passage, Fazun refers to key figures in Tibetan culture by the technical term *sengbao*, that is, the third of the *triratna* (C. sanbao 三寶; T. dkon mchog gsum): the Buddha Jewel, the Dharma Jewel, and the Saṅgha Jewel.

their authority are secretaries, who are likewise monastics, endowed with a notable capacity to intervene in political issues. Lower in the hierarchy are high-ranking lamas and senior *khenpo*s who hold titles associated with the top four ranks, in addition to regular fourth-rank *khenpo*s. In the absence of an official capacity, these positions lack real power, yet when filled, their power rivals that of a prefect. Reserve secretaries rank next and serve as county magistrates if they receive an appointment; if not, they have no authority.

In summary, monastics only take part in politics in civil roles, while military positions are only filled by laypeople, which ensures that the monastic community remains uninvolved in military matters. Still, monastics assume a leading role in the realms of governance and education, as there are relatively few lay officials and educators. This is only a general summary. A detailed analysis would far exceed the scope of the present discussion.

7.3 Culture

[121] Buddhist culture pervades all aspects of Tibetan culture. Its literary dimensions can be fully understood only through serious engagement with the Buddhist canon. A complete exposition here would prove cumbersome. Therefore, I shall restrict my discussion to short insights into the realm of literary arts. Tibetan societal customs, in addition to the distinctive national traits mentioned earlier, are characterized by a singular cultural ethos: reverence for Buddhism. This ethos is rooted in their belief in karmic causality, as well as in tantric methods. Certain aspects of this topic have been discussed earlier, whereas additional others do not need further elaboration. For this reason, I will address three important aspects that represent the universal threads of artistic and literary expression.

7.3.1 Literature

Whether expressed through poetry, songs, prose, essays, or through extensive scholarly works that distill the entire Buddhist canon, all Tibetan artistic and literary endeavors are integrated with Buddhist principles. The Buddhadharma functions as the most essential element, even in writings related to subjects like mathematics, medicine, history, and geography. Most rhymed poetry is modeled on the prosodic patterns of Indian verse. Within a single poem, all lines or even individual syllable adhere to a specific rhyme pattern, such as the 'yi 咿' or 'wu 鳥' rhymes. Another method connects the final word of one line with the initial word of the next by using the same word. In certain poems, multiple layers of repeated words are positioned in the middle of each line. In certain others, the first line is read forward order, but the second line is presented in reverse order. There are poems that feature a pattern where the reading direction alternates between forward and reverse order across the first and last two lines, or between entire stanzas. There are others that have one half of a line written in reverse, while the other half remains as it is. Certain poems can even be read in all directions – horizontally, vertically, or cyclically – while still maintaining coherence. **[122]** These intricate poetic forms attain exceptional beauty and

remarkable depth, showcasing endless variations and an astonishing array of structures.

The practice of singing is even more widespread and embedded into the fabric of daily life. In villages and rural areas, almost everyone – men and women, elderly and young – can sing. Their repertoire extends beyond just one or two melodies and encompasses a variety of songs, most of which are closely associated with the Buddha's teachings. During a year I spent in Xikang, I stayed with a patron's family. After dinner, both the hosts and their guests were at leisure, and the servants, including the maids and the elderly attendants, would gather to sing for their own amusement. The exact lyrics escape my mind now, but the essence of one song was, "In the eastern realm, there is a world – I no longer recall its name – where a buddha named Vajrasattva[78] dwells. His body is white, seated in full lotus position, his head adorned with a jeweled crown, his body draped in precious stones. He radiates white light throughout the realm of reality, dispelling calamities, bestowing longevity, and banishing demons". Another tune celebrated the "Buddha Ratnasambhava[79] of the southern realm, whose body is yellow, etc.", and continued with, "bestows upon us the accumulation of fortune, wisdom, and merit". Another one honored "Amitāyus[80] of the western realm, whose body is red, etc.", and continued saying "bestows upon us the ability to summon beings from all directions, subdue and transform them, bringing happiness and peace to them". And yet another song recounted of the "buddhas of the north and the center, with their virtues and deeds in conjunction with the four activities[81] – pacification,[82] increase,[83] attraction,[84] and destruction".[85] And further, there were verses about "A towering mountain, majestic like a lion king, before which lay a vast, boundless monastery. Within it dwelled countless sages and saints, tirelessly teaching the Dharma for the sake of living beings, ensuring perpetual prosperity and good fortune", and so on. To be candid, it appears that the themes in their song lyrics are mostly

78 C. Jingang saduo 金剛薩埵; T. Rdo rje sems dpa'. In Secret Mantra traditions, 'Diamond Being'. Together with Vajradhāra, 'Diamond Holder' (C. Jingangchi 金剛持; T. Rdo rje 'chang), Vajrasattva is an important figure, often regarded as a primordial buddha (S. ādibuddha). Vajrsattva is closely associated with purification practices.

79 C. Baosheng 寶生; T. Rin chen 'byung gnas; "Born of a Jewel", one of the *pañcatathāgata* (C. wuzhi rulai 五智如來; T. de bzhin gshegs pa lnga), is the buddha associated with the southern direction.

80 C. Wuliangshou 無量壽; T. Tshe dpag med; "Limitless Life", one of the *pañcatathāgata* that is interchangeable with Amitābha (C. Amituofo 阿彌陀佛; T. 'Od dpag med), is the buddha associated with the western direction.

81 C. sizhong jiemo 四種羯摩; S. caturkarman; T. las bzhi; the four activities are a classification of ritual practices found in the Buddhist tantras. These activities divide rituals based on their goals or methods. They encompass functions of tantric ritual aimed at: (1) pacifying hindrances or healing illnesses (S. śānticāra), (2) increasing wealth and lifespan (S. pauṣṭika), (3) attracting persons and situations to bring them under control (S. vaśīkaraṇa), and (4) destroying, that is, rituals aimed at exerting subjugation or harm (S. abhicāra); *abhicāra* presents a sixfold division into killing (S. māraṇa), enchanting (S. mohana), paralyzing (S. stambhana), causing harm through animosity (S. vidveṣaṇa), removing or driving away (S. uccāṭana), and subduing (S. vaśīkaraṇa).

82 C. xiaozai 消災; S. śānticāra, or śāntika; T. zhi ba'i las.

83 C. zengzhang 增長; S. pauṣṭika; T. rgyas pa'i las.

84 C. aijin 愛敬; S. vaśīkaraṇa; T. dbang po'i las.

85 C. xiangfu 降伏; S. abhicāra; T. drag po mngon spyod.

based on Buddhist teachings. Even the performers themselves find these compositions to be dull, and the crowds display minimal excitement towards them. This reflects how pervasive Buddhist teachings are in Tibet.

As for Tibetan works of prose fiction,[86] they are exceptionally rare. Beyond the celebrated epic tales of King Gesar,[87] there seems to be no fully developed secular prose fiction. For, even these war tales mainly illustrate **[123]** the king's determination to propagate the Buddhadharma, as he subdued local chieftains and petty rulers in Tibet who opposed the Buddha's teachings. Gesar's ties with the institution of the Buddhadharma run deep, to the extent that Tibetans universally regard him as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. Indeed, the people's devotion toward him is profound. Thus, this epic tale – encompassing dozens of tomes – remains the most cherished and widely circulated epic narrative among the Tibetan people.

There is another genre of fiction that resembles the operas performed in the Inner Lands. Yet again, the source material for these stories is drawn entirely from Buddhist scriptures. They recount episodes from the past lives of Śākyamuni Buddha in his role as a bodhisattva, depicting the bodhisattva's deeds of extreme selflessness – feeding his own body to a starving tigress and giving away his possessions, cities, lands, and even relinquishing his kingdom, wife, children, and parts of his own body, including his head, eyes, brain, and marrow. These performances are both visually engaging and emotionally moving. They effectively portray the sublime virtues of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and play a crucial role in shaping the religious devotion of everyday people.

Another genre of prose fiction incorporates allegorical fables to convey the idea that the things of the world are impermanent and that fame and fortune have a fleeting nature. These parables serve as cautionary tales for the wealthy and powerful, who are caught up in the pursuit of the five sensual pleasures, while also motivating those members of the saṅgha who have grown lazy or indifferent. Notable examples include the tale of the rabbit and the *śrāmaṇera* narrated by Longchen Rapjam,[88] the story about

86 C. xiaoshuo 小說. In this section, Fazun borrows the analytic category of *xiaoshuo* from Chinese literature to illustrate the pervasiveness of religious themes in Tibetan prose fiction.

87 C. Gesa wang 格薩王; T. Ge sar rgyal po; King Ge sar of Ling (T. Gling) is the central figure of the Tibetan epic cycle regarded as the world's longest poem. Celebrated in Tibetan, Mongolian, and Central Asian cultures, Gesar is revered as both a historical and mythical hero. The epic, especially prominent in Eastern Tibet, is traditionally performed by professional epic bards (T. sgrung mkhan). It recounts Gesar's birth, his adventures, and his role as a champion of justice against the forces of evil. Some traditions link Gesar to a historical figure from Eastern Tibet in the tenth or eleventh century, but the epic is widely regarded as a composite work, drawing on Zoroastrian influences and Central Asian narratives. Among Kham Tibetans, Gesar is honored as an ancestor and hero and embodies their martial and heroic spirit. Wealthy Kham families often preserve manuscripts of the epic, and in the nineteenth century, episodes were printed in woodblock editions under monastic patronage. The Buddhist cult surrounding Gesar confers religious meaning to his legend, portraying him as an enlightened being and a manifestation of Padmasambhava. On King Gesar, see the volume by Kapstein and Ramble 2022.

88 C. Langqin Naojiang 郎勤撓絳; T. Klong chen rab 'byams (1308-1363); Longchen Rapjam, also known as Longchenpa, was a revered teacher and scholar in the Nyingma tradition. Renowned for his role in systematizing the Dzokchen teachings, his major works include the *Dzö Dün* (T. Mdzod bdun) or "Seven Treasuries". His life integrated rigorous scholarship, meditative mastery, and administrative responsibilities, including his tenure as abbot of Samyé, interspersed with extended retreats. Fazun renders Longchen Rapjam's name phonetically as Langqin Naojiang 郎勤撓絳. However, the sinograph *nao* 撓 (p. 123) in the manuscript should be read as *rao*, consistent with the forms *rao* 橈 and *rao* 繞.

the bees of gold and jade told by Patrül Rinpoché,[89] the parable of the yellow sparrow from Drakar Rinpoché of Karze, and the legend of the royal minister. This selection of stories features the finest examples of this genre of fiction. The assortment of aspirational writings and the extensive key treatises are fully concentrated on Buddhist teachings, a theme that is far too vast to be fully explored in this discussion.

7.3.2 Art

Tibetan fine arts encompass a wide variety of artistic forms. For the time being, I turn my attention to the facets of sculpture, casting, and painting, and offer a brief reflection on their sculptural **[124]** creations. Impressive sculptures, including sandalwood buddha statues measuring around one *zhang* in height,[90] are crafted with exact proportions and delicate intricacies in the folds of their robes, complemented by serene and well-defined facial features that are greatly admired. These types of statues are commonly located in the major monasteries across Kham and Ü-Tsang. Some of the tiniest and most exquisite carvings are those engraved on single grains of wheat, illustrating the Three Sages of the Western Pure Land.[91] This art form is similar to that of artisans in our Inner Lands, who etch ancient inscriptions onto rings. The proportions of these artworks, whether it be Avalokiteśvara carved in ivory or Mañjuśrī carved in stone, are consistently well-balanced in every detail, regardless of their size.

At Ganden Monastery, which is the primary center of practice of the Yellow Hat sect, I came across many carvings. The most remarkable item was a *Guhyasamājavajra* maṇḍala[92] carved by Khedrup Jé,[93] the foremost

89 C. Bazhu dashi 巴主; T. Dpal sprul rin po che (1808-1887). Here, Fazun is referring to a story in Patrül Rinpoché's *Pema Tselgyi Dokar* (T. *Padma tshal gyi zlos gar*). Patrül Rinpoché was one of the greatest Tibetan Buddhist teachers of the nineteenth century and a prominent figure in the Nyingma tradition. Born in the Dzachuka Valley of Eastern Tibet, he is remembered for his humility, ascetic lifestyle, and profound influence on Tibetan Buddhism. Patrül Rinpoche lived as a wandering hermit, traveling between mountain retreats and monasteries, embodying the ideal of a renunciate teacher. He played an important role in the nonsectarian Rimé (T. Ris med) movement, which was instrumental in preserving endangered lineages, renewing meditation and practice, and promoting new trends in Tibetan thought. An exceptional teacher of both Dzokchen (T. Rdzogs chen) and Mahāyāna teachings, he famously taught Śāntideva's *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* over a hundred times. His seminal text, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* (T. *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*), remains important for Tibetan Buddhist study across all sects. Patrül Rinpoché composed his *Pema Tselgyi Dokar* (Drama in a Lotus Garden) as a response to the grief of an aristocrat in Dergé mourning the death of his wife. This work, a blend of folk storytelling and Buddhist teachings, takes the form of a dialogue in which a gold bee, stricken by the loss of its mate, a jade bee, receives dharma instructions. By weaving spiritual lessons into an accessible narrative, Patrül Rinpoché exemplified his innovative approach, combining entertainment with edification to reach a wider audience.

90 In the Republican period system of measurement, one *zhang* is equivalent to 3.2 meters, or 3.5 yards.

91 C. Xifang sansheng 西方三聖.

92 C. *Miji jingang mantuoluo* 集密金剛曼陀羅.

93 C. Kezhu jie 克主結; T. Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438). Khedrup Gelek Pal Sangpo (T. Mkhas grub rje dge legs dpal bzang po), known as Khedrup Jé, was a close disciple of Tsongkhapa and a key early figure in the Geluk sect. A prolific scholar, Khedrup Jé excelled in Madhyamaka, tantra, and *pramāṇa*.

disciple of Tsongkhapa. With a diameter of more than five *chi*,[94] this maṇḍala encompasses a palace structure that is over two *chi* wide.[95] Inside, the palace is adorned with more than thirty buddha statues. The height and thickness of the palace's walls were carved strictly according to the measurements outlined in Buddhist texts. Outside the four gates, there are four pavilions, each featuring eleven steps. At the highest point, finely carved tiny deer face one another, with a Wheel of the Dharma placed in the middle. On either side of the pavilions, there are two treasure vases, and from them, a wish-fulfilling tree springs forth. Every tree branches into seven limbs, each bearing one of the seven treasures that a Cakravartin[96] uses to rule the world. The main hall features walls decorated with strings of jewels, each about the size of a grain of rice, from which dangle exquisitely small carvings of bells and other ornamental items. The walls that enclose the palace are decorated with motifs of lotus petals. Encircling the walls, there are sixteen vases, each filled with a set of eight banners and eight auspicious victory pennants. In the middle of the palace's rooftop lies a scripture pavilion that enshrines the root texts of Guhyasamāja. The summit of the pavilion is crowned with a lotus, a vase, and a jewel.

Based on my estimation, the intricate work on this carving suggests that it would take at least a hundred days to complete, and even then, achieving the necessary precision and stylistic harmony would be a challenge. And yet, the biography **[125]** of Khedrup Jé suggests that when Tsongkhapa displayed signs of illness, it was believed that the act of carving and consecrating the Guhyasamāja maṇḍala within a single day could have healing effects. Khedrup Jé accomplished the carving in one day, which resulted in an improvement in Tsongkhapa's illness. This exceptional incident parallels the legendary events that took place at the Tripiṭaka Hall[97] of Bishan Temple 碧山寺 on Mount Wutai, where a similar miracle involving the storing of holy texts is recounted. Situated on the cliffs near Ganden Monastery, there is also a Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara,[98] skillfully carved by Khedrup Jé within a single day, and it remains an active site of pilgrimage even to this day. Likewise, Sera Monastery and Drépung Monastery house many other sculptures, but it is not feasible to describe each one in detail here.

Tibet's craftsmanship in the art of casting is equally outstanding. The casting techniques you encounter at any of the temples will leave you with a favorable impression. For instance, in their main halls, one consistently finds a multitude of bronze buddha statues, together with several elegant and historically valuable cast pieces. Each of the monasteries preserves one or two bronze stūpas that trace their history to the Tang and Song dynasties. The upper floor of the main hall at Drépung Monastery contains a collection of no fewer than two to three hundred statues. The quantity

94 Based on the lengths unit effective in Republican China in 1930, the equivalent of 5 *chi* are equivalent to 167 cm, or about 66 inches.

95 2 *chi* equal to about 67 cm, or 26 inches.

96 C. zhuanlun shengwang 轉輪聖王; T. 'khor lo sgyur ba'i rgyal po; 'wheel-turning king', 'universal emperor'.

97 C. Cangjing lou 藏經樓.

98 C. Sibi Guanyin 四臂觀音; S. Caturbhūja Avalokiteśvara; T. Spyan ras gzigs phyag bzhi pa.

of statues in the monastery of His Holiness Radreng[99] is even higher by several fold. Naturally, ancient monasteries dating back to the Tang and Song periods, such as Samye, Sakya, Riwoche,[100] and Drigung, house an even more extensive collection of ancient bronze castings. Today, places like Beiping and Mount Wutai have dedicated shops that sell Tibetan-style buddha statues, which could strike us as rather refined in their casting. Yet, they cannot compare with the buddha statues that come from Tibet. The comparison reveals a notable disparity due to the errors in proportions and the coarseness of craftsmanship.

During my stay in Chamdo, I acquired a small, unpolished bronze statue of Mañjuśrī, measuring no more than five *cun*.[101] Even in its unfinished state, **[126]** the quality of the craftsmanship surpassed that of polished bronze statues from Beiping, Mount Wutai, and other places. If it underwent further polishing, this statue would belong to an entirely different league. Similarly, even though *ghaṇṭā*s and *vajra*s[102] in the Tibetan style are also made and sold in Beiping, they pale in comparison to those produced in Tibet. The difference is found not only in the material used, but also in every aspect of the casting, polishing, and the detailed engraving of complex patterns. The quality of this craftsmanship exceeds the skills of coppersmiths from the Inner Lands. The most talented silversmiths in the jewelry workshops are unable to produce work of this level of elegance and refinement.

In Tibet, there is a tradition of casting bronze seals that are utilized to stamp clay images of the buddhas. The sizes of the seals differ, but those depicting Tārā, Tsongkhapa, and Atiśa, which are commonly used by the Dalai Lama, usually measure no more than three *fen*.[103] In contrast, the iconographies of Yamāntaka, Maitreya, and Avalokiteśvara, whether stamped, cast, or carved, generally reach a height of no more than five *fen*.[104] Each detail is precise – the folds of the garments worn by each bodhisattva, the shapes of their hands and feet, and even the contours of their facial features like eyebrows, eyes, mouths, and noses are clearly rendered. The depiction of Yamāntaka Vajrabhairava is particularly complex, as it features nine distinct faces, thirty-four arms, and a total of sixteen legs. Every leg tramples a different animal[105] or one of the eight *mahādeva*s,[106] while each

99 C. Rezhen fo 惹眞佛; 'Radreng Buddha', where *fo* 佛, literally 'buddha', becomes an honorific form of address.

100 C. Riwoqie 日俄伽; Ri bo che.

101 5 *cun* are nearly 16.7 cm, or 6.6 inches.

102 C. lingchu 鈴杵; literally, 'bells and clubs'.

103 The equivalent of 3 Republican-period *fen* is 10 mm, nearly 0.4 inches.

104 5 *fen* equal to 16.7 mm, nearly 0.66 inches.

105 Under Vajrabhairava's feet, various animals are trampled. In the section titled "Visualization", the *Vajrabhairava Tantra* reads: "With the first of his right legs he tramples a human, with the second a buffalo, with the third an ox, with the fourth an ass, with the fifth a camel, with the sixth a dog, with the seventh a ram and with the eighth a jackal. With the first of his left legs he tramples a vulture, with the second an owl, with the third a crow, with the fourth a parrot, with the fifth a hawk, with the sixth an eagle, with the seventh a myna and with the eighth a crane;" cf. Siklós 1996, 109.

106 C. bada tianshen 八大天神. Here, *mahādeva* refers to the Hindu gods that, together with the sixteen animals, Vajrabhairava tramples under his feet. Under the right foot, Vajrabhairava stomps on the following gods: Brahmā, Indra, Viṣṇu, Śiva. Under the deity's left foot: Kārtikeya, Sūrya, Candra, Gaṇeśa. Cf. Siklós 1996, 109.

hand holds a specific implement,[107] like a *khaṭvāṅga*,[108] a blade, or similar items. The nine faces, each possessing three eyes, displays a range of expressions from wrathful to calm or joyful. The intricacy of this casting and carving exceeds what artisans in the Inner Lands can envision.

The craftsmanship of Tibetan paintings is showcased in monasteries across various regions. Many of these paintings, ranging from several *zhang* to just a few *chi* in height, depict figures whose clothing, colors, and shapes must be rendered according to established ritual manuals. The sophistication and elegance of these pieces can be likened to the *gongbi* 工筆 painting technique in the Inner Lands. Unlike *gongbi* painting, which allows greater freedom in composition and artistic choices, Tibetan paintings adhere to rigid standards regarding color usage and proportions. While painting techniques in places like Beiping are nearly equivalent with those of Tibet, **[127]** the pigments used differ significantly. Within a year or two, paintings from the Inner Lands inevitably fade and darken. On the other hand, the paintings crafted in Tibet not only hold on to their colors over the same period, but also remain strikingly vibrant, even as the underlying fabric begins to show signs of wear. In addition, in Tibet, the colors and proportions of large maṇḍalas are in full compliance with the required standards. In contrast, paintings produced in Beiping often contain several flaws unless they are crafted under strict supervision. Even a small lapse in attention could lead the painting to deviate from the correct method, making it unfit for use. While I was in Beiping, I often interacted with painters and observed that their level of craftsmanship was noticeably less polished compared to those of artists from Tibet.

In Tibet, there exists another unique craft that is similar to the dough figurine artistry of the Inner Lands. However, rather than working with dough, they mold their creations with butter. They shape butter into various forms, including landscapes, people, flowers, and entire dramatic scenes. They execute these works with effortless skill, achieving a realism that feels truly lifelike. The technique involves taking a wooden board as a base, onto which they affix thin strips or sheets of multicolored butter, carefully shaped by hand. Through this process of layering, they bring together all kinds of complex scenes. Larger creations can rise to three to four *zhang* in height,[109] producing complex butter murals,[110] while their smaller counterparts

107 The *Vajrabhairava Tantra* continues: "In the first of his right hands there is a curved knife (1), in the second a single-pointed spear (2), in the third a pestle (3), in the fourth a small knife (4), in the fifth a single-pointed vajra (5), in the sixth an axe (6), in the seventh a lance (7), in the eighth an arrow (8), in the ninth an iron hook (9), in the tenth a staff (10), in the eleventh a *khaṭvāṅga* (11), in the twelfth a wheel (12), in the thirteenth a vajra (13), in the fourteenth a *vajra* hammer (14), in the fifteenth a sword (15), in the sixteenth a skull-drum (16). In the first of his left hands there is a skull (17), in the second a head (18), in the third a shield (19), in the fourth a leg (20), in the fifth a noose (21), in the sixth a bow (22), in the seventh intestines (23), in the eighth a bell (24), in the ninth an arm (25), in the tenth a cemetery cloth (26), in the eleventh a man impaled on a stake (27), in the twelfth a hearth (28), in the thirteenth a skull-cup with hair (29), with the fourteenth he makes the threatening gesture (30), in the fifteenth a three-pointed pendant (31) and in the sixteenth a cemetery cloth billowing in the wind (32). With two of his arms he holds a fresh elephant skin (33-4);" cf. Siklós 1996, 109-10.

108 C. qiang 槍; 'spear'.

109 Approximately 10-13 meters; around 11-14 yards.

110 C. *huabi* 花壁; literally 'flower wall'. In this context, *hua* does not mean 'flower', but denotes an 'ornament', or a 'decoration' made of butter, hence *huabi* may be rendered as 'ornamental wall', 'ornamental relief', decorated with multicolored butter strips.

showcase figures on bamboo slivers that are merely the size of a fingernail. The colors in these butter sculptures stay clear and separate, almost giving the impression that they have been applied with paint. Yet, the human figures made of butter, molded in relief with expressive facial traits and hands that resemble actual human skin, appear to be several times more vibrant than paintings. A festive contest dedicated to this artistic form takes place on the fifteenth day of the first month in the Tibetan calendar, filling the streets surrounding the Jokhang Temple with celebration. The Dalai Lama personally inspects each piece, bestowing rewards for exceptional craftsmanship and imposing penalties for poor efforts. For this reason, this distinguished art has been steadily climbing to unprecedented heights of sophistication.

During my stay in Karze, I met a lama who was skilled in this intricate craft – a common **[128]** talent that many locals possess, although the degree of expertise differs. His work was exceptionally delicate and charming. During the celebrations for the New Year, he dedicated six to seven days to create a small piece for me. This tiny masterpiece, crafted on a wooden board measuring just about a square *cun* 寸,[111] featured a holy image of Sarasvatī. Behind the goddess rose a mountain, before which stood a wish-fulfilling tree laden with blossoms and fruits. On both sides of the goddess, he used butter to create a clear stream and a grassy meadow. In the stream, four tiny yellow goslings paddled along: one turned its head backward, another stretched its neck forward, a third drifted with its tail exposed, and the fourth climbed the bank, poised to cry out. On the meadow, he depicted two deer; a doe rested on the ground, twisting her neck to flick her ear with her back leg, while a stag stood by the stream, bending down to take a drink. Before the goddess, the artist rendered the five offerings of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Sarasvatī was seated in full lotus posture. Her legs were wrapped in a multicolored skirt fastened with red and green sashes. Her upper body was draped in a multicolored heavenly garment with a mix of pink, green, red, blue, and yellow. She cradled a *pipa* 琵琶 against her chest, allowing its round soundboard to rest on her right thigh. With her right hand, she plucked the strings, while her left hand adjusted the tuning at the *pipa*'s tail, which was positioned toward her left shoulder. Her head was slightly tilted to the right. She wore an array of jewels, including a crown, earrings, a necklace, armlets, bracelets, anklets, and a jeweled garland. Executing such a refined butter sculpture on such a small wood surface was a remarkable feat. To say nothing of dough artists, even the most talented painters would find it challenging to match its precision. I am convinced that this level of craftsmanship truly represents a unique and specialized tradition of Tibet. This offers a glimpse into the greatness of Tibetan art.

7.3.3 Architecture

The architecture of Tibet is reflected in its monasteries rather than in the secular realm. Although Tibet does not have monumental constructions like our Great Wall or the Iron Bridge[112] on the Yellow River, **[129]** it is home to

111 About 10 square centimeters; nearly 1.6 square inches.

112 C. Huanghe Tieqiao 黄河鐵橋; The Yellow River Iron Bridge, also known as Zhongshan Bridge 中山桥, is located in Lanzhou 兰州, Gansu Province 甘肃. Completed in August 1909, this steel truss bridge was Lanzhou's first permanent bridge across the Yellow River.

its own architectural wonders. The Palace of the Dalai Lama, looming like a mountain; the Great Buddha Hall at Drépung Monastery, as vast as three grand halls put together; and the Maitreya Hall[113] in Posterior Tibet, taller than the Tower of the Qianmen Gatehouse 前門, all stand as magnificent and impressive examples of architectural brilliance.

To begin, the Palace of the Dalai Lama is constructed on the sunlit southern slope of the Dalai Lama's Mountain. Its lowest stone foundation rises several *zhang* in height. Higher up, the mountainside features a series of stacked halls that are divided into layered sections. The palace envelops the entire mountain, shielding it from the elements of wind and rain. You will find it almost impossible to measure or assess the actual mountain's full height and width. Unlike monasteries in the Inner Lands, which are spread out with separate buildings and courtyards, this palace forms a single, cohesive structure that extends across and around the mountain. Upon entering via the main eastern gate, you have the option to climb a staircase on either the left side or the right side. The structure, with its countless halls and rooms, ascends through a network of connected levels, both at front and rear, as well as above and below. Some spaces are allocated to administrative functions, others are used for chanting sessions, while dozens of Buddha Halls remain open for religious worship.

My mind is rather simple, and my memory somewhat weak. Even though I visited the palace several times to pay homage to the Buddha, I always felt lost as soon as I stepped through the eastern gate. Past the gate, there are straight roads and broad staircases, each winding in multiple bends. At times, I would walk alongside other devotees, moving straight ahead before turning left and right to climb the staircase. Other times, as soon as I passed the gate, I ascended one or two flights of stairs, winding east and west to offer incense at various shrines. Occasionally, I climbed straight to the summit, turned a few corners to enter inside, and veered right to arrive at the Sandalwood Avalokiteśvara Chapel.[114] From that point, I wandered through various halls **[130]**, moving up and down, going in and coming out, while paying my respects to buddha statues and golden stūpas. Gradually making my way down to the lower levels, I would leave through the main gate and rush toward the west gate, or sometimes leave through the rear gate.

During another visit, after paying homage to the halls in the palace, I slipped into a long, winding, and utterly dark alley. After making a right turn, followed by another right, and then ascending in a spiral several times, I arrived at the lower front tier of Namgyal Monastery. Once I paid homage to the Buddha there, I took an alternate, dark path leading back to the eastern gate. Even though I visited many times, I never followed the same path twice. Each time I stepped into the main gate, I would simply lose my way. The palace contains several hundred rooms along with more than a hundred chapels. We never managed to see all of them, since we usually stopped at several renowned sites before heading back to Lhasa for our lunch. I reckon that a proper visit would easily take more than a single day.

One of the most celebrated chapels is the Sandalwood Avalokiteśvara Chapel, where a statue of Avalokiteśvara made of sandalwood is enshrined.

113 C. Mile dian 彌勒殿.

114 C. Zhantan guanyin pusa dian 栴檀觀音菩薩殿; T. 'Phags pa lha khang. In Tibetan, the "Chapel of the Noble [Lokeśvara]", located in the Potala Palace, where the sandalwood statue of Phakpa Lokeśvara is enshrined. See the *Introduction* to the translation.

This statue is famous for **[131]** several reasons. To begin, it is said to have developed naturally, without any intervention from humans in the carving process. According to historical records, during the Tang Dynasty, King Songtsen Gampo, the husband of Princess Wencheng, received a prophecy from the bodhisattva [Avalokiteśvara] and dispatched a man to a sandalwood grove located on a mountain in India. In that place, he cut down a tree and discovered three naturally formed statues of Avalokiteśvara within it. This statue is one of those three. The statue stands no more than three *chi* in height[115] and depicts a figure in a kneeling position.[116] I once had the chance to honor this holy image when it was briefly taken down for gold leafing. Stripped of its ceremonial garments and crown, it took on a pristine, natural appearance, with no visible signs of human carving. Second, whenever the Dalai Lama experiences swelling in his feet, the feet of the statue also display signs of swelling, and clear water begins to seep through the gold plating. When the Dalai Lama's swelling subsides, the feet of the statue likewise return to normal. For this reason, people from all regions of Tibet recognize the miraculous qualities of this statue and unanimously acknowledge the Dalai Lama as the transformation body[117] of Avalokiteśvara. Third, when government officials at any level face reprimands or fall out of favor with the Dalai Lama, they often fear harsher consequences. Their first response is to make a pilgrimage to this statue, offering prayers of repentance and pledges to make amends, in the hope that the Dalai Lama will spare them from punishment. If their devotion is heartfelt, their prayers are met with immediate resonance. For this reason, in Tibet, government officials of all ranks, regardless of whether they are being promoted or demoted, pay a visit to this statue to make offerings and declare their vows, either in gratitude or in penitence. The devotion shown by the general population for this statue far exceeds that of the authorities. Therefore, the statue is perpetually surrounded by a multitude of worshippers, much like how the sick gather near a famous healer or how the poor cluster around a benefactor. The chapel's doors are inundated with throngs of devotees every day, making the place as crowded as a bustling avenue.

The second significant structure [in the Potala Palace] is the splendid golden stūpa of the fifth Dalai Lama, reaching the height of a five-story building and fully clad in gold plates as thick as the hide of an elephant. Its surface is encrusted with a collection of gemstones, including diamonds, coral, amber, cat's eyes, Indian sapphires, and various other rare and invaluable gems from across the world. The stūpa is home to various treasures, including the physical remains of the fifth Dalai Lama as well as sacred texts. **[132]** Tradition holds that this stūpa also enshrines a relic of a previous buddha, said to be comparable in size to a horse's head, along with countless others that may number in the hundreds or even thousands, although the exact quantity remains unknown. The Tibetan Regent of the time, Sangyé Gyatso, upon learning that certain temples held ancient buddha statues and other valuable treasures, exercised his authority to collect these relics, pretending that it was for the sake of

115 3 *chi* are equivalent to 1 meter, or almost 40 inches.

116 C. ku 跍; the term ku indicates a squatting position. In this context, it indicates the posture of the statue with one leg slightly bent.

117 C. huashen 化身; S. nirmāṇakāya; T. sprul sku.

ceremonial veneration. Still, under the guise of honoring them, he never returned them and instead enshrined them all in this impressive golden stūpa. Therefore, Tibetans maintain that paying homage to this stūpa not only equals but also surpasses the merits generated by visiting all the sacred shrines and stūpas in Jambudvīpa, the southern continent.

A stūpa that commemorates the thirteenth [Dalai Lama] has recently been erected. It is slightly taller than the fifth [Dalai Lama]'s, as it surpasses it by about one *chi*.[118] I do not know if the treasures contained within it can rival those enshrined in the fifth [Dalai Lama]'s. Yet, when considering the external decorations and the sheer quantity of the embedded gems, it may well surpass the Fifth's worth by multiple times. This stūpa is encircled by a band of pearls, each larger than a soybean, along with two or three layers of nine-eyed cat's eye gemstones. The corals and other precious materials are no less splendid those adorning the stupa of the fifth [Dalai Lama]. The architectural magnificence of this edifice approaches the monumental scale of an emperor's mausoleum. In addition to these, the [Potala] Palace contains the golden stūpas dedicated to earlier Dalai Lamas, all kinds of gold-encrusted large maṇḍalas, and holy images from different epochs, all of which are too numerous and extraordinary to detail here in full.

The second notable structure [in Tibet] is the Great Buddha Hall of Drépung Monastery, which is supported by more than one hundred pillars. Set up with conventional cushions for seating, it can accommodate between six and seven thousand people. Still, even if it were packed to full capacity, I am afraid, it might still not be filled with ten thousand people in it. Surrounding the hall, the walls have a thickness of more than one *zhang*[119] and stand between seven and eight *zhang*[120] tall. Rising above these, there are two additional stories that house offices for administration, while the upper levels that are visible from the front are part of the Buddha Hall itself. Upon entering the main hall, a transverse row of pillars can be seen holding **[133]** a flat ceiling. Beyond this, there are two more rows of pillars that reach all the way to upper level of the hall. The front sections, both upper and lower, are entirely made up of skylights that let natural light flood the vast interior. As a result, even with its immense size, the entire hall – except for one or two rows along the edges – remains brightly illuminated. A wide, flat square terrace with crimson paving stretches out before the hall, providing enough seating for around three to four thousand people. A vertical wall, reaching a height of ten *zhang*,[121] is positioned before the terrace with crimson paving. It is built entirely in stone to align with the height of the hall's front foundation. This arrangement forms a vast terrace, more than twenty *zhang*[122] in length and about a dozen *zhang*[123] in width. A horizontal row of buddha statues and several large stūpas are arranged along the rear wall of the Great Hall. Behind this wall lies a series of annexed chambers, organized in an horizontal alignment. These chambers serve as additional

118 33.3 cm, or 13.10 inches.

119 3.2 meters, or 3.5 yards.

120 Just over 25 meters, or 28 yards.

121 32 meters, or 35 yards.

122 64 meters, or 70 yards.

123 38.5 meters, or 42 yards.

buddha halls and house many precious statues. These are the "pure and fragrant chambers" where the Buddha resides like described in the Vinaya.

Drépung Monastery is home to four other main halls, which are somewhat smaller than the Great Hall. At the center of each structure, there are between eighty to ninety pillars – not counting the outer walls and passageways. The larger halls can accommodate three to four thousand individuals for chanting, and when they reach full capacity, they can contain five to six thousand people. Beyond these, each regional unit features its own assembly hall, which results in a total of around seventy to eighty buildings of different dimensions. The largest of these can seat more than one thousand people. Besides the main halls, the saṅgha's living quarters are mainly comprised of three-story buildings – two-story structures are relatively rare. While I have not conducted an exact survey, it seems that the total number of rooms is probably greater than ten thousand. When considering the scale of the architecture, even the Yonghe Temple 雍和宫[124] in Beiping seems to pale in comparison. Finding something similar elsewhere would prove to be a tough task, if not, dare I say, entirely out of the question.

[134] The third notable site, that is, the Tashilhünpo Monastery[125] located in Posterior Tibet, is regarded as the most magnificent monastery in Tibet. It is said that there are more than ten buildings adorned with gilded rooftops. When considering its splendor and grandeur, they claim it is several times more magnificent than the three great monasteries of Lhasa. The current Panchen Lama pledged to build a nine-story Grand Maitreya Hall at the monastery. Even though the building has only nine stories, each is at least one *zhang* and five *cun* high,[126] which leads to a cumulative height of more than ten *zhang*.[127] I have not seen the site myself and know of it only through hearsay. The Maitreya inside the hall is standing figure. Observing from the lower level, one can only catch a glimpse of the statue's lower half, and so one misses the sight of Maitreya's compassionate face. It is said that the eyes alone are as tall as a person, which gives a sense of the statue's immense scale. Besides its Great Hall, Tashilhünpo Monastery also houses several other buddha halls that match the grandeur and majesty of the Great Hall at Drépung Monastery. The stūpa halls that enshrine the remains of past Panchen Lamas **[135]** are particularly noteworthy. While they cannot be compared with the stūpa halls of the fifth and thirteenth Dalai Lamas, they

124 The Yonghe Gong 雍和宫, or 'Palace of Eternal Harmony', known in English as the Lama Temple, is one of the most important Tibetan Buddhist temples in China. Located in northeastern Beijing, it was originally an imperial residence and served as the home of the Yongzheng Emperor (1678-1735) before his ascension to the throne in 1723. In 1744, the Qianlong Emperor converted the residence into a temple, establishing it as a monastic center and a symbol of China-Tibet relations. The name 'Yonghe', meaning 'Eternal Harmony', reflects its imperial origins. Spanning approximately 66,000 square meters, the temple is renowned for its architecture, which integrates Tibetan, Chinese, and Manchu elements. During the Qing dynasty, the Yonghe Temple functioned as a hub for Tibetan Buddhism, hosting monks from Tibet and Mongolia. After the fall of the Qing in 1912, its status as an imperial institution declined. Under the anti-superstition policies of the Republican government, the temple fell into neglect. Restoration efforts began in the 1920s, when the Panchen Lama briefly resided nearby. By the early 1930s, when Fazun resided in Lhasa, the temple was repurposed as a museum. For further study, see the classic work by Lessing 1942; for the Panchen Lama's visit to the Yonghe Gong in 1925, see the contribution of Tuttle 2013, 567-9.

125 C. Zhaxi lunbu si 扎什倫布寺; T. Bkra shis lhun po.

126 Nearly 3.4 meters, or 134 inches.

127 32 meters, or 35 yards.

are nonetheless far more splendid than other chapels and stūpa temples. Other notable sites, such as Samyé Monastery, Sakya Monastery, Riwoche Monastery, and both the Great and Small Jokhang temples located in Lhasa, are architectural relics that trace back to the Tang or Song dynasties. A detailed account of each would prove to be a highly demanding endeavor.

7.4 Center of Gravity

So far, I have offered a short account of the geographical and historical facts that I observed and heard during my two voyages to Tibet. I have also provided a more comprehensive account of the temperament, everyday life, and religious devotion of the Tibetan nation, along with insights into their military and financial institutions, religion, and culture. Yet, where, precisely, is their true center of gravity? While I have covered these matters thoroughly here, I have a feeling that many of my compatriots might still be confused about them! In the section where I addressed the Buddhist faith, did I not provide a detailed exposition of their devotion? And in the section about the saṅgha, did I fail to mention the significant population of Tibetans who embrace monastic life? In the section on political organization, then, did I not clarify that the Dalai Lama is their only authority? And in the section on religious institutions, did I not specify that Tibet operates under a model where the saṅgha is involved in the administration, which integrates both religious and political governance? Especially in the section centered on the educational system, did I not establish that all knowledge stems from the saṅgha?

This demonstrates that the saṅgha is the center of gravity in Tibet. As a consequence, the monastic community becomes their only object of trust and refuge. All their actions are directed toward preserving the Buddha's teachings and supporting the saṅgha. The saṅgha decides on all matters **[136]**, great and small. Simply put, the saṅgha is the very center of gravity for their personal sensibilities, family ties, and religious devotion. Likewise, it also forms the heart of their society and is woven into the political, military, financial, religious, educational, and cultural systems of the country. In other words, the saṅgha is their lifeblood. Perhaps, the saṅgha is even more important and vital to them than life itself.

Again, I assert that the saṅgha is the center of gravity in Tibet – and all things considered, this can hardly be regarded as an exaggeration, right?