

8 The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama

Summary 8.1.Their Relationship. – 8.2.Status.

8.1 Their Relationship

Tibetan Buddhism reached its most flourishing period during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, under the influence of the Kagyü and other sects. However, they neglected monastic discipline, aimed for unattainable goals, and allowed the practice of *śamatha*¹ to fade into obscurity. During this period, Tsongkhapa arose in response to the times. He thoroughly investigated the true principles of the Buddhadharma and rectified the mistakes of the various sects. Based on the teachings of the noble Atiśa, he adopted the distinctive strengths of all sects and systematically organized them into an innovative system. Through teaching and practice, as well as through broad propagation and unrelenting effort, he gradually revived the full scope of the Buddha's teachings. Learned masters endowed with correct insight from across the various sects gathered around him. They gave rise to the New Kadampa sect, distinguished by its revolutionary character.

Many of Tsongkhapa's disciples attained levels of understanding from foundational to advanced.² Khedrup Jé, the foremost among them, was

1 C. zhifa 止法; in English, the 'practice of serenity'.

2 The idiom *sheng tang ru shi* 昇堂入室, "ascend the hall, enter the inner room", is a citation from *the Analects of Confucius* (11.15). In describing Zilu's 子路 level of attainment, Confucius remarks that Zilu is "qualified to ascend the hall, though he has not yet entered the inner room". Here, *sheng tang* 'ascend the hall' denotes mastery of the foundational teachings, while *ru shi* 'inner room' implies deeper realization. Fazun employs this idiom to extol many of Tsongkhapa's disciples who achieved doctrinal comprehension and experiential embodiment of his teachings.



originally a distinguished figure [137] in the Sakya sect. After Tsongkhapa's death, he became the second successor to his Dharma seat. Once Master Khedrup passed away, he reincarnated as Ensapa,³ who subsequently reincarnated as the first Panchen Lama, Losang Chökyi Gyaltzen,⁴ who in turn served as a preceptor to the fifth Dalai Lama. Panchen Losang Yeshé,⁵ the next incarnation of Chökyi Gyaltzen, became a disciple of the fifth Dalai Lama and later taught both the sixth and the seventh Dalai Lama. Subsequently, he incarnated as Panchen Palden Yeshé,⁶ a disciple of the seventh Dalai Lama. Together with His Holiness the second Changkya [Rölpai Dorjé],⁷ Palden Yeshé also held the position of Imperial Preceptor under the Qianlong Emperor and died at the Huang Temple 黃寺⁸ in Beijing.

Thereafter, the Panchen Lamas and Dalai Lamas maintained a relationship where one served as the mentor to the other. Even though there were constant disputes and disagreements among the followers on both sides, the bond between teacher and disciple remained untouched by any real discord. Gendün Drupa,⁹ the first Dalai Lama, was one of the youngest disciples of Tsongkhapa and had strong ties with Khedrup Jé and others. However, his main teacher was Master Sherap Sengé,¹⁰ who had received the transmission of Tsongkhapa's instructions on the *Guhyasamājantra*. Having been entrusted with the Guhyasamāja teachings from Tsongkhapa, Sherap Sengé traveled [138] to Posterior Tibet with his disciples and widely propagated the teachings there. Among his disciples, Gendün Drupa was the one who emerged as the most gifted. After the death of Sherap Sengé, Gendün Drupa led his disciples in the construction of Tashilhünpo Monastery - notably, this monastery of Posterior Tibet was originally established by the Dalai Lama -, where he continued to propagate the Saddharma. The incarnation of Gendün Drupa, known as Gendün Gyatso,¹¹ was welcomed at Tashilhünpo Monastery, where he became its leader. He was later invited to fulfill the duties of abbot at major monasteries in

For this passage, see Burton Watson's translation in *The Analects of Confucius* (2007, 74): "The Master said, You's zither playing hardly fits the style of my school. The other disciples began to treat Zilu with disrespect. The Master said, You is qualified to ascend the hall, though he has not yet entered the inner room". Cf. also Tiziana Lippiello's Italian translation in Lippiello 2003, 124-5: "Il Maestro domandò: "Perché mai la cetra di Zilu è entrata nella mia dimora?". I discepoli di Zilu allora cessarono di rispettare Zilu. Il Maestro disse: "Zilu è salito fino alla sala, ma non è ancora entrato nelle sale interne". In her commentary, Lippiello notes that while Confucius disapproves of the sound of Zilu's *se* 瑟 - a stringed instrument similar to the zither (It. cetra) - he simultaneously illustrates three phases of the learning process: (1) crossing the threshold, (2) ascending the hall, and (3) entering the inner chambers.

3 C. Wensaba 溫薩巴; T. Dben sa pa (1505-66); Ensapa Losang Döndrup (T. Dben sa pa blo bzang don grub) was recognized posthumously as the third Panchen Lama.

4 C. Shanhui fachuang 善慧法幢; T. Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1567-1662).

5 C. Shanhui zhi 善慧智; T. Blo bzang ye shes (1663-1737).

6 C. Jixiang zhi 吉祥智; T. Dpal ldan ye shes (1738-80).

7 C. Zhangjia 章嘉; T. Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje (1717-86).

8 C. Huangsi 黃寺; The Huang Temple, built during the early Qing dynasty, comprised two sections: the East Huang Temple, now lost, and the West Huang Temple, which remains intact. The West Temple hosted the fifth Dalai Lama on his visit to Beijing in 1652-53 and the sixth Panchen Lama in 1780. Cf. Tuttle 2006b, 65-87.

9 C. Gendun zhuba 根敦主巴; T. Dge 'dun grub pa (1391-1475).

10 C. Huishi 慧獅; T. Shes rab seng ge (1383-1445).

11 C. Senghai 僧海; T. Dge 'dun rgya mtsho (1475-1542).

Anterior Tibet. The third incarnation, Master Sönam Gyatso,¹² took on the role of Tibetan Regent in Anterior Tibet and later journeyed to Mongolia and other regions to disseminate the Dharma. Sönam Gyatso founded the Kumbum Monastery¹³ at the place where Tsongkhapa was born in Qinghai 青海. In so doing, he established a branch institution dedicated to scriptural teaching that attained near equivalence to the three great monasteries in Lhasa. Sönam Gyatso also passed away in Qinghai. The fourth incarnation, Master Yönten Gyatso,¹⁴ continued to reside in Anterior Tibet. By the time of the fifth incarnation, the Dalai Lama's authority had extended into all areas of both Anterior and Posterior Tibet. The thirteenth Dalai Lama, who passed away two years ago, acted as the master who conferred the precepts¹⁵ to the current Panchen Lama.

Thus, the bond between them is one of close kinship, forged through countless lifetimes of mutual relationships as teacher and disciple.

8.2 Status

Both the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama hold the title of Dynastic Preceptor to the Imperial family and enjoy the highest status within the entire saṅgha across Tibet and Mongolia. The Dalai Lama, in particular, was appointed by the Emperor as the ruler of both religious and political affairs in Tibet. All Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, regardless of their location in Ü-Tsang, Kham, Qinghai, Gansu, Mongolia, or the Inner Lands, fall under the Dalai Lama's jurisdiction. They all consider the Dalai Lama to be their supreme authority. Each monastery has its own local administrator, but the Dalai Lama retains the prerogative to remove the offender if monastic precepts are violated. For instance, in the late Guangxu 光緒 era [1898-1908],¹⁶ when the [thirteenth] Dalai Lama traveled to Qinghai, Akya Hothokthu,¹⁷ who was the administrator of Kumbum Monastery at the time, was removed from his positions due to transgressions involving alcohol consumption and hunting activities. Although Akya Hothokthu had been a fellow disciple of both the Tongzhi 同治 and [139] Guangxu Emperors, the Dalai Lama still expelled him from the monastery, reorganized its regulations, and forbade the continuation of unlawful activities. A different instance pertains to

12 C. Fuhai 福海; T. Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1543-1588).

13 C. Taer si 塔兒寺; T. Sku 'bum; The Kumbum Monastery, meaning "Hundred Thousand Images", is a Geluk institution in the Kokonor region of Amdo, southwest of Siling in modern-day Qinghai province. Officially known as Kumbum Jampaling (T. Sku 'bum byams pa gling), it was founded in 1583 by the third Dalai Lama, Sönam Gyatso.

14 C. Dehai 德海; T. Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589-1617).

15 C. jieshi 戒師; S. śīlācārya; T. tshul khriims kyi slob dpon; 'master of discipline', 'master of morality'.

16 The Guangxu era, that is, the reign of the Guangxu Emperor, spanned 1875 to 1908. Here, Fazun's expression *Guangxu monian* 光緒末年, "late Guangxu era", likely refers to the final decade of his reign, roughly 1898-1908.

17 C. Ajia hutuketu 阿迦胡土克圖; T. A kyā ho thog thu. Here, Fazun's reference is to Losang Tenpai Wangchuk Sönam Gyatso (T. Blo bzang bstan pa'i dbang phyug bsod nams rgya mtsho, 1870-1909), the fifth Akya Hothokthu.

Master Pakpa Lha,¹⁸ the abbot of Chamdo Monastery, who held the title of National Preceptor during the Manchu-Qing era and was one of the eight great *hothokthus*. As a result of breaching the rules of monastic conduct, the Dalai Lama released a written edict that stripped him of his position and banished him from the monastery, which effectively lowered his status to that of a commoner. In matters of religious leadership, the Panchen Lama holds the position just below that of the Dalai Lama. Figures like the Changkya,¹⁹ the Jetsün Dampa,²⁰ and the Tsenpo Nomin Han²¹ all hold a lower status than him. Although the Panchen Lama has a more limited jurisdictional authority over monasteries compared to the Dalai Lama, he is nonetheless universally respected wherever he goes.

In the realm of politics, the Dalai Lama is the sole ruler, exercising unquestioned authority over all of Tibet. When examined closely, even the activities at Tashilhünpo Monastery in Posterior Tibet are subjected to his jurisdiction. In Tibet, there is no sector of governance, be it political, military, financial, or educational, that is not managed by the Dalai Lama. Hence, it is no exaggeration when I assert that he is the ruler of Tibet. Things are quite different when it comes to the Panchen Lama. Except for Master Palden Yeshé, who briefly oversaw political matters after the passing of the Seventh Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama has consistently refrained from becoming involved in Tibetan politics. Certainly, he is regarded as the highest and most revered tulku²² in Posterior Tibet. However, aside from a small number of matters directly under his administration, the governance of Posterior Tibet as a whole remains under the authority of the Dalai Lama. Therefore, the political status of the Panchen Lama is comparable only to that of figures like Radreng – interim or provisional stewards who assume political responsibilities for a few years, without any lasting authority. The territories that are officially under the administration of the Panchen Lama remain subject to the sovereignty of the Dalai Lama [140] and are limited in size. This restricted autonomy has resulted in discontent among

18 C. Shengtian 聖天; S. Āryadeva; T. 'Phags pha lha. The Pakpa Lha incarnation line dates back to the fifteenth century, when Dechen Dorje (T. Bde chen rdo rje, 1439-1487), at the age of eight, declared himself to be the reincarnation of the great Indian master Āryadeva. He was posthumously recognized as the First Pakpa Lha. The seat of this lineage is Chamdo Jampa Ling (T. Chab mdo Byams pa gling), a major Geluk monastery established in Kham by Jangsem Sherap Sangpo (T. Byang sems shes rab bzang po), a disciple of Tsongkhapa. In this context, Fazun refers to the Tenth Pakpa Lha, Losang Thupten (T. Blo bzang thub bstan, 1901-1939). In 1920, the Tenth Pakpa Lha married openly, which led the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to strip him of his honorific titles and ranks, remove him from the abbot's throne, and exile him to a remote hermitage. In 1934, after an appeal from the Chamdo community, he was re-ordained and re-enthroned as the abbot of Ganden Jampa Ling Monastery.

19 C. Zhangjia 章嘉; T. Lcang skya.

20 C. Jiezun danba 結尊蕩巴; T. Rje btsun dam pa. The title Jetsün Dampa refers to the leader of the Geluk lineage in Mongolia. This lineage, established by the Fifth Dalai Lama, traces its origins to Zanabazar (1635-1723), the first Jetsün Dampa and an incarnation of the Tibetan historian Tāranātha. Renowned for his artistic skills, Zanabazar was also a respected scholar. In his capacity of both a religious and political leader, he unified the Khalkha Mongols and earned recognition from the Qing Emperor Kangxi as a key figure in Mongolia.

21 C. Zhenbo nuomenhan 眞薄諾門罕; T. Btsan po no mon han. The title Tsenpo Nomon Han designates a Geluk reincarnation line. This lineage, also known as Mindröl Nomon Han (T. Smin grol no mon han) or Mindröl Hothokthu (T. Smin grol ho thog thu), is closely associated with Tsenpo Monastery (T. Btsan po dgon pa) in Amdo, an institution founded in 1650 by Tsenpowa Döndrup Gyatso (T. Btsan po ba don grub rgya mtsho, 1613-65).

22 C. huofu 活佛; T. sprul sku. From the Chinese, "living buddha".

the Panchen's subordinates. They persistently strive to claim a share of governing power, which in turn has resulted in conflict between the two factions. These very tensions could be the root cause for the emergence of the Panchen Lama!

Our people in the Inner Lands lack awareness of the stark differences between the roles of the Dalai and the Panchen in the context of Tibet's religious and political affairs. It is often believed that the mutual relationship of the Dalai and the Panchen as teacher and disciple implies that their statuses are roughly equivalent. Moreover, the former resides in Anterior Tibet, the latter resides in Posterior Tibet. This geographical distance has led many to assume that both parties share the same level of authority in political matters. Therefore, they incorrectly assume that the Dalai rules Anterior Tibet while the Panchen governs Posterior Tibet. And so, they are led to view the two as equals in authority. This misconception - that they are co-equals - has been amplified by the advocates of the Panchen Lama, who propagate the notion that the return of the Panchen Lama to Tibet would grant him unparalleled authority over the entire country.

I have come across countless such misguided statements - similar to those of blind men trying to feel their way around an elephant - in various periodicals. Since I already explained this matter,²³ I urge our Central Government to take into account the substantive distinctions between the two factions of the Dalai and Panchen when resolving their disputes, and to avoid any further exploitation by their subordinates. - The subordinates of both the Dalai and Panchen often take advantage of our limited understanding of their roles and often inflate their own stature. I, too, was misled in Beijing by figures like Khenpo Losang²⁴ and others, only to discover, through rigorous investigations in Tibet, that they are purveyors of deceit.

I further implore my fellow journalists in the magazine industry to conduct thorough research before publishing any consequential commentary. It is crucial to avoid replacing direct observation with hearsay.

23 Here, Fazun is referring to *Wo quguo de Xizang*. Cf. Fazun 1937b.

24 C. Luosang kanbu 羅桑堪布; T. Blo bzang mkhan po (d.u.). I was unable to identify this figure.

