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THE STRUCTURE OF TIBETAN  
RURAL SOCIETY

by

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I examine the operation of social relationships in three kinds of Tibetan communities.

The field and period are introduced in Part 1 by an historical review of Tibet and of the beliefs and practices which had become characteristic of Tibetan society. In the first chapter the politico-religious structure of Lamaism is traced from the introduction of Buddhism in the 7th century to the establishment of the Gelugs-pa church and Lhasa Government headed by the Dalai Lama. Then a brief description of the geography places the subject in its ecological context.

In the second chapter, four major aspects of Tibetan religion considered particularly relevant to the main issues in this essay are outlined so as to provide some ideological framework of the society with which we are concerned.

Having established the historical, physical and ideological framework within which the communities to be examined operated at the beginning of this century, attention is turned to the structural and organizational features of each of the three Tibetan communities. Each chapter of Part 2 then deals with one type of socio-political community. First the Lhasa administrative system is described. Actual social relationships are illustrated by the examination of the Lhasa government's social components: the nobility, the church, and the foreign

powers operating within and around the key government offices - those of the Dalai Lama and Regent.

In the next chapter, attention is turned to the operation of a local monastery in Tibetan society. First the distinctions as to types of monastic centres are made; then the general administrative structure of a model centre is described. The actual operation of a monastery and the relationships of its constituent elements are revealed when the office of the abbot is examined in detail. In the fifth chapter a similar approach is used to illustrate the nature of political relationships in the local lay community. There the office of village headman is the focal point to which social forces in the village and in the wider political community of the landlord are related.

Finally, in Part 3, some conclusions are drawn about the distribution of power in Tibetan society. Certain features present in each of the three types of communities examined are compared and some suggestions are made about the nature of autonomy and competition in relation to the structure of Tibetan society.

CONTENTS

	page
Author's Note	3
Introduction	7
Part 1	
Chapter I	14
Chapter II	37
Historical Introduction	
Tibetan Religious Beliefs and Practices	
Part 2	
Chapter III	56
Chapter IV	101
Chapter V	156
The Lhasa Organization	
The Monastic Organization	
The Village Organization	
Part 3	
Chapter VI	211
Conclusions: The Distribution of Power	
Bibliography	235
Appendixes	
A. Features of Succession by Reincarnation	245
B. The Pan-chen Lama and the Shigatse Government	250
C. Tibetan Buddhist Nunneries	256

		page
Maps and Diagrams		
Fig. 1	General Map of Tibet	31
Fig. 2	The Lhasa Government	39
Fig. 3	The Development of Tibetan Religious Schools	58

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Most of the Tibetan terms used in this thesis are transliterated according to the system established by Jäschke.<sup>(1)</sup> In some cases in which the transliteration is quite different from the pronunciation, only a phonetic spelling commonly used by western Tibetologists is given.

Some colloquial terms used by my informants and by other authors dealing in another dialect, are not found in Jäschke. In the case of colloquialisms of informants I have used the transliteration they themselves have provided. Where another scholar's phonetic spelling could not be transliterated back into Tibetan, I have quoted the term used by the author himself

The number of alternative terms used by different informants and authors for general offices such as headman, district officer, religious collector has presented some problems. To overcome these I have used a descriptive English term such as those just listed and footnoted the various Tibetan regional names. On the other hand there are some general Tibetan terms which are so culture-specific that no English translation is possible. For example, kan-bzans (a residential unit within a monastery containing members from the same

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(1) Jäschke (1881): his system and dictionary are still the authority to which most contemporary scholars refer.

locality), and mKhan-po (the principal of the college or residential unit - like a don or dean in a western university) are used whenever the institutions are referred to.

It will be noted that the terms lamasery, lamaism and lama are - as far as possible - avoided. Their use was kept to a minimum because of the ambiguity created by their indiscriminate use by western authors. 'Lama', for example, comes from the word bLa-ma which simply means 'superior one(s)': it is only infrequently used as a term of reference by Tibetans themselves and never, to my knowledge, used as a term of address. In reference to religious men who are of high status and/or religious specialists working among the laity, the English term 'priest' is used. The English word 'monk' is reserved to describe inmates of monasteries who hold no special status and are celibate. Tibetans themselves apply the term grva<sup>^</sup>-pa to any man attached to a religious establishment who cannot marry. Admittedly that term could have been used throughout this paper.

It might be helpful to give some guides to the pronunciation of Tibetan words. A feature of the Tibetan language is the eight silent prefixes, g, d, b, m, r, s, l and ' (apostrophe). In order to facilitate pronunciation, where these occur, the first letter after them which is sounded is



capitalized.<sup>(1)</sup> Some combinations of consonants are simplified into single sounds: e.g.

gy is sometimes pronounced 'j',

py is lightly pronounced 'j',

phya is pronounced as 'ch',

and bya is a deep 'ch',

tr, dr, mr, sr are usually pronounced so that the 'r' is scarcely heard; also, where a syllable ends in 's' that letter is usually silent.<sup>(2)</sup>

The fifteen informants quoted throughout this essay are all well-known to me. All except one are Tibetans who have spent the greater part of their life in Tibet, but who are now living in India, Europe and the United States. Most of them are men who were monks in Tibet but have recently given up that role; others of them continue to work and live as priests. The interviewees represented a cross section of Tibetan society: some are from aristocratic families of Lhasa while others claim humbler origins from peasants and local chiefs. Some are affiliated with the strongest most reformed of the Tibetan religious sects; others remain loyal to the

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(1) Some Tibetologists do not capitalize in such a way.

(2) For further details see Snellgrove (1968), pp. 278 - 9.

smaller older sects. My informants came from all over Tibet: the metropolitan communities of the central valley, the isolated hamlets, the independent territories of the East. Many of them have drawn on their diverse experiences in different communities in which they resided, but generally, the information they have provided has been limited to their 'home town'. Knowing the general social position and locality of each informant, information from them was solicited only about their own class and locality; informants were not asked to give quantitative data or impressions of relationships outside their immediate experiences. Therefore, the information they have provided is first hand and is qualified in all cases cited. The names of my informants are: S. Karmay, A. Karmay, T. Lhakpa, J. Surk'hang, C. Youngdong, C. Trungpa, S. Palden, A. Lobsang, Y. Khendrup, G. Wangyal, G. Sö-po, T. Nyamdrak, K. Thinley and the nuns of Karma Drupgyü Tharjay Ling, G. Panggong and S. Lha-lun,

INTRODUCTION

Tibet has much to offer western scholars. Historians, theologians, geographers and ethnologists long ago recognized both the uniqueness and complexity of the culture that prevailed among the Tibetan-speaking inhabitants of the Himalayan foothills and the plateau of Central Asia. Despite the problems posed to would-be investigators by the hostile physical and political conditions which have so characterized the land and people of Tibet, many Europeans did observe the social life of Tibetans at close hand. In fact, until very recently, most of the material on Tibet which was accessible to us had been provided by the records of the explorations of a handful of Europeans. The sketchy and personal accounts of the earlier generation consisting of Huc and Gabet, Desideri, Bogle, Hedin and even those of Das, Kawakuchi and Rockhill were of limited use. They were followed by equally vague and unrefined presentations of life in Tibet by the profuse writings of the 20th century British colonial officers, and a few American visitors.<sup>(1)</sup> Although the data and suggestions about Tibetan social life which this body of literature presents are not completely without value, they are disappointing: they have contributed little

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(1) The best known British writers of that generation are Bell, Chapman, Macdonald, Sandberg, Sherring, Teichman and Waddell. The Americans are Ekvall and Duncan. Mme David-Neel is another prolific writer of that generation.

either to our understanding of the social mechanisms operating within Tibetan communities, or to the ethnographic material on folk beliefs and relationships. The social life of Tibetans, through those writings, was presented in ideological terms according to the ideals, values and norms expressed by a few informants - often of the upper class - to whom most of the Europeans' experience was limited.

The most methodical and scholarly early accounts of Tibetan society are limited to the works of Francke, Das, Waddel and Tucci. They are less subjective works and their first-hand observations presented together with rigorous examination of the Tibetan literature provide an important body of knowledge. While they have contributed much to the fund of information on Tibet and pointed attention to the vast body of Tibetan literature which their pupils are only now beginning to decipher, they still left much to be explained about the actual operation of social institutions in Tibet. It is surprising that even with all the information of those observers before us they can be put to little use in other disciplines: economics, folklore, magic, political science and the arts, let alone social anthropology. Carrasco, in his admirable examination of land and power-distribution in Tibetan societies, was clearly limited by his reliance on such sources.

The best documentation of life in Tibet remains in Tibetan sources themselves. The most exploited of these to date are the histories and biographies compiled by the priests and

other political leaders throughout the last millenium. (This is probably the explanation for the monopoly historians and classicists have enjoyed over Tibetan culture). The scholars mentioned above, together with the contemporary Tibetologists Petech, Kolmas, Snellgrove, Hoffman, Stein, Govinda and Events-Wentz have made good use of Tibetan and Chinese literature. Their intensive studies have provided interesting and valuable accounts of the development of social institutions in Tibet and of the various religious beliefs and practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Still, these writings suffer from the same weaknesses as those of their predecessors: they are but translations of ideals and rules presented by a very select segment or class of Tibetan society, the priesthood, who wrote on idealistic and philosophical terms about their religious life and national political events. Historical and biographical accounts - both those of Tibetans and those of their European interpreters - have still to be placed in a sociological context; and they have still to be combined with beliefs and relationships of a lower order.

The writings reviewed above, in fact all the literature on Tibet, particularly affects the work of social anthropologists interested in the society of the Central Asian Plateau and Himalayan range. Problems are created both by the quality and quantity of the material on Tibet. The body of information before us cannot easily be supplemented by professional anthropological observation of social institutions in Tibet.

In fact Tibetan society no longer exists in the form in which it was observed. Remnants of the culture remain in the art, literature, and among refugees and immigrant peoples in outlying areas, but the communist revolution of the last two decades brought about a massive reorganization in the ecology, economy, religion, and in fact in all social institutions in Tibet.

The task of the anthropologist interested in the operation of Tibetan institutions is twofold: he must first try from the available material to construct a picture of the social organization as it existed in Tibet, and he must evaluate and even challenge the conclusions and ideological framework presented by other writers on Tibetan society. The information made available by histories, travelogues, religious doctrines and biographies must first be put in a social context, and then mechanisms must be explained not in historical or philosophical terms, but in sociological terms.

Since the quality and orientation of the secondary sources described above themselves impose so many limitations, in order that these problems might be tackled, that material had to be supplemented with other types of data on Tibetan society. The supplementary data on which this essay relies are of three types. One is the body of anthropological material collected only during the last two decades from intensive observations of skilled researchers in the Tibetan-speaking regions on the perimeters of Tibet proper. In Himalayan Nepal, Sikkim,

Lahal and Spiti, and on the Tibeto-Chinese frontier, intensive observations and recording of village social organization and folk beliefs and practices have been carried out. Ekvall, Rock, Li An-che, Gorer, Fürer-Haimendorf and Prince Peter are all social scientists who have now provided intensive information of a quality and depth previously lacking for any Tibetan-Buddhist community. Comparing the information from these sources with what little we have on Tibet proper, it appears that there was a considerable similarity in the social structure of all Tibetan-Buddhist communities. The use of those anthropological works here has been to provide supporting information in cases where data on Tibet proper is weak. In this essay there is no attempt to extrapolate from conditions in those border areas to Tibet proper, but a certain degree of standardization of beliefs and relationships and certainly of economy and ecology is assumed.

The second body of supplementary data comes from a new and fruitful source which still has much potential: the accounts of Tibetan refugees now living through the world. In the last ten years many of them have published histories and biographies. These accounts have their limitations and weaknesses, but they do give us first-hand case histories and ethnographic data, and they provide a cross-check on the descriptions of early European authors. Two recent publications, one by Cassinelli and Ekvall on a small Tibetan principality, and the other by

Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark on polyandry are excellent illustrations of the use to which information collected from Tibetan refugees can be put. Using both the published accounts of Tibetans and the personal reports of Tibetan refugees in England and America, it is possible to illustrate social organization in Tibet with concrete cases and to check the generalizations of other reporters. It has also been possible to accumulate a considerable amount of new information on the organization of monasteries from my informants since most of them were monks in Tibet.

The third source on which this work has drawn is my own experience in Tibetan communities. Though without training in anthropological techniques and without an orientation towards the problems discussed herein, my three years' residence in Tibetan refugee communities in northern India provided an imaginative framework for the problems discussed in this essay and a sensitivity regarding the values and experience of my informants.

All this material was gathered in order to reconstruct a social picture of the organization and operation of three kinds of Tibetan communities: the central government, the monastery and the village. The application of anthropological analysis to the data allows Tibetan institutions and mechanisms to be seen in their social context. Such an exercise has two values:



a) It reveals the irrelevancy of the ideological and historical explanations presented by the early writers and by the Tibetan sources.

b) It focuses attention on the real forces operating in Tibetan society which limited the development of certain institutions and supported the strength of others. Some sociological explanation is thereby provided for the existence of various mechanisms and customs in Tibet.

PART ICHAPTER IHISTORICAL INTRODUCTION1. Historical Foundation of Lamaism

The feudalism that followed the 9th century dissolution of the Tibetan empire which had been built by King Srong-brtsan-sgam-po, profoundly affected the course of Buddhism in Tibet.

Two centuries earlier Indian scholars, patronized by Srong-brtsan-sgam-po and his successors, had introduced Buddhism from India. Some influence of this new religion was also attributed to the wives of the illustrious kings. Srong-brtsan-sgam-po's Chinese Princess perpetuated the Buddhism that had evolved in China during the early centuries of its development. The new religious movement from India that was to eventually become the most influential, consisted at first of the introduction into Tibet and translation into the new Tibetan script of religious writings. Consistent with this literary development, was an active exchange of scholars between the two countries - Indians were invited to Tibet while Tibetan scholars were sent to study in the great Indian institutions. During

the 8th century, that tradition was continued, culminating during the reigns of two kings who were sympathetic to Buddhism, Khri-srong-lde-brtsan and Ral-pa-can (755 - 797 and c.800 - 836 B.C.). In general, Buddhist practices and beliefs did not extend beyond the royal courts. Even though many Tibetans began to take monastic vows and the first great monastery bSam-yas had been founded and with others received lands and revenue, it is doubtful whether Buddhist practices and beliefs were widespread. There are indications that the pre-Buddhist religion, Bön, still at the time of the royal patronage of Buddhism, enjoyed a large following. While the kings were encouraging the new religion on the one hand, they were still following Bönist practices, and many of their ministers were strongly Bönist.<sup>(1)</sup> Whether or not Buddhism was widespread by the 9th century, the status and political influence of the Buddhist priests in the administration was, according to historians, strong enough to pose a threat to the established traditional religion and its adherents.<sup>(2)</sup> This period of Buddhist history was

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(1) Richardson (1962), p. 30.

(2) *ibid.* Bell (1928), pp. 35-7 and Shakabpa (1967), pp. 34-6.

significant because it marked the introduction of a universal Tibetan script, a literary tradition based on Buddhist literature, and a monastic tradition. Even by the 9th century, priestly status implied prestige and proximity to the ruler.

### Sectarianism and Lay Rule

During the rule of Glang-dar-ma (836 - 842), any influence the early Buddhist priests had won and enjoyed, was curtailed. Buddhism seems to have been severely persecuted and all but disappeared. The death of Glang-dar-ma which precipitated the break-up of the Tibetan empire, pushed Buddhism further into the background of the political scene, at least for a short time. From the 9th to the 13th century Tibetan political history was dominated by internecine wars among the various branches of the royal family. Opposing princes fled to various parts of the country and established their own polities, but despite those rivalries and divisions, Buddhism did survive. It underwent changes which reflected that new political structure, for what emerged during the 11th century was a number of distinct schools of Buddhist philosophy and practice. That development affected the shape Lamaism was to take in Tibet during the rest of its history. The rulers of each of the new dynasties sponsored different religious scholars, and so religious communities developed supporting each dynasty. Alliances were established between

lay rulers and priests. Often the sons of those rulers became religious men and headed the new monastic communities; such an arrangement enabled the lineage of the lay rulers to retain control over the succession of their monasteries.<sup>(1)</sup> Other rulers 'adopted' into their dynasty, priests who had themselves established followings and monastic communities. These were the conditions under which new temporal power was built upon religious prestige. At the same time, as Shakabpa explains, "the diversification and development of sectarianism was a result of the search for prestige among the newly established local rulers".<sup>(2)</sup> So, since the political rivalry among the dynasties manifested itself through the medium of religion, the diversification and ensuing competition among the religious orders must be interpreted against the background of the rivalling dynasties.

The increase in strength of religious elements as symbols of political power together with the establishment of opposing dynasties resulted in the emergence of rivalling religious dynasties. It was not a shift in power from the lay rulers to the religious leaders, but only a shift in

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(1) Kolmas' (1968) translation of the history of the De-ge kings provides an excellent example of the development of the lay-priest dynasty.

(2) Shakabpa (1967), p. 60.

the articulating principle of power which characterized the events of that period. And it was not until very much later in Tibetan history that the power of religious parties became distinct from and sometimes opposed to lay factions.

### Mongol Overlordship

By the middle of the 13th century a dominant political power emerged in the Tibetan-speaking world. It was one of these lay-religious alliances. Headed by a priest of the Sa-sKya sect of Buddhism, the lay element (the KHon family) was considerably eclipsed by the religious. However strong, this unit was not sufficiently powerful either to bring the weaker rulers and religious sects under its control or to protect itself against foreign invasion. It was at this time that the Mongol rulers, Ghengis and Godan Khan were enlarging their empire, and apparently, to avoid suppression and plundering at the hands of the Mongol armies, the Tibetans sent a peace delegation to the Mongol rulers. The Sa-sKya religious leader who was a member of that group, succeeded in reaching a peaceful settlement with the Mongols, and thus emerged as the Tibetan leader.

Independent religious rule and domination by the patriarchs of one or another sect was not yet possible. Sanction by the Mongol administrators and the support of their armies were necessary for the Sa-sKya hierarch to effect his

superiority. This alliance between a Tibetan religious leader and a foreign power marked a new stage in Tibetan history. The former was dependent on the military and economic strength of his patron who was, in turn, dependent on the administrative ability and loyalty of those they had invested with the power to rule Tibet as their suzerain state. After the death of the Godan Khan and the Sa-sKya Pandita, another such alliance was established between their respective successors, the Khubalai Khan and Sa-sKya Phags-pa.<sup>(1)</sup> Under this arrangement, the power of the religious ruler is said to have increased considerably over that held by his predecessor. In 1270 Phags-pa was invested with the sovereignty over the whole of Tibet,<sup>(2)</sup> and so it is probably correct to consider him the first religious ruler of Tibet. It certainly marked the entry of the religious hierarchs into positions of national leadership, and of religious sects as the dominant political forces. The continuation of the exalted position of the religious leaders was ensured by the adoption of political and economic privileges for themselves and for their relatives. They established the rule of heredity from uncle to nephew as the means of succession to the highest offices.

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(1) Phags-pa was himself the nephew of Sa-sKya Pandita.

(2) The extent of this hierarch's authority is not clear. Ruegg (1966) and Richardson's (1962), p. 7, reports claim that Phags-pa was only a titular viceroy under a commander appointed by the Mongols while other accounts claim he was a king.

Six hundred years after Buddhism had been introduced, Tibet was administratively reunited under one religious hierarch, but supported by an outside political force. Nevertheless, the monasteries of other sects, allied with their lay dynasties, had remained strong and relatively independent of the Sa-sKya-Mongol rule. Their chief priests, intent on securing a share of the Mongol patronage for themselves had established secondary alliances with Mongol princes who themselves were rivals of the Khubalai Khan. In 1358, after seventy-five years, the Sa-sKya rule was supplanted by another combined lay-religious force. That was led by the monk Chang-cub Gyal-tsen. Chang-cub was a prince of the powerful Phag-mo-tru family of the western Tibet - a province of Nga-ri. With the support of the Kagyü sect to which his family was closely connected,<sup>(1)</sup> and with the support of other discontented lay and monastic leaders, this prince was able to take over influential positions in the Tibetan government and, finally, to defeat the Sa-sKya rulers. At the time that the Kagyü sect and Chang-cub were consolidating their power, the Mongol Yuan dynasty was declining and unable to come to the assistance of the Sa-sKyas.

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(1) The Historian Li (1960), p. 14, attributes the rise of Chang-cub and the Kagyü-pas to the support of the Chinese Emperor and the growing Ming Dynasty.



Chang-cub's successors, the Kagyü-pa hierarchs together with the Phag-mo-tru family held sway over Tibet for only ten years. In 1364 they were displaced by another powerful family, the Rin-spungs, allied with a sub-sect of the Kagyü-pas, the Karma-pa. The Rin-spung princes were hardly distinguishable from the Karma-pa hierarchs, so it is difficult to assign to that period of rule either the terms lay or theocratic. From Chang-cub's death in 1364 until the mid-17th century, no single sect or dynasty was able to rule the Tibetan-speaking world. The 15th and 16th centuries were marked by a lack of central authority. There were no religious lay alliances or foreign power sufficiently strong to unite the atomized politico-religious units.

#### The Rise of the Gelugs Sect

Upon this scene of ineffectual and short-lived hegemonies there emerged a new political force. It was a new religious organization which for two hundred years had been crystallizing around the new reformed sect, the Gelugs-pa. Providing a new ideology, new leadership, and a more rigorous monastic organization, this religious force succeeded in establishing a powerful extensive network of monastic centres, and of winning a substantial following. Yet three hundred years of economic and political development preceded the enthronement of the Gelugs-pa leader as the sovereign of Tibet.

The work of Tsong-kha-pa, the zealous founder of the new order, was continued by his energetic disciple, dGe'dun-grub-pa (1391 - 1475) whose second subsequent reincarnation was responsible for an important new development in the Gelugs-pa's rise to prominence throughout the Lamaist world. That proselytizer, bSod-nams rGya-mtsho, introduced the Gelugs-pa doctrine to the Mongols winning the confidence of the Mongol Prince Altan Khan. After receiving the title of Dalai Lama from the powerful ruler, bSod-nams rGya-mtsho was reincarnated in the great-grandson of his benefactor. That event allied the powerful Oosót clan, led by Gu-shri Khan, to the Gelugs-pa sect, greatly furthering the power and status of the latter. Their combined strength was sufficient to challenge that of the gTsang princes who, with the Karma-pa sect were claiming control of Central Tibet at the time. Finally, in 1642, the power of the Gushri Khan installed the 5th reincarnation of dGe'dun-grub-pa,<sup>(1)</sup> now called the 5th Dalai Lama, as the sovereign of Tibet. With the Dalai Lama installed, the Mongolian armies continued to occupy Tibet and succeeded in bringing the north and western provinces of the Tibetan-speaking area under the effective political leadership of the

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(1) This figure, Ngag-dbang bLo-bzang rGya-mtsho, although the fifth in the line, was the first Dalai Lama and Gelugs-pa leader to hold high political office.

new government in Lhasa. Though the presence of the Mongols continued in Tibet for some years, it did not inhibit the growth of the Gelugs-pa Church. On the contrary, it was under the protection of the Mongols that many monasteries of the older, unreformed sects were converted and annexed to the new order or were annihilated altogether.

The Gelugs-pa monasteries and their leaders, following the fashion set by the Sa-sKya hierarchs, were endowed with large estates and appointments to government offices. The 5th Dalai Lama's own economic and administrative reforms and his friendly ties with the new Manchu Dynasty in Peking were the basis of further centralization of Tibet and of the active participation of the Gelugs-pas in government affairs. While the great monasteries which had established themselves prior to the Gelugs-pa's political domination remained relatively independent of secular control, their own officers were vested with temporal power. Thus the Gelugs-pa leaders of secondary status entered the administrative and judicial ranks of the government, and participated in civil government.

From the accounts we have of the office of ruler of Tibet, none of the subsequent Dalai Lamas (there were nine more reincarnations after bLo-bzang rGya-mtsho) exercised temporal power as extensively as the 5th. But, despite the e/ limited temporal power wielded by its incumbents, the office of the Dalai Lama, after the image established by the "Great

Fifth", continued to be the symbol of ultimate authority and sanction in Tibet, and of the supremacy of the Gelugs-pa sect.<sup>(1)</sup> Succession to the office never lapsed, although, e/ for the most part, its incumbants were ineffectual. The power of the office was in fact exercised either by its regents or by other high ecclesiastical or government officers.<sup>(2)</sup>

The supremacy of the 5th Dalai Lama and the Gelugs-pa church did not mark a complete shift in the balance of power to the religious leaders, nor did it mark the establishment of a stable government. Further intervention by the Mongols and the ensuing civil wars again weakened the power of the central government and allowed the power of local chiefs and princes to continue for some time. After the death of blo-bzang rGya-mtsho in 1679, while his reincarnated successor (the 6th Dalai Lama, Tshangs-dbyangs rGya-mtsho) was still alive, temporal power was exercised by the Regent Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho<sup>(3)</sup> who had maintained political relations with a strong Mongol clan, the Dzungars. But then conflict developed

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(1) The symbolism of the Dalai Lama's office is so strong that the historians Shakabpa, Richardson, Snellgrove, Bell and Li attempt to interpret political events and the autonomous status of Tibet in terms of this office. Since the installation of the 5th Dalai Lama as sovereign, despite the lack of temporal power exercised by his successors the Gelugs-pas have remained the dominant political force in Tibet.

(2) For detailed consideration of the effective limits of power of these offices, see below, Chapter III.

(3) It is reputed by several Tibetan historians that this man was the very son of the 5th Dalai. See Petetch (1950), p.218

between him and the leader of the opposing Oosot Mongol clan, lHa-bzang Khan. The latter retained or reclaimed the title of King of Tibet, so a struggle developed between the Regent and the Dzungar Mongols on the one hand, and the lHa-bzang Khan leading the Oosots and some members of the Tibetan nobility on the other. It ended only when the Regent and the ineffectual and unconcerned 6th Dalai Lama were exiled by lHa-bzang. Shortly afterwards, the latter too was overthrown.

Finally, in 1717, the forces of the Manchu Emperor, claiming possession of a strong candidate for the office of the 7th Dalai Lama and allied with the Tibetan leader Pho-lha took control of Tibet. With their 7th Dalai Lama installed as religious head of state, Pho-lha ruled from 1728 until 1747 without much opposition. Although the Dalai Lama exercised no temporal power and was very much sustained by Pho-lha, the Gelugs-pa organization apparently remained a force to be reckoned with, for they had maintained control over many important secondary government offices, and were in themselves a military force. Pho-lha's death marked the beginning of a new political phase. For the next century, the Regent and ministers of the five succeeding Dalai Lamas administered Tibet. But that government involved close participation and direction by the Chinese (Ch'ing Dynasty) representatives in Lhasa. In 1751 and later in 1792, the Chinese introduced a number of reforms which gave Tibet an administrative character

that was to last until the 20th century. On two occasions, foreign invasions required active Chinese military occupation of Tibet. During this period of Chinese control, after their successful defence of Tibet against foreign invasion, the Chinese set up a loose system of indirect rule. Local government was reorganized with Tibetans remaining in control of local administration and responsible to central government officials who had wide overall control. Monasteries and local leaders who had been brought under the authority of Lhasa were allowed to continue to administer their own lands with certain conditions of allegiance to the central authority. The nobility, including the local rulers, while enjoying considerable autonomy in regards to their estates and political privileges, were incorporated into the government. Their obligation to participate in government administration probably strengthened the bureaucratization of the central government and restricted the ambitions of noble families to that organization. The government still retained considerable power over the nobility by its authority to expropriate or to increase their estates and to call upon the monks in the Lhasa monasteries for military support of its policy.

Some of the Chinese reforms were aimed at limiting the selection of the Dalai Lama, particularly by the exclusion of wealthy noble families. To supplement the so-called religious devices of selection, they introduced a measure requiring that

final candidates for the office be subjected to a drawing of lots in the presence of the Chinese representative and other officials. This, together with other measures probably had the desired effect of preventing the permanent appropriation of power by any one individual or class. The active participation of the nobility in the government, short terms of office succeeded to by appointment, and the establishment of a lay army, were probably calculated to provide a check on the growing power of the central monasteries.

After the fall of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1911, the Lhasa government exercised considerable independence and, for the first time in 160 years, a Dalai Lama reached maturity and exercised his temporal power.<sup>(1)</sup> In asserting its independence from China however, Tibet came under British influence. Except in minimizing Chinese influence, British presence probably had little effect on the internal socio-political system or on the Lhasa organization. Only parts of the Tibetan speaking world on the geographical and political fringes of Tibet, where ties with the central Tibetan government and monasteries had always been weak, were annexed by the British Government. They included Sikkim and Bhutan in the south-east, and Ladak

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(1) That was Thub-bstan rGya mtsho, the 13th reincarnation.

and Lahaul-Spiti in the west. Only parts of the eastern provinces of Amdo and Khams on the Chinese-Tibetan frontier continued to enjoy considerable independence under their native rulers.

Only after the reforms of the 5th Dalai Lama and the centralization of a strong Gelugs-pa network was Lamaism established in Tibet. That was not until late in the 16th century. Although the power of the priests in political affairs and the strength of religious symbols had long been important factors in deciding the balance of power, it was only in the 16th century that Lamaism was an integral part of the government and authority system. While some minor sects represented the establishment of Lamaism in the independent principalities and outlying provinces, the Gelugs-pa monopolized the central government. Although comparatively young, the Gelugs sect, commanded the largest lay and monastic following; the adherents and leaders of the older sects had been pushed to the outlying border areas, where, under the protection of distance and propinquity of foreign governments, they enjoyed some independence. However, both in regard to the central government of Tibet and to the provincial governments of Ladakh, Bhutan, Sikkim, and other outlying states, affiliation with a sect or subsect was coterminous with a man's or a community's political allegiance to the authority allied



with or patronising the sect. For example, in Bhutan, all citizens were adherents of the official Bhutanese sect the Brug-pa.<sup>(1)</sup> Likewise, in the principality of Sa-sKya, almost all citizens owed allegiance to the Sa-sKya hierarch - who was in that case, the head of state.

Over a period of twelve centuries, Buddhism in Tibet had developed into a social organization: a network of several sects, each of which had a different relationship to the central government in Lhasa and to foreign and local governments. However, in all sects and at all administrative levels, the religious agents - especially those in high monastic office - held the balance of power. Those men enjoyed high social status. Not only were they the symbols of power but their offices and skills were the primary means to the acquisition of power - both temporal and spiritual.

## 2. Geography and Political Units of Tibetan Lamaist Society during the Period 1850 - 1950 A.D.

The number of people who comprised the Tibetan-speaking Lamaist world was between three and four million. They all spoke a Tibetan dialect and used the singular Tibetan script

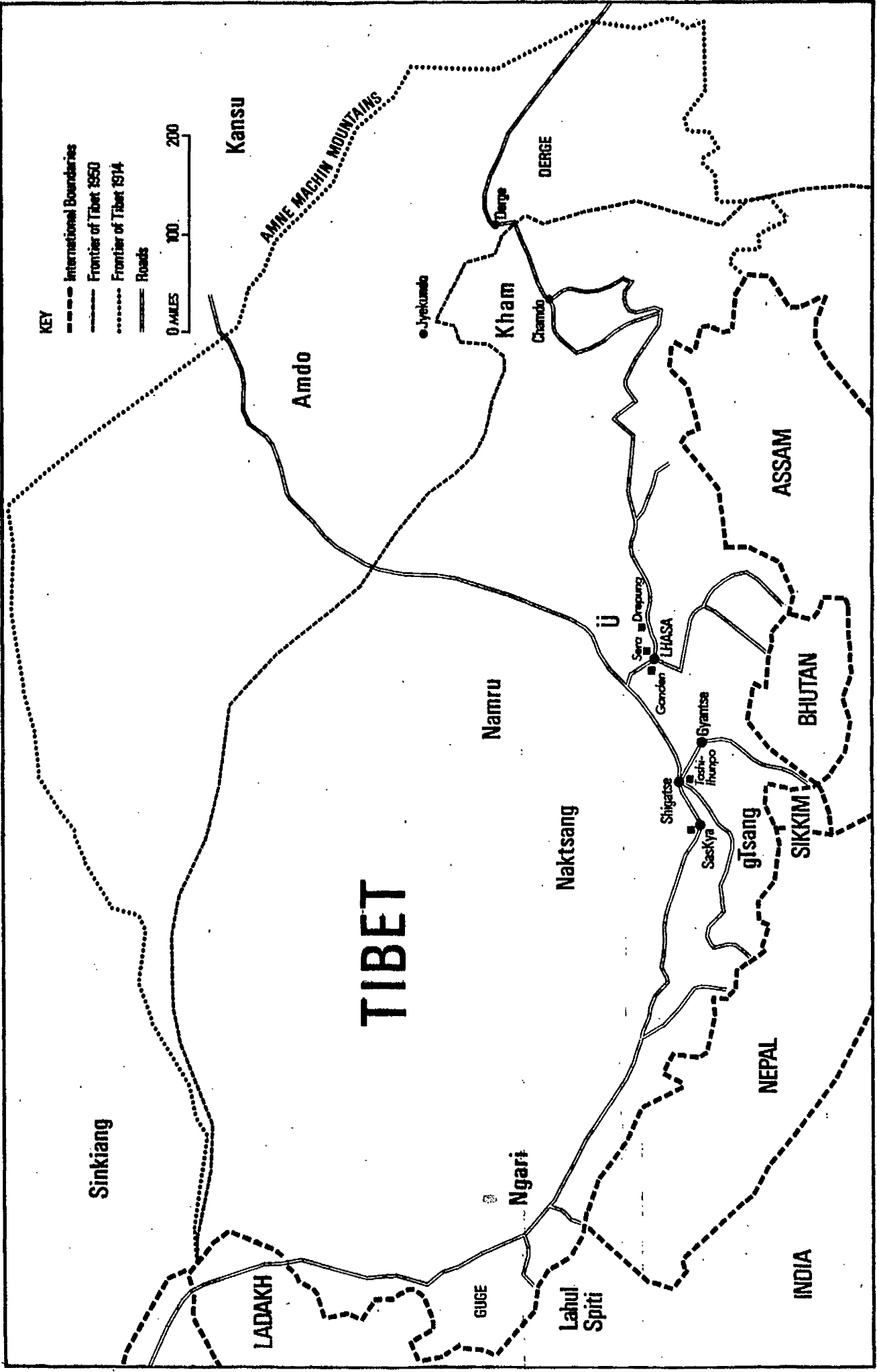
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(1) This is a sub-sect of the Kagyü sect. Early in its history, it became inextricably tied to the locality and leadership of Bhutan. See Snellgrove and Richardson (1968), p. 270.

devised in the 7th century (that was also the liturgical script of all the Tibetan religious sects). The majority of the people with whom this study is concerned, were mountain dwelling. There was an important class of aristocrats in the major towns but most of the population was peasant. Although we are mainly concerned here with the rural social organization, some attention is also given to their urban administrative centres, since it was their history and organization which to some extent determined the pattern of local monastic and village life.

The most populated area of Tibet was its cultural and political centre, the gTsang-po valley. That included the cities of Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse, and Sa-sKya together with their respective monasteries. Accurate demographic data are not available but it is estimated that there were no more than 150,000 people in these urban areas, and that half of them were monks. Most of the population of Central Tibet was dispersed throughout the valleys and slopes, separated by relatively extensive areas of formidable wasteland. Gathered in small villages adjacent to a small monastic centre, this form of habitation characterized the entire Tibetan-speaking world.

Except for a few pockets of nomadic peoples and monasteries belonging to the minor sects, all of Central Tibet came under the jurisdiction of the Lhasa administrative organization. That meant about one and a half to two million people.



- KEY**
- International Boundaries
  - - - Frontier of Tibet 1950
  - ..... Frontier of Tibet 1914
  - Roads



# TIBET

The other half of the people with whom we are concerned inhabited the peripheral areas of Tibet: semi-independent provinces comprising greater Tibet, and other territories which came under the power and jurisdiction of China, Nepal or India. The former consisted of Nga-ri and Purang in the west, Khams and Amdo in the east. There, more than in Central Tibet, the population was almost completely rural. Other than a few important trading and monastic centres, all of those regions were inhabited by agriculturists; sedentary and nomadic, who, like their counterparts in the central zone, were scattered in small hamlets throughout the countryside. The same distribution is found in the foreign areas occupied by Tibetan-speaking peoples; in the districts of Siking and Kansu, Ladak, Lahaul-Spiti, Sikkim, Bhutan, and in the Bhotia or Sherpa region of northern Nepal, the lamaist culture predominated.

Even though more than half of the population of Tibetan people was semi-independent or completely politically free of Lhasa authority, they managed to maintain close ties with the economic and religious centres of Tibet proper. Village organization, family structure, economy, and of course beliefs and religious rituals of all the Tibetan-speaking peoples were remarkably standard. This was facilitated by four major factors:

- a) geography and climate
- b) economic exchange
- c) monastic networks
- d) kin relationships.

a) The ecology of all the territories inhabited by Tibetan-speaking people was similar. It was characterized by rugged mountain, dry but grassy slopes, and fertile valleys irrigated by rivers and aqueducts. The low rainfall favoured intensive agriculture in the arable areas but only cereals such as barley, buckwheat, and a few root vegetables were cultivated. The mountain terrain, until the last two decades, severely limited the use of wheeled vehicles; that, together with the need for dairy products and meat to supplement the cereal diet favoured the extensive use of animals in the economy. Therefore livestock breeding and trade comprised an important industry. In addition, the cold and windy climate demanded fat, skins, and rugged pack animals.

b) Because of their similar ecological and religious conditions, the Tibetan-speaking peoples shared techniques of economic production and consumption. Still, diverse areas produced different crops, manufactured goods, and livestock. Those localities on distant trade routes controlled the supply of a few foreign goods. The demands of different classes and absence of speedy means of communication favoured

the operation of an extensive, wholesale type of economy. The trading industry in Tibet involved the participation of a large proportion of the population with almost every class: lay and monk, man and child engaged in part-time entrepreneurial activities. The extensive trading was carried on both between major social centres and among the local village communities.

c) Monasteries and other religious centres were for the most part local concerns; they had independent means of economic support and recruited their members locally. But monasteries were neither independent of a church organization nor of other monasteries. Intermonastic links of a personal and political nature were operative. Areas as far away from the major monastic centres (in the gTsang valley) as Mongolia and Ladak maintained strong religious ties with Lhasa and the Gelugs-pa centres there. Monks moved freely throughout the countryside visiting and training at a number of monasteries. Even after a district had effected a political breach with Tibet proper, its monks, following the traditions of their forefathers and religious masters, continued to link their own communities with the Tibetan centres.

d) There were a number of means by which both commoners and the endogamous noble class established and maintained kinship ties between their respective localities and those of other Tibetans. Polyandry, polygamy and divorce - all of which

were common practices among Tibetan-speaking peoples - favoured the exchange of both men and women between widely separated communities. A man's second, third, etc. marriage was often contracted with a family from another locality. More than the commoners, the members of various Tibetan aristocracies, practised multiple marriages. Each of the districts of Shigatse, Sa-sKya (it had twenty-four noble families), Sikkim and Bhutan, and even smaller principalities such as those of Lo Mustang<sup>(1)</sup> and De-ge<sup>(2)</sup> had maintained their own royal families around which aristocratic courts, however small, grew. All Tibetan aristocrats practised class endogamy. Since the aristocracies of many of these districts were very small, and for political reasons, there were frequent marriages contracted between families of distant courts. The prestige of obtaining an affine from the more prominent families of Shigatse and Lhasa further favoured such exchange between them.

At the same time that these conditions and practices perpetuated the standardization of beliefs and social organization through the Tibetan-speaking communities of the Himalayas, they acted to minimize foreign cultural influence.

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(1) See Peissel, (1967).

(2) See Kolmas (1968).

a/ The Himalayn range, the relatively hostile climate and vast expanses of wasteland provided an effective natural barrier. Trading that took place between Tibet and China, and Tibet and India passed through only three or four main centres on the frontiers of those countries, and were, for the greater part, dealt with by Tibetans themselves. There were important socio-political reforms introduced by the various Chinese dynasties which were able to exercise power over Tibet. However, they were effected by indirect rule, and, except for the border areas, the Tibetans were left to institute those reforms themselves. By the 19th century, those reforms were complete and except for the border skirmishes in the east, and the short-lived British invasion and occupation, there was almost no foreign influence. Even the Tibetan-speaking areas all along the northern borders of India and Nepal which had been annexed from Tibet, were almost ignored by their central governments and left to continue their traditional relationships with other Tibet-speaking centres.



## CHAPTER II

### TIBETAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Only four aspects of the religious beliefs and practices prevalent in Tibetan society need concern us here. One is the historical and methodological differences in the five major religious schools. Another is the theory and practice of spiritual reincarnation as it was developed as a means of succession to high office. The Master-Pupil tie is the third, and the segmentation of (spiritual) spheres of power and influence is the last.

#### A. Tibetan religious traditions and schools

Religious beliefs and practices which became part of the folk ideology and daily pattern of life in Tibetan societies had their origins in several religious traditions: the pre-Buddhist shamanistic<sup>(1)</sup> tradition, known as Bön, which

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(1) For many years such eminent Tibetan scholars of religion such as Tucci (1967), Hoffman (1961), Lalou (1957) held that Bön was an essentially pre-Buddhist shamanist religion. But recently the rigorous study of the Bön-po Texts and practices by the Tibetologist Snellgrove has presented a very different view of Bön. Snellgrove claims Bön is as recent a Tibetan tradition as Buddhism with a great many Buddhist elements in it. "The Bön", he writes, "were just one class of priests among others, whose practices and beliefs are covered by the general term lha chos, which may be translated perhaps as 'sacred conventions'." However, since Bönists themselves do not accept Snellgrove's dating of their tradition, and since Bönist practices are strongly priest-oriented with the common belief in the exorcising powers of the priests, our description is still appropriate. See Snellgrove (1967) introduction.

is believed to have been prevalent in Tibet centuries before the others, the Indian Buddhist tradition containing a strong element of Hindu tantrism, and the more conservative Indian Buddhist tradition which was introduced into Tibet by way of China.

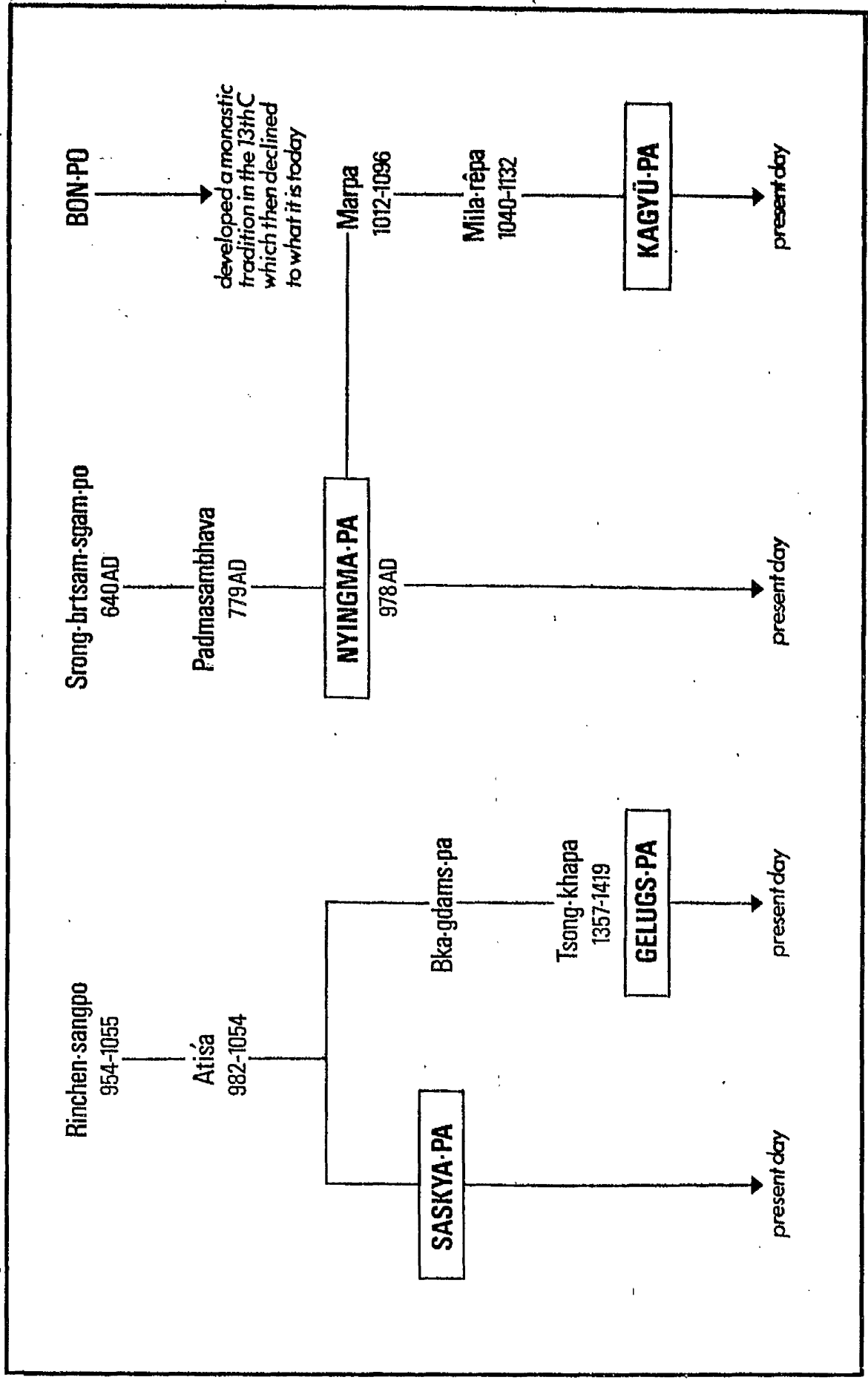
The conservative Buddhist school, known as Hinayana or Theravada stresses the observance of Vinaya<sup>(1)</sup> discipline for the sake of the individual's own entrance into a state of peace. There is an emphasis on the ideal that an individual can attain release from the world of suffering for himself alone. Opposed to this is the Mahayana Buddhist school, more strongly influenced by Hindu ideology and practices. This tradition asserts the need for the individual to attend to the spiritual welfare of all beings, placing a stronger emphasis on all creations sharing a common karma or destiny, characterized by the law of cause and effect to which every individual contributes - for good or evil. The Mahayanist approach presents a course for the would-be Buddha (bodhisattva) towards enlightenment based on the assumption that it is necessary to accumulate vast quantities of knowledge and merit throughout innumerable ages.

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(1) The Vinaya Pitaka is the first main division of Tipitaka. It is concerned with the rules of discipline governing the Sangha or body of monks (Humphries, 1956, p. 184).

# Development of Tibetan Schools

FIGURE 2



Although the two schools sprang from the same concern with salvation, the latter stressed the gradual processes by which revelation was attained and the intermediary elements - physical and metaphysical - as necessary adjuncts.

In the 8th century, the Mahayana approach advocated by the prominent Indian scholar of the time, Kamalasila,<sup>(1)</sup> was officially declared the one to be followed in Tibet. Supported by the kings and their courts, it became the predominant philosophy in Tibet.<sup>(2)</sup> The oldest Tibetan Buddhist sect, the Nying-ma-pa,<sup>(3)</sup> represents the early Mahayana tradition containing a strong element of Hindu tantrism together with the indigenous magical beliefs and practices. Although the Nying-ma-pa have enjoyed a considerable following right up to the present century, it was much stronger before the 10th century. Some of its adepts have always followed the monastic tradition, but many have always lived as married men, in a village, and carried out their religious work on an individual basis. More than other sects, the Nying-ma remained a loosely organized network of individual (often lay)

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(1) For details of the historic debate in which Kamalasila defended the Mahayanist philosophy, see Das (1893), p; 151.

(2) The Mahayana may owe much of its success to some of its features which approximated the pre-Buddhist ideology and practices of Tibetans, but as yet no research has been carried out to support such a correlation.

(3) rnyin-pa = old (Jäschke, 1881).

practitioners concerned with folk conditions and beliefs. Tracing their origins to the legendary Indian magician, Padmasambhava,<sup>(1)</sup> who is said to have used his magical powers to deal with the tormenting demons and dieties, the Nying-ma-pas continued to favour magical rites and deeper yogic practices. These methods were developed to deal with the indigenous spirits which continued to harass Tibetans, but they also expressed the Buddhist principle that the divine light hidden in man can reveal itself to the adept through appropriate yogic exercises and meditation.

The 9th century purge of the Buddhist and monastic influence together with the latter 11th century concern of Buddhist scholars in Tibet with an authentic Buddhist heritage, saw a decline in the Nying-ma school. Thus, by the 11th century, when Buddhism was re-established, it took a variety of forms. The concern of the purists with strict monastic discipline and the renunciation of evil elements on the one hand, and the tantricists on the other, was a point of further cleavage in the Buddhism of Tibet. The methodological differences were clearly reflected in the development of a number of sects, of which the Kagyü, the bKa-gdams, the Sa-sKya, and the Gelugs were the major.

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(1) Tib. Guru-Rin-po-che.

The tantrism that was an important aspect of the Nying-ma school and the latter Kagyü<sup>(1)</sup> schools set out from the assumption that the divine essence was within man and co-essential with him. Rather than renounce his desires (dod-chags), man had to utilize them. The tantric schools, therefore, defined the paths leading to spiritual and physical integration and developed techniques to achieve that integration. Tantrism offered its adepts, by virtue of its magical power, a relatively accelerated method of transcending temporal existence.

The Kagyü was, like the Nying-ma, a school following the old tantric tradition, but it developed a character of its own. Stemming from the Indian tantrist, Marpa (1012 - 1097), the Kagyü-pa developed a distinctive tantric tradition which focussed on the essentially non-physical meditative techniques established by a strong line of Marpa's disciples, the most prominent of whom was the yogin Mila-répa (1040 - 1132). Because of the preference for slightly various approaches and teachers, a variety of sub-sects and a monastic tradition evolved within the Kagyü-pa sect, but, as in the case of the Nying-ma, the distinctions were never emphasized or considered incompatible.

In the 10th century, subsequent to the travels and teachings of the Indian monk and scholar, Atisá, a greater

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(1) Tib. kagyü = thread of the word (Jaschke, 1881).  
The kagyü-pa is "the order of the transmitted word".

emphasis was laid on the monastic tradition, and the tenets of Buddhism were refreshed. In order to make tantrism compatible with monasticism, Atisa's foremost pupil, Rinchen-sangpo developed a new tantric technique. The result was the founding of the bKa-gdams-pa school; it called for the recitation of tantras together with progressive meditation. Subsequently, it gave rise to two strongly monastic sects, the Sa-sKya<sup>(1)</sup> and the Gelugs<sup>(2)</sup>. The former was neither doctrinally nor methodologically different from the bKa-sdams, but it became distinguished as a separate sect, primarily because of its leadership.

The Gelugs-pa represented something more. Not only was its founder Tsong-kha-pa (1357 - 1419) a well-disciplined monk intent on reform, he was a scholar interested in the logic and philosophy of the religion. His copious writings on the basic doctrine of Buddhism - which by then had been well established in Tibet by Atisa and Rinchen-sangpo - together with his interests and efforts in reforming the monastic communities and introducing a more rigorous discipline, laid the foundation of a new tradition.<sup>(3)</sup> The Gelugs-pa

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(1) Sa-sKya is named after the founding monastery of the sect in the locality of Sa-sKya.

(2) dGelugs = virtuous, merit; it is the order of "the Model of Virtue".

(3) For further details see Hoffman (1961), pp. 160 - 170.

school established an academic tradition stronger than anything before, based on the concern with logic and philosophy which Tsong-kha-pa had inspired. That new orientation, coinciding with the stress on moral and social discipline, transformed the monasteries into large academic centres. Public examination and debating emerged as a particular aspect of the Gelugs-pa approach, and with these developments, a system of awards, grades, and statuses were introduced, all combining to give the church a more hierarchical structure and operation.

By the end of the 16th century, four major Buddhist schools had evolved in Tibet, each of which had enjoyed periods of dominance. Although their development and diversification expressed an increasingly Buddhist and monastic element, indigenous Tibetan beliefs were never absent from any one of them. At the same time that the ideologies and practices introduced from India promoted new concepts and relationships, much of the belief and ritual aimed at reckoning with the existing pre-Buddhist beliefs and attitudes. Thus the Buddhist sects in Tibet retained many non-Buddhist elements which were never eliminated. Tucci claims<sup>(1)</sup> that the survival of the early animist beliefs governed the whole

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(1) Tucci (1967), p. 73.



outlook of the common people. "The Tibetan", he writes, "still has to reckon with all the gods of the region or 'serpents' which are everywhere, since, if they are not propitiated and are offended, will be sure to cause disaster."

Magic ritual, acts of piety, liberality toward the monastery and teacher, and liturgical technique were all accepted and developed to come to man's aid in combating the thousands of invisible forces which had inhabited the minds of Tibetans for hundreds of years. An important role of the new religions and teachers was to cope with the daily needs of their followers. They themselves, therefore, had to recognize the existence of these earlier elements and devise rituals and tantras in order to make Buddhism at all relevant and effective.

While the four so-called Buddhist schools contain many indigenous Tibetan religious elements, the fifth school, the Bön-po, is a primarily non-Buddhist one.<sup>(1)</sup> Claiming to have originated many centuries before Buddhism evolved in India, the Bön-pos do not accept the Shakyamuni Buddha as their leader. Rather, they claim Shakyamuni was merely an aspect of their real founder, sTom-pa gShen-rab. Although doctrinally, it is substantially different from the Buddhist sects

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(1) Tucci (1967), p. 34.

and although its scholars claim no correspondence with the basic tenets of Buddhism, the Bön-pos do share similar beliefs in regard to the laws of cause and effect, enlightenment, and the mediating role of the priests. Snellgrove's extensive study of the literature and life of the Bön-po adherents reveals that they, like the Buddhist members of their society, believe that the affairs of life are controlled not only by the laws of cause and effect predestined by former deeds, but also by the apparently arbitrary reactions of powerful local gods. And Snellgrove observed that the Bön-po people (of Dolpo) sought the assistance of their priests in overpowering the gods and in assisting the layman towards a higher plane of rebirth, just as other Tibetans do. "In effect", Snellgrove sums up, "they (the Bön-po priests) represent not only the supreme ideal of the Buddhist sages and philosophers, but also the popular conception of the sage-magician."<sup>(1)</sup>

Essentially the Bön-po traditions along with the Nyingma, remained intact and flourishing in the villagers among the lay-householders. There the priests carried on in the roles of hail-chasers (ser-kha-pa), exorcists (gnak-pa), astrologers (rtsis-pa), oracles (cho-jèh) and medical practitioners (em-chi, gnak-pa). But subsequently, with the

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(1) Snellgrove (1967), pp. 28 - 9.

development of the monastic tradition by the Buddhist schools, these sects too established monasteries to promote the academic approach by its members who were so inclined.

B. Spiritual reincarnation; its theory and practice as related to succession to high office

Reincarnation, though not unique to Tibetan Buddhism, became, throughout Tibetan society, a characteristic feature of ecclesiastical and political organization. Adopted as a means of succession to high office, it had important social consequences, the details of which are discussed throughout this paper. Therefore it demands some preliminary explanation.

The theoretical basis of rebirth or reincarnation is Buddhist, but, like many of the beliefs and attitudes of this religion, it had its origin in Hinduism. The Hindu, by fulfilment of religious obligations, expects an improvement in his personal chances of rebirth by the ascent of his soul into a higher caste. The Buddhist believes that his soul, upon the departure of his physical body, may enter into the paradise of the Buddha through the attainment of supreme enlightenment. Further, from this basic relationship, the Mahayanists propound that no man should seek absolute enlightenment (nirvana), there being too many needy suffering people in the mundane world. Therefore, the Mahayana doctrine professes, man should strive to become a bodhisattva and remain among the living with the aim of being an example, a teacher, and a saviour. Holy men - such as the direct

disciples of the Shakyamuni Buddha - remain in the world in various forms or manifestations to carry out their mission of salvation. The task of watching over the spiritual destinies of the world's inhabitants is accrued to them, but since it is too great to be fulfilled in any one lifetime, the spirit of the bodhisattva, upon the death of one of its agent bodies, enters another - usually that of an infant boy - and so on. The name sprul-sku<sup>(1)</sup> is ascribed to these persons, popularly referred to by western authors as 'reincarnate lamas'. As a result of this ideology and of the need for priests in the Tibetan communities, a system was perpetuated of multiple and vicarious, constantly renewed living manifestations of saviourhood in the persons and functions of these reincarnate priests. Not only full bodhisattvas, but also their humble disciples and other leaders who had contributed to the spiritual salvation of mankind (founders of monasteries were among their ranks) were so embodied.

While on the one hand, the sprul-sku was obliged to serve mankind, on the other, the followers, in pursuit of merit and rebirth into a higher sphere, sought the assistance of the sprul-skus. It is not difficult to see how such a concept and system perpetuated the dependence of the laity on

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(1) Tib. sprul = emanation; sku = body (Jaschke, 1881).

the priests, both those who were intent on becoming bodhisattvas, and others who had been delegated such status by the benevolent gods. One of the logical results of such a relationship was the high status and authority which was accrued to sprul-skus, even when they were still infants. The members of this exceptional class enjoyed not only their immediate followers whom they had accumulated in their tenure, but also those of their predecessors. In addition, the reincarnation and the priesthood as a whole acquired the essential and irreplaceable function of assuring, through the process of reincarnation, a stable and orderly succession, which, by reason of the rules of celibacy, could not be hereditary.

As a fundamental Buddhist concept, of course rebirth applied to every individual and was a common recurrence among one's family and friends where it was usually recognized without much concern.<sup>(1)</sup> But there were different stages and statuses of reincarnation. So when applied to religious leaders and others of high status, it had more

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(1) Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 160, cites the case of a Sherpa boy who was recognized by his fellow villagers as the reincarnation of a local notable, recently deceased and points out that such recognition did not entitle the lad to a special inheritance or status. Similarly, Tibetan informants report that some, though not all, of their fellow monks and villagers were seen as reincarnations of friends or family members. Often distinctive anatomical peculiarities such as fused fingers or hair-lips were considered signs of reincarnation.

significance. Developed and adopted as the primary means of succession to high office, it gave its incumbents political and economic power along with the spiritual. Then it became a matter of political concern, and in the following discussion, the use of the office of sprul-sku as a focal point around which political relationships were expressed - both at the national and the local monastic level - will be elucidated.<sup>(1)</sup> Suffice to point out that the three administrative centres in Tibet: Lhasa, Shigatse and Sa-sKya each were organized around a pre-eminent sprul-sku.

#### C. The master-pupil relationship

One of the outstanding features of tantric Buddhism, the master-pupil tie, it may be said, reached fruition through the development of Tibetan religious schools. Expressed particularly through the theory and practice of reincarnating-priests, the special relationship between the master and pupil became a prominent characteristic of Tibetan social life. In all Tibetan schools, monastic and otherwise, those following the old tantric methods, and in the later schools of logic and philosophy, the teacher was an indispensable element.

It was believed that the texts were useless unless accompanied by a proper consecration which only a master, who himself had been initiated by another, could bestow. To the

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(1) See Appendix A for the features of reincarnation as applied to succession to high office in Tibet.

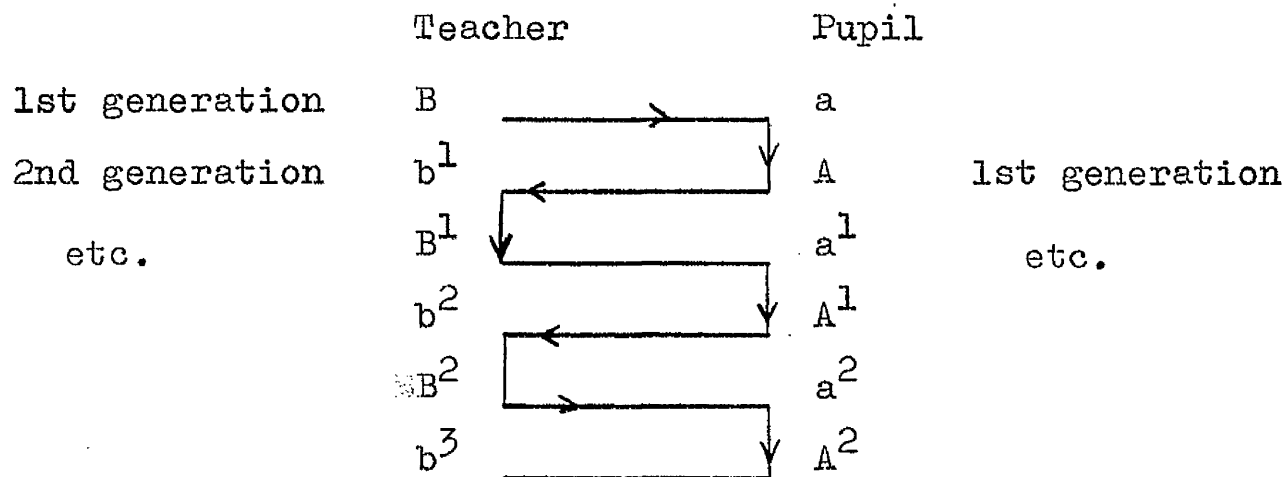
religious pupils, he was the imparter of knowledge and power for it was only through direct initiation that a novice could gain access to the esoteric doctrine and rituals. These beliefs were to a large extent the ideological basis of the highly esoteric initiation ceremonies practised by Tibetan priests. The elaborate rituals of tantrism and their host of supportive elements including yogic partners strengthened this ideology. The oral tradition, together with the 'literary monopoly' of the priesthood further perpetuated the reliance of their followers - both novices and laymen.<sup>(1)</sup>

When the practice of reincarnating masters was combined with the master-pupil relationship, the result was the creation of a perpetual bond between alternating generations of teachers and devotees. The dependence and devotion of pupil a, for example, with master B who was usually the elder, was transferred to  $b^1$  when B died and was reincarnated. Although  $b^1$  would have been but an infant and A an adult, they would have still maintained the master-pupil relationship. Upon A's death, the ties between them would be continued by  $B^1$  and A's reincarnation,  $a^1$ . Then, when  $B^1$  is reincarnated in  $b^2$ , the master-pupil tie would be perpetuated by  $b^2$  and  $A^1$ , and so on. These relationships are clearer

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(1) Weber (1963), Chapter V.

when represented graphically with the younger generation represented by a small letter thus:



It is not to be thought that such relationships were purely local producing clusters of disciples, one around each master. As Pallis points out in his brief account<sup>(1)</sup> of this relationship, "the Master Pupil relationship, in a regular tradition, is something far transcending the actual personalities concerned. The chain is more important than the single link". These vertical generation links were supplemented with lateral inter-monastic links. As a result of the astonishing degree of physical mobility in Tibet, masters wandering about the country in the yogic<sup>(2)</sup> tradition, were invited by lay leaders to their courts to tutor

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(1) Pallis (1939), p. 274.

(2) Miller (1959), pp. 139 - 140, makes much of the teacher-disciple ties operating to link monasteries in Inner Mongolia. He claims those ties, in the absence of direct interference from the Tibetan religio-political hierarchy, were essential in effecting inter-monastic ties throughout Mongolia and between Mongolia and Tibet.



and lecture. Many made pilgrimages on their own initiative and sometimes toured on behalf of their monastery collecting offerings from lay devotees. The general effect was of a kind of corporateness between bodies of novices and lay devotees in different localities all of whom had shared a common teacher. These bonds between disciples and ordinary followers reached out to tie monasteries to one another. Either in pursuit of their master (or his reincarnation) or of fellowship with others who had been initiated by him, pupils moved from one monastery to another.

#### D. The segmentation of spiritual spheres of power

The fourth feature of the lamaist belief system which is important for our understanding of Tibetan social organization, is the particular distribution of power which people ascribed to the supernatural elements.

One of the most basic aspects of Tibetan Buddhism is the division of the world, of spiritual powers and of techniques into categories and autonomous realms. In charge of those realms were spirits with particular powers. The world, for example, was divided into three basic spheres: the heavens, the middle space, and the nether regions. These are described as "thickly populated regions inhabited by spirit beings who have different spheres of influence and power".<sup>(1)</sup> For

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(1) Ekvall (1964), p. 78.

example, the gods of the middle range are called AH-Mes (Mountain gods). Each dominates a region, and has special characteristics and functions in regard to it. Tibetan gods are not only assigned particular localities; they are also given responsibility for a particular attribute or quality. The quality of "purity leading to transcendental wisdom" is assigned to the white goddess Tara (Tib. Drölma). She is responsible for the expression of purity and protection ("with her left hand she bestows charity and with her right she controverts the arguments against Buddhism"<sup>(1)</sup>) and when a devotee requires the attributes for which Tara is responsible, he appeals to her. Other well-known deities which command special realms are Chen-ré-zik, Manjusri, and Ö-pa-me, who are the gods of compassion, wisdom and long life respectively.

Some gods are invoked only at special ceremonies because of their role in relation to the deity with which the ceremony is concerned. For example, Dorje-Sempa is a go-between for the main deity of the mandala and the human invoker in certain of the Nying-ma tantric rituals. The chief deity of the Nying-ma and Kagyü devotees is Guru Rin-po-che. Although Guru Rin-po-che's assistance on any occasion and for any reason may be invoked, usually a particular manifestation

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(1) MacQuitty (1969), p. 79.

(the one responsible for the particular attribute or power needed by the devotee) is appealed to on any one occasion. Thus Guru Rin-po-che has hundreds of forms.

Although the power of some gods applied universally to all followers of Tibetan Buddhism, each sect and sub-sect had their own deities possessing particular powers and roles in relation to the devotees of their school. tJan-sing-lham-lha is, to the Bön-pos the god of the road. Before embarking on a journey, all devotees of this sect make offerings and invoke tJan-sing lham-lha. These practices and beliefs are a kind of distribution of labour and decentralization of authority.

CHAPTER III  
THE LHASA ORGANIZATION

Lhasa, in the 16th century, became the economic, political, and religious centre of Tibet. By the early 19th century its structure was relatively stable, that is, its constituent elements and sphere of influence were established by law, and it functioned as the centre of power throughout the Tibetan-speaking world. Besides being the administrative centre through which the country was ruled, Lhasa was itself a political community. This fact not only affected its role in various parts of the domain, it also gave the capital a particular character and the government a particular mode of operation.

The Central Government was an organization consisting of two administrative spheres. It was not a configuration of two parallel administrative systems comprised of monks on the one hand and laymen on the other, as some historians would have us believe.<sup>(1)</sup> Rather those two administrative systems were separate departments of the Dalai Lama's office representing his two spheres of power. On the one hand was the Religious Secretariat representing the religious sphere:

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(1) Bell (1931, 1946), Shen and Liu (1953) and Richardson (1962).

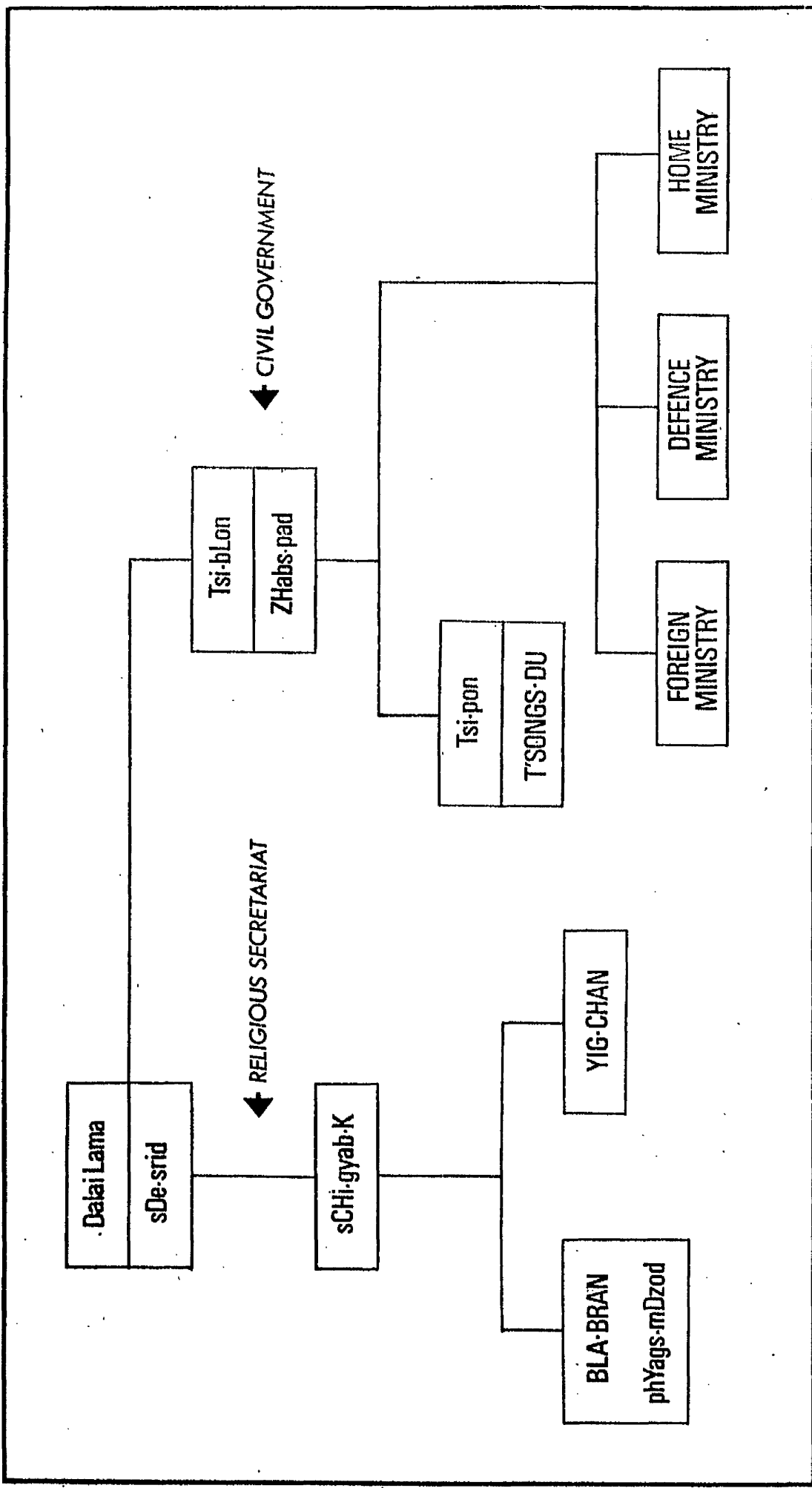
it dealt with ecclesiastic matters. On the other hand was the Civil Government representing the temporal sphere: it dealt with civil matters. The Dalai Lama or Regent was head of each and was the only office formally linking the two departments, each of which had its own executive and hierarchy, its own treasury and its own sphere of authority (see diagram on page 58).

### The Religious Secretariat

This was the ecclesiastical administrative department of the Dalai Lama, sometimes called the tse-skor or tse-drun. All of its 165 members were monks of the Gelugs-pa sect of Tibetan Buddhism. They were recruited from its major monasteries: Drepung, Ganden, and Sera, all of which were located around Lhasa. The Secretariat had authority in all religious matters but was subject to the control of the Dalai Lama or Regent. Its authority was recognized even by the members of the minor non-Gelugs-pa sects not only within the political boundaries of Tibet, but throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world. The Secretariat was concerned with religious policy: the standardization of religious doctrine and practices, discipline and general monastic management, and the selection of religious leaders. Another primary concern was the education and care of the Dalai Lama as leader of the predominant sect and as spiritual leader of the whole country.

# The Lhasa Government

FIGURE 3



Three main units comprised the Secretariat:

- a) the executive,
- b) the administrative body,
- c) the Palace or bLa-bran.

a) The executive consisted of the office of the president of the Secretariat called the sCHi-gyab mKhan-po. He was appointed by the Dalai Lama or Regent for an indefinite term (usually life) from among the high ranking officers of the Gelugs-pa Church. As head of the Dalai Lama's personal household and with the power of appointment over its staff, he is reported to have had considerable personal influence over the Dalai Lama himself (the sCHi-gyab mKhan-po of the 13th Dalai Lama was also the leader's personal physician). Another important member of the executive was the phYags-mDzod (private secretary of the Dalai Lama) who was appointed by the latter, again for an indefinite term. He too was supposed to be a monk official from the Gelugs-pa Church.

b) The administrative body, called the yig-chan had both judicial and legislative powers. On the one hand it carried out the religious policies as directed by the ruler and on the other received appeals and cases on which to pass judgement or refer to the ruler. This body exercised considerable influence in the appointment of monk officials,

both within its own ranks and in those of the Civil Government department, and in monasteries throughout the Dalai Lama's sphere of religious power.<sup>(1)</sup> Its authority to sanction reincarnations gave it additional power in the non-Gelugs-pa Tibetan Buddhist hierarchies.

c) The Dalai Lama's Palace or bLa-bran was a vast and wealthy estate which was inherited by the incumbent for the period of his tenure (life) and was then passed on to his successor. The estate required a large staff of administrators, a personal domestic staff for the Dalai Lama's household. Appointment of those officers was effected by the sCHi-gyab mKhan-po. In addition to its own lands and subjects, it has its own treasury.

#### The Civil Government

This department, the drun-sKor, was comprised of 165 members, both lay and monk, recruited exclusively from the two main social elements of the Lhasa community, the nobility and the Gelugs-pa church. All its members were followers of the Gelugs-pa sect. Although this department, together with the Religious Secretariat had certain rights over all the inhabitants of political Tibet and dealt with other governments (regional and foreign) as the ruling body of Tibet, it

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(1) It was this body, for example, which appointed the tutors of the Mongolian Patriarchs.



did not exercise extensive rights over all the land and subjects. The Government could claim primary allegiance from only a portion of the Tibetan population. According to the division of land and subjects among three land-owning establishments, the nobility, the church, and the central government, the latter had extensive rights only over those subjects who occupied specifically government land. To administer its own estates, the government had a special department.

The other functions of the Civil Government were defence of all the territory and subjects acknowledged to be under the rule of Lhasa, and the expression of international policy. It maintained a small standing army comprised of men recruited from the subjects of the Lhasa nobility, the subjects of principalities such as Sa-sKya, under the command of both monk and lay officers from the Lhasa nobility and Gelugs-pa church. An executive with ministries for the special functions listed above and a national assembly comprised this department.

a) The executive and ministries constituted the most active and powerful aspect of the Civil Government. Heading the executive, but only nominally, was the Prime Minister (Tsi-bLon) who was a layman appointed for an indefinite term of office by the Dalai Lama or Regent. The chief ministers (ZHabs-pad) of which there were four, were recruited and appointed likewise; one of their members was a monk and

nominally the head of this executive body. Some of my informants claim that the ZHabs-pads had more power than the Tsi-bLon. They were the body on which the Dalai Lama relied to carry out his temporal policies and to inform him of conditions among the laity and of civil matters. While the ZHabs-pads had magisterial authority to deal with civil and criminal cases brought to them, more serious ones had to be referred to the ruler. As individual ministers and as a body they exercised considerable influence with their power to appoint and dismiss lower officials. However, for the most part, the power of this executive, like that of the Religious Secretariat, lay in its direct access to the ruler. Any major matters which concerned the civil population and required the attention of the ruler were presented by way of the ministers. As the primary advisory body on any civil matters which were attended by the ruler, the latter relied on this executive to a considerable extent.

b) The National Assembly of the Tibetan government was the T'songs-du which consisted of lay and monk members from all sectors of the Lhasa community. Theoretically, it had legislative powers, but was extremely limited as a governmental body, as it had no regular period of assembly and relied on the ruler to call it together and then to make its decisions binding.

The Lhasa political community, of which the central

government organization was only a part, consisted of three social elements which combined to form the central government organization and interacted in such a way as to give central Tibetan politics its special character. Those elements were:

- A. The Gelugs-pa religious sect and church
- B. The Tibetan nobility
- C. The foreign (Chinese) power

A. The ecclesiastical element: the Gelugs-pa church

The administrative centre of the Gelugs-pa sect rested in the three oldest and largest monasteries of the order - Drepung, Ganden and Sera - which were located around Lhasa. Each monastery had its own lands and subjects and managed its own internal affairs quite independent of each other and of the civil government. None of these vast religious and business institutions had a single leader, but rather a number of priests heading their various internal departments. Together the top priest officials of the three monasteries constituted a non-corporate Gelugs-pa church executive. From this body of administrators, were selected the tutors of the Dalai Lama, the sCHi-gyab mKhan-po, the Regents, the dignitaries who searched for the new Dalai Lamas and elected the Regents, the Nai-Ch'ung oracle media. Although these three monasteries had certain rights in regard to the highest

administrative offices of the country and claimed many privileged and financial assistance from the government itself<sup>(1)</sup> they enjoyed considerable autonomy from even the ecclesiastical secretariat. Each monastery and even certain social segments within that were, like the nobility and the civil government, private land-owning establishments. From their estates they collected substantial revenue with which to manage themselves and maintain economic independence from the ecclesiastic and civil government. Their landlord status gave monasteries jurisdiction over laymen who were their subjects. These monasteries exercised authority not only over lay estates but also over smaller monasteries. Many Gelugs-pa monasteries throughout Tibet, were merely subsidiaries of these three powerful ones and the head monasteries claimed economic and political rights over them. In addition to collecting revenue for their own use, the central authorities appointed the abbots and other high officers of those small monasteries.

While sharing a similar structure, religious doctrine, wealth and status vis-à-vis the central government and the

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(1) Monks were tax exempt, the monasteries received grants of land, food and cash for renovation of its temples, and during the twenty-one day sMön-lam festival, the monks had full jurisdiction over the city of Lhasa. For further details see Shen and Liu (1953).

wider Tibetan political and religious community, Drepung, Ganden and Se-ra were three separate social units representing different political interests competing for power in the wider polity and in the central government. They all contributed to the highest governmental offices but in a highly competitive way rather than through a constitutional distribution of representatives and delegates. Generally each of the three monasteries presented its own candidates in competition for the high government posts and competed with each other in support of their respective candidates. These centres looked outside their own community for support and thus became allied with certain factions of the nobility and with the Chinese. All these activities weakened the strength of the church as a whole.

The church as a recruiting and training centre for government offices

However autonomous and privileged the Lhasa monasteries were, their real relationship to the central government was of another order. One Tibetan informant's reference to the Gelugs-pa church as a political party appropriately describes its political status in relation to the government. For the Gelugs-pa church was the major recruiting ground for government officials. Its monks filled all of the Religious Secretariat posts and many of those in the civil department.

At the same time that they held government posts, the monk officials, at least nominally, had to fill a high office

in one of the Lhasa monasteries. One qualification for many government posts, including that of Regent, was the acquisition of a high academic degree and that necessitated several years training in one of those monasteries. Not only leaders but ordinary clerical staff of the government were supplied by the monasteries where reading and writing skills in addition to administrative training were obtained. Under such conditions it was likely that the Gelugs-pa church exercised an influence in every government decision, both in the religious and the civil affairs. Even the primarily lay council of ministers and the prime minister, were in the habit of consulting the Nai-Ch'ung oracle (it was recognized that this agent had close ties with Drepung and represented the political views of that monastery) on important government matters. Frequently, throughout Tibetan history, the Nai-Ch'ung oracle was used to expose and denounce lay officials of treason to the church, who would then be removed from government service.

The chief spokesman for the Gelugs-pa church and the officer through whom they undoubtedly exerted most influence, was the Dalai Lama. The Gelugs-pa hierarchs played a prominent role in the selection of the infant hierarch and in his childhood training before he assumed temporal power. From the moment of his installation, the Dalai Lama came under

the care of Gelugs-pa monks and throughout his life remained dependent on them for information and advice. The Dalai Lama himself was a member of the head monasteries and spent considerable time in the hands of religious tutors supplied by them. The Regent who held temporal power and considerable spiritual power during the minority of the Dalai Lama<sup>(1)</sup> not only came from the ranks of the Gelugs-pa church leaders, but was elected by them. Regents' rule was an opportunity for the head monasteries to exercise even greater influence in the government and throughout the country. The Regents were men who had spent many years in a Lhasa monastery.<sup>(2)</sup> It has even been suggested that the premature death of many of the Dalai Lamas was precipitated by ambitious Regents or potential Regents whose power would have been curtailed by a mature and independent Dalai Lama.<sup>(3)</sup>

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- (1) In the case that a Dalai Lama was retiring or simply uninterested in politics, a regent was appointed to rule in his place. The 8th Dalai Lama was one whose retiring nature and spiritual preoccupations necessitated the appointment of a regent.
- (2) Bell points out that the three major monasteries, although they did not usually contribute directly to the office of regent, exercised great influence over those offices. Since the heads of the "regal" monasteries from whom the regents were selected, were always reincarnations, they had to attend at least one of the great academic monastic institutions for at least part of their boyhood. (Bell, 1931, p. 184).
- (3) Markham (1876), xcv.

The Gelugs-pa church as a public and military force

In case all other means failed, the Gelugs-pa church had at its disposal, an effective police force to protect and promote its interests. Many of the inmates of the three large Lhasa monasteries were not religious scholars, but were trained in the physical and military sciences. They acted as bodyguards of important priest officials, of monastic trade caravans, and as prefects to maintain discipline in the huge monastic communities. But they also provided a police force for the monasteries' relations with the wider social community.<sup>(1)</sup> There were a number of important occasions in the last two hundred years on which the "fighting monks of Se-ra" were (accrued) to have effected important changes in government policy and personnel.<sup>(2)</sup> Early in this century, during the reign of the 13th Dalai Lama, the monks of Drepung became belligerent and marched on the Norbu-lingka (summer palace of the Dalai Lama) to lay an ultimatum to the ruler and the government. In that particular case, the limited lay army of the government was able

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(1) Not only in the Lhasa political arena, but also in the local communities, the monasteries had to depend on their monk armies. In the east of Tibet many hostilities in which monk forces participated are reported by Campbell (1875), Teichman (1922, p. 7), Kawaguchi (1909, p. 291) and Edgar (1935, p. 16).

(2) Tucci (1967, pp. 52, 207), Bell (1931, pp. 169, 183) and Macdonald (1932, pp. 156 - 7).



X to (squelch) the rebellion. The reference to that incident by some of my Tibetan lay informants as a 'civil war' indicates the militaristic image of the church. And, during the last political upheaval in Tibet, after all peaceful attempts had failed to prevent full take over by the Chinese communists, it was the Lhasa monks who led the futile and abortive rebellion against the new regime.

Public protest was another means by which the body of monks expressed the political views of the church. Both personal informants and historical documents attest the effectiveness of that political mechanism. One informant is the grandson of a Tibetan lay official whose political career was ended by protesting monks. He recounted that early in this century, during the annual aMön-Lam festival in Lhasa, <sup>(1)</sup> a group of aggressive monks trespassed on the property of the nobleman and removed some of his trees. When the irate property owner, who was especially proud of his garden, fired gunshots warning the trespassers off, the monks protested and later demanded that the government take action against the official. The result was his demotion to a much lower rank, and, in humiliation, the man retired. Another case of the power of monastic opinion in effecting

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(1) See above, p. 64.

government policy is furnished by Cassinelli and Ekvall in the principality of Sa-sKya. It is reported that in 1930, to emphasise their support for certain religious practices which the government had failed to introduce, about thirty monks from the two head monasteries of the principality's capital refused to take part in prayer and other services and left their monasteries. The reporters speculate that such action must have been a source of embarrassment to the government, and that the subsequent institution of the practices in question must have been partly in response to the walkout.<sup>(1)</sup> Their conclusion that the body of ordinary monks, exercising political pressure by those means indicated that they had more political power than the officials of their monasteries is perhaps naive due to their assumption that the officials could not themselves have instigated the public protest. However the case does illustrate that protest by monks was an effective political tool.

The kinship factor in Gelugs-pa church-government relations

Two erroneous beliefs about the class nature of the Gelugs-pa church have so far prevented a thorough understanding of its relation to the lay society in general and the central government in particular. One misconception is

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 318.

that the church represented the commoner class of Tibetan society; posed against the aristocracy, it was seen to be competing with the privileged class for power. The other is that religious pursuits and monastic life excluded family influence from church politics. However, the information we have, suggests the very opposite: that is, that the Gelugs-pa church was strongly affiliated with the Lhasa nobility.

The ideal of celibacy, the monastic life, and the mechanism of succession by reincarnation which were promoted particularly by the Gelugs-pa doctrine did not eliminate family influence from church affairs. Many of the highest priests in the Gelugs-pa hierarchy were found among the prominent noble families of Tibet. Likewise, many ordinary monastic officials of the church who eventually found themselves in the religious or civil departments of the government, were of noble birth. This condition was facilitated by the privileges granted by the church to sons of the nobility. And, since it was customary for every noble family to contribute some of its sons to the church to train as monk officials, at any given time noble lay officers had brothers and uncles in the church hierarchy. Such ties inevitably facilitated collaboration in political matters between the two social elements. One informant, a former lay official, claims that it was the policy of government

members to maintain kinship ties with the church for political reasons. He attributes the failure of his father (in the case cited on page 69) to maintain his position to the lack of the latter's kinship ties with ecclesiastic dignitaries. He pointed out that two of his fellow ZHabs-pads had brothers holding high posts in the Religious Secretariat.

Blood relations were not the only kin ties between the church and the nobility. Marriage and adoption between members of the two institutions were not uncommon, and monks upon attaining high rank could, without loss of status or prestige, leave the church to take up a lay post. A case in point is that of the commoner Tsensar. It is reported<sup>(1)</sup> that after becoming the servant of the 13th Dalai Lama and distinguishing himself in that capacity, he was adopted into the house of the noble Tsa-rong. He married the widow of Tsa-rong upon the latter's death and, since the family was left without male heirs, Tsensar became the new bearer of the Tsa-rong line and assumed government office. A similar case is reported from the Sa-sKya political history.<sup>(2)</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall cite the case of a levy monk from a poor family, who, as the interpreter of a famous oracle, acquired status and wealth. When he returned to the capital

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(1) Carrasco (1959), p. 109.

(2) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 309 - 310.

he was adopted by a noble family who themselves had no male heirs. Upon marrying the nobleman's two daughters, he became the family heir.

The movement of men in and out of monastic communities and into lay communities, from church ranks to government ranks was encouraged by the social values of the Tibetans. Monks, and especially those of high rank, were seen to have a role both in the monastic and lay communities. Monastic life and religious study were respected not only as an end in themselves, but as the means to an end. Religious skills and status were expected to be used to attain both social and spiritual mobility and power. According to Tibetan social beliefs, a monk was not expected to confine himself to monastic life: he had an obligation to serve his community, either in an official capacity or in a private one (as a household teacher and advisor). Privately, many monks from the academic ranks of the Lhasa monasteries served wealthy noble families and are said to have exercised considerable influence on the decisions of the family heads. The well-known case of the scholar Das' relation with the Kya-bgon Lama illustrates the strength of those relations. Late in the last century, Das, an Indian travelling in disguise in the country so unwelcoming to foreigners, became the pupil of a famous and able priest, Kya-bgon Senchen Rimpoche and a friend of the noble Pha-la family to which the priest was

attached. Apparently when the Tibetan government learned that the priest and the family had befriended and harboured an alien against the rule of the country, they condemned them. Although Das escaped to India, the nobleman, his wife and the Kya-bgon Rimpoche were all condemned and put to death for alleged anti-government activities.<sup>(1)</sup>

The role of priests as political advisors was also found at the district level of government. The Chala chief of East Tibet was accompanied by the reincarnate abbot of a Nying-ma-pa monastery, who acted as the chief's "religious advisor and associate peace envoy".<sup>(2)</sup> These relations were another expression of the personal ties between the church and the government.

#### B. The aristocratic element: the Lhasa nobility

Another social element which was in many respects autonomous of the central government, and yet a constituent of it, was the nobility. It consisted of approximately 150 families who traced their ancestry to the kings of Tibet including the fourteen Dalai Lamas.<sup>(3)</sup> Like the church, each noble

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(1) Macdonald (1932), p. 137.

(2) Teichman (1922), p. 160.

(3) Peter, Prince (1954).

family possessed estates over which it exercised complete jurisdiction and from which it drew its individual income. Although the nobility had some obligations to the central government, such as the supply of labour to government officials passing through its territory and a contribution of men to the national army, it did enjoy special privileges. As a rule, the nobility was an endogamous group. There was some intermarriage between the noble families of Lhasa and those of Shigatse and Sikkim, but except for few cases of commoners being admitted into the noble ranks by way of the church<sup>(1)</sup> there were no marriages between them and the nobility.

The nobility as a recruiting centre for lay and monk government officials

Like the Gelugs-pa church, the Lhasa nobility was not, as a class, a distinct department of the government. Rather it was a constituent social element of the administrative system with formal and informal ties to the government.

All of the lay officers in the central government were conscripted from the noble families of Lhasa; each family enjoyed the privilege of contributing at least one male member to the civil service. In practice, many families

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(1) The two examples of adoption from the church into the nobility cited on page 72 illustrate the use of the church in effecting social mobility between the commoner and aristocratic class.

had several of their members holding office at a given time. As there were no rules of inheritance limiting succession of office from father to son, or specifying retirement of older family officers, it was customary for a father and a number of his sons to be actively engaged in government service simultaneously. One informant reports that while his father was a ZHabs-pad, one paternal uncle was an army commander and another was a senior member of the ecclesiastic secretariat. The highest government posts were not restricted to members of a senior section of the nobility, but because some of the noble families were wealthier and more involved in Lhasa political life, only a portion of the 150 registered noble families were actively engaged in competition for the high offices. Family status was not of outstanding significance in attaining high office.<sup>(1)</sup> Informants claim that economic power, support from the Gelugs-pa dignitaries, and alliances with other noble families, were - more than heredity - factors in the acquisition of power.

Even though the nobility was an independent land-owning establishment and a recruiting centre for government officials like the Gelugs-pa church, it did not constitute another political party of class in opposition to the church.

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(1) Cf. Shen and Liu (1953), p. 111 and Peter, Prince (1954), both of whom claim that there was a hierarchy within the nobility and that the superior members of that class supplied the incumbents of the highest government ranks.



Rather the two elements were interdependent and linked in a number of ways, some of which were referred to above. Basically, they were committed to the same religious doctrine: it was essential that all of the nobility were members of the Gelugs-pa sect and sponsors or patrons of one or another of the three head monasteries.<sup>(1)</sup> The alliances of some families with Drepung, others with Se-ra, and others with Ganden, however, led to a factionalism of the nobility which paralleled the cleavages between the three monasteries themselves, lessening the strength of the nobility just as rivalry had weakened the authority of the church.

The sons of the Lhasa noble families were recruited into the ranks of the Gelugs-pa church where they enjoyed privileges and filled the highest posts. It was through their nominal enrolment in the central Gelugs-pa monasteries, that the monks from the nobility became officials in the Religious Secretariat. The frequency with which a superior category of church official, the reincarnate priest, was recruited from the nobility, indicated a special relationship between the church and nobility. Theoretically, spiritual reincarnation was an open method of succession to high monastic office.

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(1) A member of another sect of Tibetan Buddhism, regardless of noble status was not permitted entry into the Lhasa aristocracy.

Some high offices were filled by reincarnates from humble families, but generally they were monopolised by members of the noble families. Through economic power and kinship ties with the church (the institution with the power to identify and sanction reincarnate priests) the noble families gained some control over this theoretically spiritual means of succession to high office. A family supplying a reincarnate priest had much to gain: high social status and prestige, inheritance of an estate as well as a share in the reincarnate's estate, and access to the highest political offices.<sup>(1)</sup> Since kinship with a reincarnation of high status was such a source of pride to their families, we have well documented cases of the noble ancestry of some of these hierarchs.

- Case 1. The 8th Pan-chen Rin-po-che, incarnate lama of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery and ruler of the district of Shigatse was the grandson of the sister of the 19th century Rajah of Sikkim, Sikyong. (Das, 1902, p. 273.).
- Case 2. The 10th and 12th Dalai Lamas were supplied by the noble family of Lha-lu. (Tucci, 1956, p. 202).
- Case 3. Tsering Rin-po-che, the half brother of the Rajah of Sikkim, whose son married into the Lhasa nobility (the daughter of the chief minister of Tibet). (Macdonald, 1932, p. 133).

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Reincarnation of a former official was a qualification for succession to some important political offices such as those of tutors to Abbots, regents, and the sCHi-gyab mKhan-po.

- Case 4. Nawang Jigme Geshe Rin-po-che, the purported 4th ranking lama of the Gelugs-pa church, was born in Sikkim of aristocratic Tibetan parents. (A western newspaper covering a recent visit of this man to the West, 1969).
- Case 5. All of the 20th century ZHabs-pads, chief administrators of the Sa-sKya principality, were of noble birth. (Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969, p. 205).

Further testimony is supplied from cases in India. Among the Tibetan refugees, approximately half of the Tibetan administrators of the refugee welfare and educational projects and in the exile government of the Dalai Lama are said to be reincarnations. Most of those men claimed noble parentage. Many other incarnate lamas of my acquaintance claimed to be sons of local clan chieftains.

Given the strength of the ecclesiastic element in the central government and the reliance of the nobility on their ties with it, the means by which the Lhasa nobility sustained itself as a separate social entity are not readily discernible. The government army was primarily an appendage of the noble class, but was small and too poorly equipped to compete with the monastic armies to protect the interests of the nobility.<sup>(1)</sup> Any attempts there were to enlarge it

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(1) Tucci (1967), p. 206, claims the Lhasa army was only a reserve force but Kawaguchi (1909), p. 549, reported that it numbered five thousand soldiers. Either way, it was not able to cope with or match the combined warrior monk force of Se-ra, Drepung and Ganden.

were successfully blocked by the Gelugs-pa church<sup>(1)</sup> and it remained primarily a reserve army of limited use. The strength and continuation of the nobility depended on three factors:

- a) its economic independence,
- b) its religious ancestry, and
- c) the division of the Gelugs-pa church into three major factions.

a) Through its private estates, its tax-exemption and its freedom to accept gifts from service in lieu of salary, the nobility wielded economic power free of government control.

b) Although they were a lay society, they acquired their position by virtue of their affiliation to the religious rulers of Tibet. Along with those prestigious origins they maintained their religious ties through economic patronage of monasteries/<sup>and</sup> monks and through the adoption of men of religious status into their privileged class.

c) Various noble families established alliances with one or another of Drepung, Se-ra and Ganden, which were themselves in competition and looking for outside support.

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(1) Macdonald (1932), p. 230, reported the senior abbot's determination in this policy.

### C. The foreign element in the Lhasa organization

Foreign influence in Tibet by powers other than China and Mongolia was remarkably limited. Although Nepali and Turkestan-Moslem settlements did exist in Tibet and may have affected local political relations, their influence on the Lhasa organization and central government was negligible. Indo-Tibetan relations of any significance ended in the twelfth century and had been of a religious nature only (limited to exchange between individual scholars and artists, and esoteric literature). The influence of western foreign powers such as Russia and Britain was limited to economic enterprises of a minimal capacity, and only in the twentieth century. In any event, there were no policies contracted between the governments of Tibet and those countries which in any way altered the structure of the Lhasa organization.<sup>(1)</sup>

But China for centuries was undoubtedly an influential power. Although China's legal status as suzerain of Tibet is a matter of international political and academic dispute, it is recognized that she exerted a strong and continuous influence over her western neighbour since at least the 5th century. Besides sharing an extensive frontier, the religions

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(1) The British armies did invade Tibet but they did not reach Lhasa and although there was an English diplomatic mission and school in Lhasa, their trading activities were limited to Gvantse and Chumbi Valley.

of the two countries were similar, both having roots in early Buddhism. Chinese styles of life, cultural patterns, technology, government institutions were incorporated into Tibetan society; sometimes they were imposed on the Tibetans by political force and at other times they were introduced by economic and kin relations between the two countries.

The expression of Chinese influence in Tibet was manifold: since at least the 7th century, spiritual, family, economic and military ties had shaped the Tibetan way of life. We know from the earliest Tibetan histories that the Chinese wife of King Srong-brtsen-sgam-po introduced a number of Chinese Buddhist attitudes and patterns of life into the Tibetan court.<sup>(1)</sup> Medical knowledge and techniques in medicine, agriculture, printing, art were adopted from China before the 10th century, as well as such products as tea, silk and foods. The class which was most strongly influenced by the Chinese way of life was the Tibetan nobility.<sup>(2)</sup> Its Chinese tastes and manners were not only a reflection of its greater power to import eastern goods, but also of its special social ties with the Chinese ruling class. There

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(1) Rockhill (1891), p. 191.

(2) Apparently there was a rule restricting the wearing of Chinese silk to the members of the Lhasa nobility. Among the Tibetan refugees in India there are a variety of life styles exhibited which distinguish the nobles from the peasants.

were frequent visits of the Lhasa nobility to Peking and intermarriages between members of the two aristocratic courts. It is not known whether the Lhasa noble families received grants from the Peking government, but the latter did sponsor education and travelling tours for the Lhasa aristocrats in China.

The spiritual ties between their respective leaders is said to have effected a special mutual respect and ideological bond between the two countries. The Chinese Emperor was seen as a manifestation of the god of wisdom, Manjusri, and the Dalai Lama was seen as a manifestation of the patron deity of Tibet, Chen-ré-zik. That special relationship between the two dieties, claims Ekvall,<sup>(1)</sup> was reflected in the political ties of the two nations. The spiritual relationship of the leaders is considered by the Tibetans as symbolic of the interdependence between the two countries and of the superior patron status of China. That ideological tie and the common Mahayana doctrine provided a foundation for the Chinese patronage of the Tibetan priests and monastic communities. Since the 11th century, it was a common practice for the Chinese court to receive tribute from visiting Tibetan priests, to summon the latter to service

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(1) Ekvall (1964), p. 90.

in Peking, and in turn to patronize Tibetan monasteries.<sup>(1)</sup> It is probable that many of those exchanges were politically motivated both by Tibetan and Chinese parties, and there is even one suggestion that the Chinese patronization of monasteries in Eastern Tibet was a political manoeuvre to offset any potential military force in those areas and to lower the population through the encouragement of celibacy.<sup>(2)</sup> Among those monasteries popularly claimed to have received substantial economic support were the Gelugs-pa centres in Lhasa, especially important politically as the centres from which were drawn the candidates for Regent and other high political offices. In addition, semi-autonomous Tibetan regional governments such as those of the districts of Shigatse and Sa-sKya were in the habit of receiving economic patronage from China.<sup>(3)</sup>

Patronage of the noble families and monasteries was one form of economic influence in Tibet. Another was trade.

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(1) Richardson (1958), p. 141, and (1962), pp. 35 - 6.

(2) Macdonald (1929), p. 186.

(3) The Shigatse-Tashi Lhunpo government, though granted some autonomy from Lhasa, had strained relations with the central authority there. The accusations of their fraternization with the Chinese cannot be taken too seriously since they are made by the Lhasa authorities themselves, particularly when the latter incurred difficulties with the Chinese. It was customary, at least in the last two centuries, for Lhasa to express its conflict with minority groups and leaders in terms of the Chinese. Ekvall (1964) and some historians claim that the Chinese themselves exploited the intra-Tibetan cleavages. For further details of Shigatse government, see Appendix B on the Pan-chen Lama.



Many Chinese products, particularly manufactured goods were consumed in the Tibetan cities and monasteries, and to meet the demands, there was a flourishing trade between west China and Lhasa. What little is known about that main channel of trade indicates that there was little active participation of Chinese agents. Rather the major caravans and depots were monopolised by wealthy Tibetans and Moslems. Yet the fact remains that the goods that were carried were Chinese, and with the goods was transferred a certain way of life.

Since the time of the early kings in the 8th and 9th centuries, Tibet did not maintain a military force effective enough to thwart foreign invaders. Either the country succumbed to the rule of a superior nation, as occurred several times with the Mongols, or it called in the Chinese army to protect its interests. In 1841 and 1855 when the Dogra forces attacked, in 1792 when the Gurkhas invaded Tibet and in 1720 when the Dzungar Mongols were rebuffed, Chinese militia were essential in protecting the Lhasa political structure. Chinese military forces only occupied Tibet for short periods, during such crises, but throughout the period 1757 to 1959 a Chinese amban (an officer who has been compared to a Governor General) was maintained in Lhasa. The power of the amban and his involvement in Tibetan affairs varies greatly during those two centuries; in periods that

the Peking government was weak and preoccupied with other matters, and when there was strong Tibetan opposition, the power of the amban was reduced. Nevertheless, there were extensive periods when the amban was able to impose the policy of the Chinese government in effecting reforms in the Tibetan administrative system and in supervising the appointment of high officials, including the Dalai Lama. The best known reform was a 1793 edict of the Manchu Emperor which decreed that the Dalai Lama could not be reincarnated in the family of any Tibetan nobleman and that the selection of the final candidate should be made through the drawing of lots at a ceremony in which the Chinese representative participated.

Regardless of the imposed reforms, the occupying armies and the office of the amban, generally the Chinese political power in Lhasa was discreet and usually expressed through Tibetan institutions. While the Chinese authority effected changes in the administrative structure of Tibet, it did place indigenous Tibetan leaders in all offices. And the general ecclesiastical-civil administrative system with the Dalai Lama-Regent at its apex was maintained. The chief political offices of the country were competed for only by Tibetans, even though some of the candidates were often Chinese sponsored, either overtly or covertly. Chinese influence on Lhasa was expressed through other channels

for, generally, Tibetan political units which were ideologically and geographically distant from Lhasa control were allied with China. Chinese protection and support allowed minority sects and principalities a means of resisting Lhasa domination and of maintaining their autonomy. It cannot be a coincidence that the most powerful non-Gelugs-pa monastic centres were located on the Tibetan-Chinese frontier in the provinces of Khams and Amdo. We have sufficient evidence to state the principle that generally, affiliation of a Tibetan individual, institution or region with the Chinese government, was an expression of that unit's independence from the Tibetan government. For its part, the Lhasa organization generally tolerated such relations between its members and the Chinese.

We can conclude that generally the presence of the Chinese element in Tibetan politics a) enhanced competition within the Lhasa community by providing alternative sources of economic support for contending factions, and b) enhanced autonomy among units of the wider political community by allowing or encouraging them (the princes, local chiefs and priests) to assert their independence from Lhasa and the Gelugs-pa church. Economic power was expressed by the Chinese in terms of grants to individual Tibetans and religious institutions. That practice too was consistent

with the traditional Tibetan custom of accepting gifts and sponsorship as symbols of offering and tribute.

### The office of the Dalai Lama and Regent

The actual operation of the Tibetan Government and the dynamic relations among the aristocratic, ecclesiastic and foreign elements in it are best understood by an examination of the key political offices of the Lhasa organization. While the importance of the offices of the rulers' tutors, the sCHi-gyab mKhan-po, the Nai-Ch'ung oracle have been alluded e/ to, the paucity of information on their incumbants (even those of the 20th century) prevents a fuller investigation. Nevertheless, we can examine in detail the offices of the Dalai Lama and Regent, which will indicate more clearly the actual dynamics of the Lhasa political structure.

Recruitment of the Dalai Lama. Recruitment to this office was absolutely open. No one class or locality or family had a special right to it. In fact one segment, the Lhasa aristocracy, was theoretically excluded from competing for it.<sup>(1)</sup> This diffusion of competition among potential heirs was increased by lack of involvement by the outgoing incumbant in the choice of his successor.<sup>(2)</sup> Since the successor

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(1) See page 86.

(2) The 5th Dalai Lama is reported to have exerted considerable influence in the choice of his successors, both his regent and 6th Dalai Lama.

was not even sought until the death of the Dalai Lama there could be no competition between the incumbent and heir, nor could the incumbent choose his heir. The use of supernatural signs and methods in the selection of the Dalai Lamas was also designed to minimise human control, and to curtail a successor determined by the hierarchy. The method of succession had many features of indeterminacy such as reincarnation in an infant, a necessary period of regency, and the deliberate avoidance of a hereditary principle. The rivalries which did exist could not easily be focussed.

Goody, in his introduction to the study of succession in high office,<sup>(1)</sup> cites the Tibetan method of reincarnation as a prime example of indeterminate succession whereby dynastic governments are eliminated, successional conflicts minimised. It is true that the methods of selection were divine but such practices did not really eliminate human control and questioning.<sup>(2)</sup> Indeed, the variety of tests used in the divine selection and the family histories of the incumbents provide evidence that social factors were operative and conflicts common around the office of Dalai Lama. The spiritual tests of candidates for the supreme office in Tibet did involve human participation.

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(1) Goody (1966).

(2) The Dalai Lama was selected according to procedures applied generally to all incarnate priests. They followed the principles and rules outlined in Appendix A.

The first signs of a reincarnation were made either by a government sponsored oracle, or by a high priest of the Gelugs-pa church, or by the reincarnate child himself. These signs were made to an agent who interpreted them and commenced the search. However, the prophet (or oracle) and the interpreter-leader of the search party were never the same person. While the prophet may have been more independent in his pronouncements, the interpreter was more susceptible to influence by social forces. He was a high ranking lama in the Gelugs-pa church, usually a member of a Lhasa noble family, and an officer in the civil government or ecclesiastical department.<sup>(1)</sup> Such an officer usually conducted the search and selected the final candidates. He could have either accepted or rejected the oracle's signs and even interpreted them in his own interests. The oracles in turn may have represented diverse political interests and been susceptible to various political forces.

The lack of an official role on the part of the nobility in the selection of the Dalai Lama did not exclude it from the competition. The ties between the nobility and church which were examined above, could have been functional in effecting their influence in the choice of the Dalai Lamas.

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(1) The tutors of the Dalai Lama usually had this role.

There were, in addition, means by which they could have influenced the choice at the oracle level. There are several reports that the parties most actively engaged in offering gifts to the oracles and high monastic officials were members of the nobility. The Chinese government too is purported to have used this method of promoting its candidates.

The Nai-Ch'ung<sup>(1)</sup> was the most powerful state oracle, but it was not the only one. There was an institution of no less than four oracles at Nai-Ch'ung Monastery and Kawaguchi and Shen and Liu claim that because of their differences, their judgement rarely coincided and tended to produce four different candidates representing competing political interest groups. Tibetan informants admit that the oracles received bribes from wealthy families who were seeking a prophecy in favour of their respective candidates. It was acceptable for oracles to receive monetary and other gifts for their service and the great wealth that the state oracles accumulated attested their partisanship. When the final candidates for the Dalai Lama's office were decided, they were subjected to

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(1) According to the intensive study of Tibetan oracles by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956), Nai-Ch'ung was the medium of the diety Pe-har who resided in the annexe of Drepung Monastery. Pe-har, upon the death of one oracle is said to take possession in a monk inmate of one of the three chief Gelugs-pa monasteries.

further examination - a series of tests to verify their identity with their dead predecessor.<sup>(1)</sup> This stage in the selection was one in which the Gelugs-pa church officers, especially the tutors of the former Dalai Lama could exercise some authority. For such tests, only the religious scholars of the sect were qualified to judge. Narrowed further, the final candidates' names were submitted to a drawing of lots ceremony. That was a stage in which the Chinese element is reported to have been dominant. The Manchu Emperors had introduced the practice, and the Tibetans claimed that the procedure was a means by which the Chinese prejudiced the selection in favour of their interests. This claim is difficult to validate, but whether the Chinese representative actually engineered the final choice or only supervised the operation of chance, the control of the Tibetan hierarchy was, in either case, lessened. The Chinese did constitute another element which lessened the final authority of the Tibetan political leaders.

Training of the Dalai Lama. The selection and installation of a Dalai Lama was not the end of the competition around his office. Even though this indeterminate method of selection did eliminate conflict between the outgoing ruler and

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(1) See Appendix A.



his successor, it provided other problems. The incoming ruler was an infant of no more than four or five years, who held only spiritual status at the time of his installation. For at least the first twenty years of his tenure (even after he was officially invested with spiritual and temporal power)<sup>(1)</sup> he had to undergo rigorous religious and administrative training.<sup>(2)</sup> During that time he was nurtured, instructed, and advised by monk officials from the various Gelugs-pa monasteries. These factors functioned to create the infant ruler a point around which power struggles between the different monastic officials, the Chinese representative and the noble families continued. Regency rule was an extended period during which e/ time the family of the incumbent and his regent played an active political role.

The office of Regent.<sup>(3)</sup> The regents have played a prominent role in both the wider Tibetan political community and in the lives of the Dalai Lamas themselves. After the death of each Dalai Lama, there were at least sixteen years of regent's rule while the new ruler was being sought and then prepared for his post. This condition, together with the

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(1) The Dalai Lama, like other reincarnate abbots, assumed full temporal and spiritual authority at the age of 16 or 18.

(2) As the head of the Gelugs-pa sect and spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhists, he was obliged to become a master of its doctrine and history, and a religious teacher.

(3) Tib. sde-srid (Jäschke, 1881).

premature deaths and early retirement of no less than six of the ten Dalai Lamas who held temporal power, resulted in the rule of regents in Tibet for most of the last 300 years. (1)

It was decreed by the first Dalai Lama who wielded political power (the 5th), that the regent should always be a monk and, since his death (1683 A.D.) the post has been filled by dignitaries of the Gelugs-pa church. (2) Candidature for this powerful office was open only to reincarnate abbots of the six small 'regal' monasteries near Lhasa and the elected abbot of Ganden (Ganden Khri-pa). The regents obtained their appointment by election in which leading priests of the three major Gelugs-pa monasteries participated. Their term of office was indefinite: it was dependent on the age of e| the incumbent, the period of minority and on his popularity. Some regents even maintained their power after their wards had reached maturity. In the cases of the 6th and 8th e| Dalai Lamas, the incumbents did not assume temporal authority at the age of 18; the former was apparently more interested in secular life, and the latter was very retiring and pre-occupied with personal religious pursuits.

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(1) Richardson (1962), p. 71 notes that during the period between the rule of the 7th and that of the 13th Dalai Lamas regents ruled Tibet for one hundred and twenty years continuously.

(2) Only once was it filled by a layman. In the 19th century, a nobleman, Sha-tra, who had distinguished himself in military service and won the support of Ganden Monastery became the successful candidate. But, from the hour of his appointment, he is reported to have lived as a monk. (Bell, 1931, p. 185).

The present Dalai Lama (the 14th), although heading only a refugee community of some 80,000, has some temporal and spiritual authority. But, like his predecessor, he is considered rather retiring and preoccupied with religious matters. His temporal duties, it is said, are attended to by his elder brothers rather than a regent.

The regent's office, more than the Dalai Lama's, can be seen as a focal point around which religious, noble and Chinese elements in the Lhasa political community competed for power.<sup>(1)</sup> Kin relations between the regents and the leading lay and ecclesiastic government officers, were as much a feature of this office as of the Dalai and Pan-chen Lamas.<sup>(2)</sup> Recent history provides a dramatic example of the methods by which political factions, focussed around the office of regent, challenged one another and succeeded to power. In the late 19th century, during the minority of the last Dalai Lama (Thub-bstan rGya-mtsho) the Ten-gye-ling Regent and two of his own brothers occupying high government office. One of them, the chief minister, was held to have made many enemies by his oppressive administration and thus incurred the hostility of many officials. The actual

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e/ (1) For detailed histories of the incumbants of this office, see Bell (1946 and 1931) and Petech (1959).

(2) See Appendix B.

identity of the opposing faction is not known, but they did identify themselves with the young Dalai Lama, who, apparently experienced frequent spasms of illness about that time. The Nai-Ch'ung oracle was consulted about the Patriarch's illnesses and it was found that they had been induced by a charm placed in his boot. Both the unpopular minister and his brother, the Regent, were accused of having bewitched the young ruler and of ~~accomplice~~ accomplice with the Chinese in a conspiracy. After the execution of the Regent and his brother, the Ten-gye-ling monastery was closed for its alleged pro-Chinese support.

Several other regents accused of pro-Chinese interests and sympathies were likewise expelled from office by opposing factions. But ousted regents did not always represent a pro-Chinese faction. Sometimes the faction opposing that of the regent was allied with the Chinese itself, and used their ally to oust the regent. The series of incidents following the death of the 7th Dalai Lama illustrate these struggles. (1) The Regent, Gesub Rin-po-che, suspected of having assassinated the ruler, was challenged by the latter's successor (the 8th Dalai Lama). With the help of the Chinese, the young Dalai Lama had the regent condemned and

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(1) For further details of this case, see Markham (1876), p. xcvi and Rockhill (1891), Book IV.

banished. Subsequently, he chose the young incarnate Lama of Reting Monastery as his regent, but since both the latter and the Dalai Lama were still minors, yet another regent, Pe-chi, was appointed by the Chinese. Later, when Reting attained majority, he fought with Pe-chi for power. But Pe-chi, with the support of Drepung, Ganden and Se-ra monasteries won over Reting. (Reting was banished to China whose interests, it is said, he represented). When Pe-chi died in 1869, he was succeeded by an abbot of Ganden monastery.

The family of the Dalai Lama. The nature of the ruler's office and the Tibetan constitution provided conditions e| under which the family of an incumbent Dalai Lama (both during his minority and after he assumed power) could exert great influence, both indirectly over their son, and directly through government office. At the time of his installation the family of a Dalai Lama became ennobled and inherited a sizable estate from the government. The ruler's father and brothers were given honorary titles and all family members were treated with the greatest respect. Although there was a rule that the newly ennobled family could not participate in government affairs during their son's tenure, they did. Both as managers and secretaries of the Dalai Lama's personal estates and as members of the civil government, the royal

families exerted considerable influence in Tibetan political affairs.<sup>(1)</sup> Bell reports that during his tenure in Lhasa, the Prime Minister was the Dalai Lama's own brother's son.<sup>(2)</sup> Further illustration is provided in the case of the present Dalai Lama. Before his flight from Tibet in 1959, the office of phYags-mDzod, the private secretary of the ruler, was filled by his own brother. Further, in India, the exiled government of the Dalai Lama is to a large extent managed by his elder brothers. No doubt the ruler's age and inclination, and the ability and personalities of his family together with the trustworthiness of high government officials affected the involvement of the royal family in political affairs. Nevertheless, they represented a significant check on the factions, lay and ecclesiastic, who sought to use the Dalai Lama's office to promote their own interests, or even to assassinate the ruler.

The factions of Lhasa society which were prominent in the competition for political power, did not represent exclusively the particular social elements of the society, that is, the ecclesiastic, aristocratic, commoner or foreign.

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(1) From Macdonald (1932), p. 116, we learn that the Dalai Lama's father traditionally held the chief office in the ruler's personal household.

(2) Bell (1931), p. 185.

Nor were opposing factions representative of lay versus ecclesiastic sectors of the society. Rather, within each establishment, there were opposing and competing segments which allied with similarly opposed segments in the other establishment. Kinship, economic and religious ties between allied sectors were effective in strengthening the interdependence between them. Since the Gelugs-pa church possessed a monopoly of a number of crucial prestige symbols and powers of sanction and a military force, there was no choice for the nobility and the Chinese, but to make alliances with them. This situation, however, did not give the ecclesiastics absolute control. The Gelugs-pa church itself was split into a number of parties competing for power and promoting its own members and leaders into high political offices. That fact, together with its celibate nature, prevented it from being self-sufficient. Thus, the situation was far more dynamic and complex than a simple examination of the three primary political elements would suggest. In theory, the Gelugs-pa church, the nobility and the Chinese elements had each been assigned certain areas of administration. Generally, the ecclesiastical element had an upper hand; its proximity to the offices of the national leaders, its monopoly of the primary religious symbols of power, and a potential political force at its disposal gave it more potential power. But the power of the church was not expressed

in terms of a theocratic government framework. Rather the civil government was an administrative structure of which the church was only one contributing element. Neither can the government of Tibet be interpreted in national terms as for most societies. For, in Tibet, the civil government was but one of several independent administrative establishments and its authority was primarily restricted to only a portion of the lands and subjects of the total area over which it claimed sovereignty. The Lhasa nobility was, like the church, a contributory element to the central government while maintaining itself as a culturally and economically distinct establishment, even though, in order to exert itself politically, it utilised its ties with the church.



CHAPTER IVMONASTIC ORGANIZATIONTypology and Classification of Monasteries

The structure and administrative system of monasteries in Tibet exhibited wide variations. Their internal structure itself was predetermined by the nature of the religious order (their tradition and philosophy), their ecology and their position in the Lamaist hierarchy. They were also different in their response to local social conditions and to their role in the local community.

Sectarian differences. The philosophies, traditions and general orientation of each of the five major sects of Lamaism have already been described.<sup>(1)</sup> The Gelugs-pa sect maintained the ideal of celibacy more than the others. It also established a standardized academic system of achievement culminating in public examination. The Gelugs-pa monasteries, being larger, more active and competitive communities than those of the other sects, reflected those features. Almost neglecting the more individual pursuits in mediation and magic, the Gelugs-pas concentrated on study

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(1) See above, Chapter II.

and public debate of the doctrine, a more academic approach to medicine and tantrism. The older sects, the Nying-ma and Kagyü were much less concerned with celibacy and other rules of the doctrine and more with achievement through individual meditation, and with the mastery of magical power. Although celibacy and the monastic community were not as important to the non-Gelugs-pas in the attainment of spiritual power, they too established some exclusively male communities, with grading systems and courses marking different degrees of spiritual involvement and achievement. However, many of their centres were small and secluded, following the teachings of their founders, most of whom had been hermits and yogins who had achieved spiritual power through apprenticeship, wandering and then retreat and meditation. The hermit-yogin tradition was continued down to the 20th century by most of the Nying-ma and Kagyü. Their monasteries had attached to them small retreats and caves to which their members withdrew, often for years at a time, to achieve personal salvation and direct personal contact with the gods. The active shamanistic role of Bon-po specialists, and their preoccupation with the lay community also functioned to minimize the size and community life of their monasteries.

Ecological differences. Monasteries in areas of relatively dense population, and perhaps with a high professional reputation, attracted their members from a wider social and

geographical field than did obscure and small local institutions. To accommodate the regional differences on the one hand, and the kin and cultural ties between members from the same areas on the other, the populations of the monasteries were divided into residential units called kan-bzans. Each was comprised of monks from the same province, district or even village. The larger the monastery, the more provincial kan-bzans were sub-divided into local units; and the larger the kan-bzans, the greater the cleavages between them, for kan-bzans membership was a relationship which tied monks to one another and opposed them to others. Although further investigation is necessary to understand the politics of these societies within the monasteries, it is suggested that they had some of the features of a segmentary lineage system and operated along similar lines.

Large monasteries in populated areas had relations with a/ the local population which in turn effected its structure. Those monasteries required large quantities of food, water and raw materials for their industries. In return for goods supplied from the local community, monks sold goods produced in the monastery and performed various services for the layment. In some areas, a daily market place was established to facilitate the exchange between the monastic and lay community: it is reported that just outside the walls of the great

Gelugs-pa monastery of Drepung a regular market operated.<sup>(1)</sup>

On the other hand, monasteries in isolated areas had different economic needs and obligations in relation to the local community. On an isolated route, a monastery was often required to provide provisions, accommodation and protection to passing pilgrims and traders. If located in a popular raiding area, security was achieved only by the maintenance of an active military force, or indeed its own raiding band.<sup>(2)</sup>

In some cases, monastic leaders provided the leadership necessary to organize posses and police forces for the local laymen. Rockhill, writing about the feud and bandit-ridden areas of north-east Tibet, claimed that there, the large lamaseries were rather fortified camps in which every monk was well-armed, well-mounted and prepared for a fray, whether with local chiefs, the Chinese or a rival monastery.<sup>(3)</sup>

Most monasteries had land from which they drew their revenue and which supplied their agricultural needs; but some of those which had no land had either to rely on the patronage of local wealthy families, or on the contributions of wealthy member monks (whom it could only attract by a high academic

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(1) Chapman (1940), p. 200.

(2) Bell (1931), p. 6; Snellgrove (1957), p. 222; Edgar (1935), p. 16.

(3) Rockhill (1891a), p. 216.

reputation). Other non-landed monasteries maintained themselves from revenue accumulated through trading and other businesses, and from religious collections from non-landed followers such as the nomadic peoples.

A monastery often had a specialized industry by which it maintained itself economically and established a reputation. The De-ge Monastery in the eastern province of Khams was such an institution. It housed a very large printing establishment which secured for it business from all over Tibet.<sup>(1)</sup> Some monasteries were nothing more than buildings enclosing a room containing very sacred relics and marking an important place in lamaist history. As important points of pilgrimage, they were able to survive on donations from pilgrims, and only required a few monks for their maintenance.<sup>(2)</sup> And there were many monasteries which for reasons yet unestablished, had experienced a marked decline both in their population and in their role in the religious and lay community. They were allowed to degenerate to the point

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(1) Kolmas (1968), pp. 39 - 40.

(2) A monastery which today owes its survival to its proximity to a sacred lake which has been an important place of pilgrimage for Tibetan Buddhists. It is the Nying-ma-pa Monastery at Lake of the Lotus, Rewalsar, near the Punjab capital of Chandigarh. For decades Nying-ma and Kagyü followers went to that holy lake on pilgrimage, and today Tibetan refugees continue to patronize it. The monastery has only a few resident monks but substantial accommodation for visiting dignitaries. Macdonald (1932), p. 130, refers to the Monastery of Ritang and its importance as a place of pilgrimage.

where they were crumbling; their frescoes had deteriorated and they were simply maintained by a few local laymen or an old illiterate monk. Some dramatic examples have been described by scholars and travellers who have recently toured the Tibetan-speaking Buddhist areas on the fringes of Chinese occupied Tibet,<sup>(1)</sup> and Teichman, in the early part of the century, noted the deterioration of monasteries in East Tibet: there the weakening position of the monasteries was put down to inter-monastic feuds and to their involvement in the Chinese-Tibetan war.<sup>(2)</sup>

Branch monasteries. Monasteries could enjoy a number of positions in relation to one another. Their degree of independence, religious and economic, from one another, was naturally reflected in their internal organization, their wealth, and their reputation or status. As each of the five sects had its own network of monasteries, headed by one monastery (usually the one established by the original founder of the entire sect) there were five religious hierarchies.<sup>(3)</sup> In relation to the head monastery of each sect,

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(1) Peissel (1968); Snellgrove (1961), p. 78; Khosla (1969).

(2) Teichman (1922).

(3) In Tibet the head monasteries were: Drepung, Ganden and Se-ra for the Gelugs sect; Sa-sKya near Shigatse for the Sa-sKya sect; mTshur-phu north-west of Lhasa for the Kagyü; sMin-sgrol-glin for the Nying-ma; and sMan-ri in the west for the Bon-po sect.

all the other monasteries of that sect were subordinates. The relationship of the affiliated monasteries to the head was political or economic or both. The lay members of the subject monasteries which were literally "owned", owed allegiance and revenue to the large superior monastery. In addition, although the subject monasteries managed their internal affairs and appointed some of their own leaders, the abbots and other important officers were appointed from and by the head institution, and stewards or district officers were periodically sent to collect taxes. It is likely that the Sa-sKya monasteries outside Sa-sKya proper to which Cassinelli and Ekvall refer<sup>(1)</sup> are of this sort.

A few monasteries enjoyed complete independence from their head monasteries and their church in general. That was facilitated by their remoteness from the central authority. In the border areas where economic and political influence from another foreign government was prominent, or where the members of the monastic communities were culturally remote from the more cosmopolitan provinces of Ü and gTsang, the central authorities of the respective sects exerted little influence. According to reports, the monasteries in Ando and Khams on the Tibeto-Chinese frontier, received some financial

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 301 - 3.

support from the Chinese government which allowed them considerable autonomy. But, by a number of means, subsidiary monasteries were maintained under the control of their central authority. The head monastery of each sect in all cases had succeeded in establishing itself as the doctrinal authority of its sect: their academic degrees were the most sought after and prized and they housed the best libraries and most famous teachers. The prestige of those centres was such that if an ambitious monk was to ensure his prestige in his own local monastery, he would have to secure a degree or at least some training from the head institution, either of his own sect or of another, or from both. Scholars from Ladak, Mongolia, Bhutan and Nepal all aspired to obtain qualifications from the Gelugs-pa centres of Ganden, Drepung or Se-ra, especially since their home monasteries gave preference and respect to monks qualified there. In addition, all smaller and more remote monasteries welcomed graduates of the central monasteries among their administrative ranks.

If academic motivation did not draw monks to the central institutions, mere desire for prestige did, for proximity to the sacred books, the relics, the holiest priests of the sect was highly valued. Not only ordinary monks with ambitions and intelligence trained at the central monasteries: so did



the young abbots of the subordinate institutions.<sup>(1)</sup> In fact, there is one report that the latter class of priests were actually obliged to spend several years in such training.<sup>(2)</sup> If there was no actual rule, there was certainly a strong sense of obligation. And at some time it was necessary for a new reincarnate abbot to present himself to the leader of his sect at their head monastery in order to receive the official sanction of the hierarch and to pledge his allegiance to him.

Further subjugation of branch monasteries was effected in the control over the succession of their leaders. The hierarch of each sect had some authority and influence in the selection of the abbots of his subject monasteries; he had the power to appoint abbots, and even in the cases where succession of abbots were determined by spiritual reincarnation, he could exercise some authority. Only where the abbot's office was succeeded by heredity was the influence of the sect's hierarch minimal. Although reincarnation was supposed to be a completely open and indeterminate method of succession to high monastic office in which human control is

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(1) Today in India among the refugee Tibetans, each of the five major religious leaders have established new centres for their sect. At these centres the most promising novices and best scholars can study and receive teaching from their leader and his assistants.

(2) Carrasco (1959), p. 125.

minimal, close examination of this process reveals that mechanisms were developed which did effect human participation, particularly by the church leaders. At the highest level, the choice of the hierarchs of even the respected Sa-sKya patriarch are subject to final approval and sanction (1) by the Dalai Lama's ecclesiastic department. But before that, each candidate for reincarnation to an abbotship is subject to the approval of the leader of his monastery's sect. The Kagyü-pa leader, Karmapa, has a particularly prominent role in the choice of his junior abbots throughout his spiritual realm. By tradition and through the belief in his exceptional meditative powers, it is the Karmapa priest himself who directs his followers as to where they should search for a young reincarnate abbot. Further, he can and does occasionally veto candidates who are presented to him. (2) Despite the claim that this system of succession was indeterminate and the use of some spiritual tests, there was clearly a degree of predetermination and the possibility

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(1) This practice is maintained by the Tibetan refugees in India today. While I was living among them, several reincarnate abbots - mainly incarnation of old and respected priests who had died during the communist takeover of Tibet - were found. The candidates, upon approval by the leader of their sect, were presented to the Religion Office of the Dalai'Lama's government in exile for legitimization.

(2) See Chögyam Trungpa's autobiography in which the author, himself a reincarnate abbot, describes his own discovery. (Trungpa, 1966)<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>

of manipulation of the system in the interests of individuals. Other sect leaders prophesied the location of a reincarnate abbot<sup>(1)</sup> but to a lesser extent than the Karmapa.

Family monasteries. Among the non-Gelugs-pa sects in which the rule of celibacy and the dissociation of a monk from his family was not such a strong ideal as it was among the Gelugs-pas, tantric beliefs and practices and the maintenance of some pre-Buddhist traditions sanctioned the use of the hereditary principle and family associations in the succession to high monastic office. Many of their monasteries remained under the influence of established families, the ancestors of whom had founded the monastery. The primary link was through the office of abbot; it was succeeded to by inheritance, either from father to son, or where the celibate ideal had to be exercised, from uncle to nephew. Usually only one family had exclusive rights to the abbot's office, although in a few cases two families, or two branches of a single lineage, alternately provided the successor. A good example of the family monastery is provided by the history of the De-ge kings<sup>(2)</sup> in which the relationship between the De-ge

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(1) An outgoing abbot, approaching death, may himself give signs of his next reincarnation. The 7th and 13th Dalai Lama are said to have done this.

(2) Kolmas (1968), pp. 41 - 3.

royal family and the Sa-sKya monastery of Lhun-grub-steng is recorded in detail. It was so essential that the De-ge royal family provide the monastery's head that on one occasion when no male heirs were available, a female member of the family became a nun and succeeded to the abbotship. On another occasion, the office was passed on to the brother of a deceased incumbent until the latter's son, the rightful heir, was old enough to assume office. In the case of the succession to the office of the Sa-sKya hierarch, the priest marries and passes his office directly to his son who, it is believed, inherits his office both by blood and by spiritual reincarnation.

One Bön-po informant reports that there were, in the province of gTsang,<sup>(1)</sup> five Bön-po monasteries which maintained considerable independence from the central Bön-po authority located at sMan-ri, also in gTsang province. The abbotships of these institutions were succeeded to by sons of five local wealthy Bön-po families, one attached to each monastery.<sup>(2)</sup> The close interdependence of the family and monastery is illustrated in the following incident, recounted

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(1) Although officially under the rule of Lhasa, this province was the domain of the Pan-chen Lama and his Shigatse government.

(2) They were, Pru-t'san, ZHu-t'san, sPa-t'san, rme'o-t'san and kShen-t'san.

to me by my Bön-po informant. In the last century, the 5th Pan-chen Lama, abbot of Tashi Lhunpo monastery and prince of the Shigatse district, was found reincarnated in one of those Bön-po families. Thereupon, the young abbot and his family were removed to Shigatse and absorbed into the aristocracy and Gelugs-pa sect there while their Bön-po monastery virtually disappeared.

It must not be thought that family monasteries were but remnants of history, institutions so monopolized by powerful families that they had been powerless in effecting their independence from their founders. It was not uncommon - even in this century - for family monasteries to be established either by noblemen or by wealthy clan chiefs, for it was both prestigious and politically valuable to build a monastery. Such a gesture accumulated merit for the patrons and provided their followers with their own religious community to which they could send their sons to obtain spiritual leadership. Sometimes wars and the subjugation of powerful monasteries by lay rulers ended in the distribution of monastic properties and offices among the victors. A case in point is provided by Rockhill's history of East Tibet. (1)

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(1) Rockhill (1891 b), p. 55.

After the Tibetan army had subjugated the great monastery at C'ab-mdo, a new head abbot was installed, and "five families divided among them the management of the great and little lamaseries".

#### Internal organization of monasteries

Leaving aside the doctrinal, historical and ecological differences, most monasteries can be seen to have common structural and operational features which can be described in general and will serve to illustrate, a) political relationships within the monastery, and b) the position of the monastic community vis-à-vis the local community and the wider polity.

The structure of a monastery was largely determined by its economic organization. Ostensibly, it was a community of adult and immature males only living together with similar academic and spiritual aims.<sup>(1)</sup> There were no funds to finance their studies so most of their needs they had to provide themselves. Either they could solicit support from their families or they could work for wages with which to finance themselves. The latter alternative was common, although almost all monks had some family support during their

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(1) Cf. the organization of nunneries in Appendix C.

early years in the monastery. (Many boys undertook the monastic life at as early as five years of age). Besides receiving money and goods for their long-term needs and assistance from older kinsmen in their monastery, boys were regularly provided with food brought by family members from their homes. Wealthy monks who could afford tutor's fees were able to concentrate all their attention on religious pursuits or at least to occupy themselves as they pleased, but monks from poor families were not allowed such liberties. In order to remain in the monastery and acquire some literary or artistic skills, poor monks were obliged to take up employment in the monastery, either as a servant of a wealthy older monk or relative (who if the boy were lucky would give him some instruction) or as an apprentice to a monk artisan or monastic official. Since, within each monastery, there was usually an active business, artistic and domestic community, a number of choices were available through which a poor youth might support himself.

In addition to providing their own food and clothing, monks (of any economic status) had to see to their own lodgings. There were no communal dormitories or institutional residences and so a conglomeration of household cells evolved, crowding around the central temples and prayer halls of the monastery. These households were the property of their occupants, built by them at the time of their entry

into the community or inherited from a retired or deceased monk. Usually, a young inmate joined the cell of a senior family member such as an uncle or brother, and then later inherited it. The elder kinsman undertook the care and instruction of his ward, and often in return the youth became a servant and student of his patron. If a monk did not have a relative whom he could join, at least until he had established himself in the monastery, he had to depend on acquaintance with an older monk whom his parents patronized or with a fellow villager. A Bön-po monk informant, after reaching a high academic status in his own monastery aspired to study at Drepung. When he went to that institution, his entry was facilitated by local ties with a Gelugs-pa scholar living there who was from his own village in Amdo.

Religious activities in a monastery required a temple and assembly hall. The daily ceremonies which all monks were required to attend, were important social and academic occasions requiring some organization and supervision. Often such gatherings were meetings or lectures at which the leaders of the monastery reaffirmed their authority. Ordinary prayers, because of the difficulty of the texts, the elaborate ritual, the full participation of the audience, required organization and leadership. So there were a number of officers: chief chanters, ritual assistants, musicians, disciplinarians, were necessary to carry out



those tasks. These offices in particular were succeeded to by a combination of public election and private appointment (from among the nominees) for short periods of one or three years, but subject to reappointment.<sup>(1)</sup> Though the e/ incumbants were not necessarily scholarly men, they acquired considerable status in these offices, for disciplinary ability, knowledge of the prayer content and ritual, and physical stature which were necessary for these jobs were highly respected qualities. The office of dge-bsKos (disciplinarian) was particularly attractive since the in- e/ cumbant could, through the collection of fines and appeal money, use his office to acquire a considerable income.

Scholarly pursuits were engaged in by only a part of the monk population. Scholar monks were attached to one of several colleges (grva-t'san) in the monastery; each grva-t'san specialized in a particular technique or theory or field of science, so that a monk joined a college in

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(1) Some reports available on the methods of succession to these offices are not consistent. Snellgrove (1957) maintains that succession was by rotation while Shen and Liu (1953) and Li An-che (1948) report that appointment to monastic office was based on nomination from public votes. David-Neel's (1932) statement that elections were the primary means of succession is supported by the verifications of personal informants, although the latter admit that in some cases only a number of nominees were elected, and the officer was appointed by his superiors from among that group.

which he wished to specialize. Scholar monks were known as dpè-cha-wa<sup>(1)</sup> and usually consisted of the wealthier sector of the community since full-time study and instruction from a tutor required considerable funds. Each grva-t'san elected its own executive headed by one of its leading members; he was called a mKhan-po, or master, and was supposed to be a noted scholar besides a man of administrative ability. Like the other officers, he was elected, but only by his own college and served as their representative on the monastic council. Since the mKhan-po's election was subject to the approval of higher monastic officials, he was often in effect appointed by a higher authority: as their control over the populace of monks was sometimes quite considerable, it was in the interests of the high monastic authorities to maintain some control over them in their method of succession. The importance of this office was increased by the fact that important government officials, monastery abbots, regents and tutors of young abbots were drawn from the ranks of retired mKhan-pos.

Informants claim that each grva-t'san was an important social unit maintained by fairly strong ties among their members, often providing the basis of intra-monastic factions

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(1) dpè-cha = book; wa = those, the people (Jäschke, 1881)†

and the main lines of cleavage. Disputes that broke out between members of different grva-t'sans and within the same one taxed and tested the ability of their mKhan-pos whose success was dependent more on their ability to lead and administer their colleges. Besides providing the basis for corporate action, monastic and doctrinal education, the grva-t'san provided the academic and administrative skills necessary for succession to the highest monastic and political offices. The winners of its degrees and the reincarnations and wealthy monks it trained gained access to high political office. For example, among the Bön-po and in the case of Ganden Monastery where abbotship was not succeeded to by reincarnation, academic qualification was the means by which people qualified for these positions.

In addition to its academic units, a monastery was segmented along different lines into residential units which were also the basis of political factions. The smallest residential unit was something of a family if it contained, as was usual, more than one member. A household was likely to contain brothers, uncles, and nephews, with the older members caring for the younger. Such kin-based units formed larger locally based ones, that is, consisting of men who had come from the same village or band. And all those from the same district formed still larger units, so that the largest were provincial societies - they were called kan-bzans.

Some small monasteries had only a few provincially based kan-bzans; large ones with a number of inmates from a variety of areas had many kan-bzans,<sup>(1)</sup> nestled like lineages and sometimes organized into a hierarchy. As soon as a monk joined a monastery he became a member of a kan-bzans with rights and obligations to it. Membership in these associations cut across membership in the grvā-t'san and were therefore likely to have had the effect of cross-cutting ties in minimizing conflict and extending relationships. However, kan-bzans membership is reported to have been very strong and many disputes broke out between them. The power of some large kan-bzans was enhanced by a strong and independent economic base. Personal informants claim that their kan-bzans were land-holding units exercising corporate rights over their property independent of that of the monastery as a whole, but nothing could be said about the details of this institution and the claims and obligations of the monk members in it.<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Macdonald (1932), p. 84, reports that Palkor Chhode Monastery containing 1800 monks was divided into eighteen kan-bzans, and a Bön-po informant said that his monastery, sMan-ri, was segmented into ten kan-bzans although it had only one grvā-t'san. The largest monastery in Tibet, Drepung, had twenty-three of these residential units.

(2) Although Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969) devote an entire chapter to the operation of monasteries in Sa-sKya, they seem to have overlooked the important institution of the kan-bzans. Shen and Liu's account (1953), p. 72, of the operation of kan-bzans in central Tibet, is also disappointing.

Each kan-bzans had its own executive, both for economic and jural administration. Heading it was the mKhan-po who, like the grvā-t'san mKhan-po, was elected by his unit for a fixed term but renewable for an indefinite number of terms. Although his appointment was subject to approval of the higher authorities of the monastery, in addition to popular support, the kan-bzans remained a fairly autonomous unit, and within it the mKhan-po exercised considerable authority.

#### The Monastery and the laity: secular offices

In most monasteries, non-scholar monks constituted the majority of the population. They were called me-rGyud-pa<sup>(1)</sup> or ldab-ldob,<sup>(2)</sup> drawn primarily from the poorer segments of the laity who entered the monastery primarily for reasons of employment and training as a craftsman, cook, servant, accountant, rather than to engage in purely religious pursuits. As many were recruited into the monastery by means of a monk levy which the institution exercised over its subject families, their membership in the mè-rGyud-pa class was not a matter of choice. The non-scholar monks were not organized into a

(1) mè = not, rGyud-pa = a man of letters (Jäschke, 1881).

(2) ldab-ldob were a class of non-scholar monks, particularly well-known for their rather aggressive enterprises. Miller (1957), in her consideration of mutual-aid societies operating among the Tibetans, describes the ldab-ldob as one of a number of the occupational mutual-aid institutions and points out that membership in them was not restricted to monks, but open to both men and women. For details of this class, see Goldstein (1964).

corporate group or association in a way that the grvā-t'san and kan-bzans were, but nevertheless, there were bonds between them which did operate to unite members of this class, particularly in opposition to the scholar monks who tended to think of the working monks as inferior. One Drepung informant cited a case of scholar-worker relations in his monastery. He recounted that early in the last decade a dispute broke out among the members of the sGo-mer grvā-t'san in Drepung Monastery. The opposing factions were the dpè-cha-wa on the one hand and the mè-#Gyud-pa monks on the other. The cause of the dispute was unknown, but when it became too serious for the mKhan-pos to settle it, was referred to the Religious Secretariat, which did effect a settlement and expelled four scholar monks and twenty-seven non-scholars.

Among the non-scholars there was a special rather infamous category called the thob-thob whose main function was defence of the monastery, protection of the leading priests, intra-monastic discipline and policing the lay subjects of the monastery. It is said that many of their members accumulated considerable wealth through their extortionate activities, but that they also enjoyed sincere respect won by their loyalty to their leaders and their protection of their monasteries.

Since a monastery's economic and political power was based primarily upon its relations with the laity, and their non-academic enterprises, the organization of these activities was crucial to its existence and reputation. In Tibet, apart from hermitages, and especially sacred centres, the academic institutions of a monastery could not survive without support from the mé-rGyud-pas. But the reverse was possible and some monasteries made up exclusively by mé-rGyud-pas did exist and prosper.<sup>(1)</sup> In addition to comprising a militia for many communities, the mé-rGyud-pas carried out domestic services, produced some of the articles such as ritual objects, clothes, furnishings, which the operation of such isolated communities required.

The lower offices of the mundane aspects of the monastic community were probably filled on a rotation basis, but more important ones were succeeded to by a combination of election and appointment by the highest authorities.<sup>(2)</sup> The administration of the business of a monastery was carried out by a steward or manager called a gNyer-pa. Naturally, this was an important office and its incumbants were carefully selected, by nomination and then appointment from the council or

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(1) The Sa-sKya monastery of AKHor-LHun-Po has such a constitution: it was an exclusively business community (Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969, p. 301).

(2) See Li, An-che (1942), pp. 63 - 8 and Shen and Liu (1953), p. 74.

the abbot of the monastery himself. His term of office varied: some reports claim it was one year, others that it was three, but tenure was subject to renewal in any case. Although some informants claim that a steward's junior officers and assistants were elected by the body of monks and subject to their public approval, it is suspected that the steward did affect their appointments directly or otherwise. Assisted by a chief secretary (chandzö) and a treasurer (gNyer-pa), the gNyer-pa managed the supply and distribution of provisions in the monastery, and more important, the institution's income. Most monasteries employed a staff of considerable size working outside the monastery for varying periods and in a number of tasks. Since most monasteries were landlords - exercising authority over land, chattels and subject families - managers, magistrates and revenue collectors were required to administer their estates and protect their interests. All of these officers were under the gNyer-pa. Monasteries which engaged in trade - and most did - employed their inmates as traders. Those institutions and priests claiming the fealty of unsettled nomadic peoples scattered over the countryside and generally distant from them, sent out monks, generally those of high religious status as "religious collectors". These gSo-slong-pa - as they were known - went out on extensive tours soliciting



funds for their monastery,<sup>(1)</sup> but whether or not payment was obligatory and a form of tax has not been established. If a monastery were small and only held lands nearby, most of these enterprises would have been managed by a small staff, and the gNyer-pa would have acted as the district officer and dealt directly with the subject headman.<sup>(2)</sup>

Money and goods from tax collection constituted capital for procuring food and articles for the monastic community. The gNyer-pa and his assistants had a certain capital with which to administer their staff and obtain supplies, but after providing those and returning the original capital, any profit accrued was their own. Even gSo-slong-pas who were sent out to collect capital and the other revenue collectors were not required to remit all that they had collected; a fixed sum was due but anything over that was theirs. The same rule applies to magistrates who collected fines. It was not uncommon for monks holding the monastery's capital to employ it in a money-lending business. Any post which involved the handling of capital was reputed to be lucrative, and therefore such posts were competed for not only by me-rGyud-pa, but also by scholar monks.

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(1) Cf. Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 306, in which it is reported that such officers were posted for periods ranging from six months to six years.

(2) Li An-che (1948) reports that the steward and his subordinates sometimes appointed local headmen themselves. He also noted that to safeguard the monastery from local external troubles a local chief was often invited to act as a patron or 'honorary officer' of the monastery.

As in the religious sphere of a monastery's operation, successful business endeavours were rewarded in terms of prestige. Monks, upon their return from a revenue collecting tour, often provided a great tea for their monastery, and were sometimes honoured with the bestowal of the title "Rin-po-che", a term of address usually reserved for an incarnate priest or great scholar.

Besides their official relationships, monks had frequent dealings of a personal and religious nature with the local lay communities. Unlike the segregated role of the priest in other Buddhist societies, Tibetan monks were not confined to the monastery and frequently worked outside it. This practice was consistent with the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy of esoteriology, and the obligation of monks to serve the needs of the laity and to travel about the country on pilgrimage. The monasteries' facilities for accommodating visiting pilgrims and scholars, the economic, kin and academic<sup>(1)</sup> interrelations between monastic communities, all greatly facilitated the movement of monks. It was also common for a monk to return to his parents' house occasionally, for a holiday, or to help with the harvest.<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Miller (1959) in his study of monasteries in Mongolia, suggests that tutor-pupil ties were important in inter-monastery relations.

(2) Carrasco (1959), p. 104, writes that monks were released for the purpose of working on the farms. Also Kawaguchi (1909), p. 325, Tucci (1967), p. 148 and Snellgrove (1957), p. 218.

On their travels, monks of any calibre, were called upon by the laity to perform various religious services, and to tutor children of wealthy families. They would, if they were skilled and reputable, be employed to give astrological readings, medical advice and treatment, and even to exercise malevolent spirits.<sup>(1)</sup> Often monks were employed on a more or less permanent basis offering prayers and tutoring scions in the households of the wealthy laymen.<sup>(2)</sup> The receipt of money and food for services rendered to the laymen was consistent with the economic structure of the monastery and the relative economic independence of individual monks. Most monks and other religious specialists had to maintain themselves and were free to earn as much as they could and to live at whatever material standard they wished.

#### The monastic hierarch: the abbot and his estate

The highest office in a monastery was that of the abbot. As head of both the academic and business departments of the monastery, he exercised autocratic power with his realm,

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(1) Divination plays a prominent part in the everyday life of Tibetans; on any occasion they take the opportunity to consult an astrologer who will advise on the good or evil fortune of an undertaking. See Ekvall (1964), Macdonald (1932), p. 126 and Tucci (1967), pp. 130, 135.

(2) One informant reports that when he was a young monk, he went to a monastery near the home of his parents to live with an older maternal uncle. Both he and this guardian were supported by another maternal uncle - also a monk - who travelled about the countryside performing religious services.

which not only included the monastery itself, but also its lands, subjects and branch monasteries and hermitages together with their estates.

An abbot, once selected, held office for life. Succession to this office was - except in the Bön-po and family monasteries<sup>(1)</sup> - by spiritual reincarnation. In fact all reincarnate abbots were - on a smaller scale - selected and treated as was the supreme incarnation of all Tibet, and honorary abbot of Drepung, the Dalai Lama. Although a reincarnate abbot assumed his spiritual power immediately upon the confirmation of his identity (this may be as early as three years of age), he did not undertake the temporal authority of his office until the age of sixteen or eighteen. During his minority, as in the case of the Dalai Lama, a regent was selected to take charge of his temporal affairs. And although the regent also attended to many of the religious matters, an infant abbot had some rights and obligations in regard to his spiritual office. Some of the period of minority a reincarnate passed with his family - usually in special lodgings near his monastery - but the monastery's

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(1) Succession to high office in Bön-po monasteries was by election and the drawing of lots from a number of candidates who had attained a high academic standard. Appointees, it was pointed out by informants, were usually quite old, and therefore tenure was relatively short.

rights over him necessitated that he be available to distribute blessings and preside over various ceremonies at the monastery. In the event that, upon reaching maturity, an abbot wished to marry, he was permitted to do so.<sup>(1)</sup> But he was obliged to give up his office and residence in the monastery and to live outside the monastery proper, relinquishing his temporal power and some religious authority to a regent. Although his prestige may have decreased and a successor was not sought until his actual death, such a retiring abbot did not lose his spiritual status. Besides the retirement of an abbot for the purpose of marriage, there were other practices which made regency rule quite common in Tibetan monasteries. Abbots frequently were away from their monastery on religious tours and visits to other monasteries, or engaged in religious training. Also many incumbants, both in their youth and old age, were retiring and preoccupied with their religious studies. Such men spend years in seclusion meditating and writing.

Such situations resulted in long periods of regency, thus enhancing the power of that office and the potential of the abbot's religious tutors and monastery mKhan-pos, the group of officers from among which regents were selected.

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(1) Even among the theoretically strictly celibate Gelugs-pa monasteries, this was not uncommon, according to personal informants.

All of these offices, since they were succeeded to by administrative ability and high academic qualifications, and reincarnation of a lower order, provided for a number of criteria by which monastic power was acquired and exercised. Regents after qualifying by those criteria succeeded to the regent's office either by appointment from the previous reincarnation, or from the present one, or by election from the monastery council. As far as is known, tenure in these offices was for life, but that did not mean a long time since incumbents usually took office only at a relatively old age. However, the period of regency often was long, and certainly the death of an abbot, say after an average rule of twenty-five years, would invariably be followed by a regent's rule of almost the same tenure.

The estate. Succession to the office of abbot included the inheritance of a fixed property. There was an estate called the bLa-bran which passed from one incumbent to the other. It consisted of property in cash, kind, land, subjects, a house and household staff.<sup>(1)</sup> bLa-brans were often of considerable size, even larger than the monastery itself, and required administration by a special staff. The bLa-bran

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(1) In some cases these officers were appointed by an outside authority such as the patriarch of the sect. The religious collectors (see below, p. 201) were officers of the monastery who were usually appointed from outside. Personal informants confirm that the Lhasa monasteries effected many appointments in their branch monasteries.

was for the personal use of the abbot, who was its legal head, but upon his death it reverted to the monastery and was passed on to his reincarnation. Although it was economically and administratively quite separate from the monastery, it could not be detached from it.

The bLa-bran's administrative staff was similar to that of the monastery's estate. It consisted of a chief secretary, treasurer, a steward and their assistants (including the trading officers and revenue collectors). In addition, there was a sizable junior staff of monks. Servants, cooks, travelling attendants, bodyguards, temple-keepers and quartermasters were employed in the personal care of the abbot.<sup>(1)</sup> As mentioned, some of these officers were inherited along with the estate. Some monk informants claim that the emotional ties between the servants and friends of one abbot were maintained with his reincarnation. (Since the reincarnation was considered to contain the spirit of their previous master, this kind of devotion to the reincarnation is understandable). It was customary for servants and masters in one life to maintain their relationship in their reincarnated

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(1) Li An-che (1942) describes these offices and their relation to the rest of the administrative organization of one east Tibetan monastery. He also mentioned that within one monastery there sometimes were several bLa-bran belonging to other reincarnations. Rock (1956) and Trungpa (1966) discuss bLa-Bran organization, the former in bKra-shis-hKhyil and the latter in his own monastery (Surmang).

forms. Even servants, when they died, were believed to be reincarnated, and those recognized as such were brought into the service of the same master. (1)

The senior officers of a bLa-bran were appointed by the abbot himself, and they in turn appointed many of their assistants. Like the administrative posts of the monastery, those of the bLa-bran - particularly that of the steward - were highly desirable. They had the reputation of earning considerable wealth for their incumbents. Also their proximity to the abbot brought much prestige. It is assumed that because of the more personal nature of the bLa-bran, that personal factors had a more important part in the qualifications, appointments and tenure of its staff.

It would be misleading to sum up monastic organization either in terms of an administrative hierarchy or in terms of the classes and occupations of monks. As we have seen, there were associations linking academics and business monks, wealthy and poor monks, scholars and administrators. Types of monks and their roles within the monastery and outside it overlapped, but there were three administrative units which were somewhat separate and can be distinguished by their relationship to the abbot. They were the abbot's personal

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(1) Trungpa (1966) discusses these relationships in a personal context.



estate, the bLa-bran, his ecclesiastic and scholastic department, the grva-t'san, and his business department dealing with general management within the monastery and between it and the laity. Each unit had its own sphere of activity and its own administrative system. Besides the ritual activities and residential kan-bzans linked all three administrative spheres and made them interdependent, they remained fairly autonomous. Generally any mobility that occurred was within each unit. Although it was not likely that a poor monk would become a scholar and a member of the scholastic hierarchy, he could become a business officer and gain status in that sphere of activity. Each unit did have its own hierarchy and competition with it allowed considerable mobility up its ranks. And though the executive of each unit had considerable power, it was still subject to the authority of the abbots and regents whose offices were the only ones linking the three spheres.

The operation of abbot's office in the monastery; the effective limits of power

The day-to-day operation of a monastery and the power relations expressed in its structure can best be illustrated by an analysis of the effective limits of power of the key office - that of the abbot. Theoretically the abbot's power in his monastery was absolute. Not only the religious

orientation of the monastery but also its wide practical interests, the use of its resources and the appointment of its officers were all subject to his authority, and no major decision could be made without his approval. As head of a number of monasteries, or even of a whole sect, an abbot's spiritual power, at least, extended throughout his realm. And through that spiritual authority he often exerted political and economic influence.<sup>(1)</sup> Abbots of large or leading monasteries in particular could use their status in the religious hierarchy to extract tribute, not only from subject monasteries, but also from independent devotees.<sup>(2)</sup> One monk informant who studied at Drepung near Lhasa reported that the task of religious collecting was usually given to priests of high status. These priests - who would be seen by the layman as possessing greater spiritual power and propinquity to the hierarchs of the sect - were able, it is said, to elicit larger donations from them. Another monk claimed that when the revered leader of his sect went on tour to the outlying areas of east Tibet, his adherents

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(1) See above (p. 110) regarding the power of the Karmapa leader in influencing succession by reincarnation.

(2) Although Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969) claim that the Sa-sKya hierarch and his capital monasteries were not supported from outside Sa-sKya proper, it is suspected that the religious collectors he describes were, in fact, collecting an unofficial but compulsory tribute for the head monasteries.

there would contribute more generous offerings than they would to a lesser priest. A number of other social practices converted an abbot's spiritual status into economic power. For example, in Tibet, no visit to a priest was made without an offering in either cash or kind. One village woman from the province of Am-do reports that whenever she sent to visit her son at a local monastery, she made an offering to the abbot. In return for those offerings, a blessing was sought, with the belief that the higher the status of the priest, the more effective the blessing. But an abbot's spiritual and economic relation to the laity extended further than these gestures. His skills were often sought to effect settlement of a dispute which could not be handled by local authorities. Payments, together with appeals, were often made by disputants to secure a decision in their favour, providing another source of income to the honourable mediator.

The abbot vis-à-vis other religious authorities. Some abbots learned magical skills and acquired medical and astrological knowledge which were useful in attracting and maintaining a clientele. Even though Tibetans did recognize that spiritual reincarnation did not give a man absolute spiritual power, they nevertheless expected him to be a master of many arts such as astrology, medicine, and divination among

other things.<sup>(1)</sup> And as a result, most ambitious and able abbots did attempt to acquire some of these skills, with varying degrees of success. Informants claimed that if an abbot was skilled in magic, medicine and astrology, he would be preferred to ordinary monks or lay specialists with such skill. Although an abbot had the advantage of his spiritual status, he still had to compete with other religious specialists in the community, both monastic and lay. Naturally, the operation of other religious agents<sup>(2)</sup> in those communities sometimes posed a threat to the power of an abbot and he often had to devote much of his time containing and eliminating that kind of competition. As in the case of blessings and dispute settlement, the exercise of such practical skills by an abbot increased his economic power. There was no actual fee for such services, but the obligatory offering which a client made, did constitute a sizable means of revenue

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(1) Writers on this subject have given the impression that all incarnate lamas are held to be omnipotent by all Tibetan Buddhists, and that the power they possess is ascribed to them. This is incorrect. Tibetans recognize the disparity in the ability and power held by different incarnate abbots. Some are born with more power than others, but also many accumulate more through their own efforts and intelligence. In Dalhousie, India, where there are many incarnate priests heading refugee communities, some are frequently consulted by the laity, because they have a reputation for magic and medical skills, whereas others without such knowledge are not.

(2) Such agents were doctors, sorcerers, divers, oracles, astrologers, and may have been monk or lay people. Cf. power of headman, Chapter V.

for a popular and able practitioner. It is conceivable that the power of a monastery over its local community might have been effectively limited by powerful local religious specialists. One villager reported that a layman would usually seek advice or treatment from his priest in the local monastery, but if a local doctor or astrologer of high repute were available, his services were employed.

The abbot vis-à-vis his family. More than on his magical skills, an abbot's economic power rested on the economic strength of the bLa-bran. As its chief officer, he could use it in any way he wished, provided it was not detached from the monastery as a whole. Its management was of crucial significance, and since the abbot himself could not undertake this task, the steward whom he appointed, was an important officer. It was through the post of the bLa-bran gNyer-pa (steward of the estate) that an abbot's family exercised considerable influence. Even though in theory, members of an abbot's family were excluded from official positions in his monastery, such individuals could use their kinship bond with the abbot to exercise power within the monastic community. Either by becoming monks themselves or by influencing the appointment of an abbot's chief officers, his kinsmen were an effective limit of power, both in regard to the abbot himself, and to his chief officers. If an abbot were mature, and in a position to make appointments himself, he would

often introduce his family into monastic offices - trusting them more than others to manage his affairs - particularly his bLa-bran over which the other officers of the monastery had less control. There are several revealing reports of e/ the incumbants of bLa-bran offices - especially that of steward - being managed by a father, brother, or uncle of an incumbant abbot.<sup>(1)</sup> The most comprehensive study of these relationships is Rock's ethnographic sketch of the estate of the abbot of bKra shis hKhyil in east Tibet. There, at the time of Rock's investigation, two brothers and one uncle of the fifth Jam-byang (reincarnate abbot) assisted the hierarch in the administration of the monastery, while his father and other brothers held important offices among the laity. Since economic power and local following of subject families were so closely linked in Tibet, one's estates were particularly valuable. With a member of his family in charge of his bLa-bran, an abbot had some assurance that the wealth of his estate would not be drained off and that his lands and his subjects would be maintained.

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(1) Rock (1956), pp. 43, 61, re bKra shis hKhyil Monastery and gTsang-sGar Monastery. Bell (1931) re brother of the 8th Dalai Lama. Macdonald (1929), p. 116, and personal informant on Kundeling bLa-bran in Lhasa. Norbu and Turnbull (1968), p. 51, re Tagtser bLa-bran.

The abbot vis-à-vis the church. The general subordination of a monastery to the wider monastic community has been referred to. Although autonomy was a general feature of monastic organization in Tibet, and abbots were (accrued) to have autocratic powers, there were a number of factors operating to limit the dependence of a subsidiary monastery on its church hierarchy (in any sect). Control over the office of abbot was a primary factor; it was effected by the rule that all abbots, particularly when they were young and impressionable, should spend some time training at the head monastery of their sect and reside near the sect patriarch. Further, the head monastery or the patriarch himself appointed the officials of the subordinate institutions, some of whom became the advisors and tutors of the abbot; others were posted to offices through which they could exercise control over the monastic revenue. In the case of the administration of bKra-shis hKhyil Monastery, mentioned above, the sect hierarch (in that case it was the 9th Pan-chen Lama) appointed one of the abbot's tutors while the second was elected from the monastery's own scholastic community.

All the head monasteries, <sup>(1)</sup> especially those of the Gelugs-pa sect, Ganden, Drepung and Se-ra, had such highly

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(1) See above p. 106.

reputed academic standards that monks holding degrees from them enjoyed increased status and prestige wherever they went, particularly of course, in their own monastery. Therefore, many abbots and other monks went to the head monasteries to secure the prized degrees. These values can still be seen in operation among the Tibetan refugees in India. Probably the status of the degrees obtained in the Lhasa monasteries are even more valued today since as yet no institutions equalling them have been established. The Bauxa<sup>(1)</sup> degrees earned by many young Gelugs-pa monks during the last ten years are held to be far inferior to those acquired from Ganden, Drepung or Se-ra, although the Bauxa course and system of training is modelled after the Lhasa centres and many of their teachers are themselves from the old Gelugs-pa academies.

The extent to which the Central Tibetan Government or local leaders could control an abbot and his monastery is difficult to ascertain. All monasteries enjoyed freedom from government tax but that exemption did not always extend to its lay subjects and followers, especially in the case of sects other than the Gelugs-pa. When subjects of a

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(1) Bauxa, in East Bengal, India, during the last decade became the centre of the Gelugs-pa church in exile from Tibet. There, monks of the sect continue some of their scholastic and monastic traditions.



monastery were obliged to pay a government tax, they generally could not sustain allegiance to both the monastery and the government. In regard to such government demands, a monastery could offer little resistance, except perhaps in the border areas where there were no government officers or militia to enforce its tax, and where a foreign power could offer a vulnerable monastery some protection. Unfortunately we have little detailed information about the changes in allegiance of subject families from one land-owning establishment to another. Some informants do confirm that individuals - if not whole families - did alter their allegiance, and Cassinelli and Ekvall imply that this type of relationship was not at all uncommon in Sa-sKya principality.<sup>(1)</sup> Consideration must be given to the possibility that the increased power of the Gelugs-pa church aligned with the central government was increased by expropriation of the estates of private monasteries through tax pressures and even by force. Certainly the growth of the Dalai Lama's regime did coincide with the decline of the once powerful Sa-sKya and Kagyü religious and secular regimes, particularly evident in their decreasing estates.

Mechanisms other than these economic ones were instituted by the central government in order for it to extend its

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall, (1969).

authority over abbots and monasteries in a subtle but effective way: the approval of both the Religious Secretariat and the Patriarch of all Tibet was necessary for the ratification of any and all abbots. Even the Sa-sKya hierarch, after being selected and installed by his own followers, had to present himself to the Dalai Lama for final ratification.

The abbot in relation to his monastery. The ecclesiastical office in Lhasa (the tse-kor) exercised judicial power over all monasteries even though it was officially only represented by the Gelugs-pa church. Disputes which could not be settled by local abbots were referred to this central authority. Such legal recourse provided alternatives both to members and subjects of monasteries and acted as a check on the power of an abbot. However, the greatest restrictions on an abbot's authority generally came from within his own political community. The period of his minority rendered him dependent on the loyalty and selflessness of a number of his subordinate officers. His personal servants and tutors are said to have exercised considerable influence over him, and he often depended on their advice. He relied on his regent to exercise the temporal power vested in him in the abbot's interests, and to relinquish that authority to the abbot when the latter came of age. Since an abbot, for the

most part, remained aloof and separate from his followers, he depended upon his officers for information about the conditions of his estate, and he sought their advice in deciding his administrative policy. The oppressing effect of these conditions is affirmed by a young abbot informant of considerable status. He recounted his own situation in Tibet with some dismay. As an abbot, he said, he was never left alone to see and do things for himself. Surrounded constantly by no less than twelve servants, advisors and bodyguards, he developed a physical as well as a political dependence upon them. He commented that en route from Tibet to India in 1959, his staff was considerably reduced, and so for the first time in his life he experienced a joyous sense of freedom and direct contact with reality. He confided that many young abbots in Tibet were held like prisoners in their monasteries by their own staff.

Given the system of capital management and business methods and the autonomous nature of the steward's office in general, an abbot did have to rely considerably on his steward's loyalty to him and his interest in the monastery as a whole. Of course, ultimately, the abbot did have the authority to dismiss any official and to call an army of monks against any power that threatened his. But that still presupposed the availability of a protective force, and there are cases to illustrate that such a guarantee was not always

available. Rockhill,<sup>(1)</sup> in his travels through the bellicose areas of Amdo in north-east Tibet, reported the dispute that arose between an untrustworthy gNyer-pa (steward) who had been dismissed by his abbot. Upon his expulsion, the gNyer-pa went to the nearby Chinese military forces, mobilized their sympathy and support, and returned to intimidate his excommunicator. A battle broke out between the monks who supported the abbot and those who sympathized with his challenger. By the support of a faction of monks within the monastery, together with the aid of his Chinese soldiers, the gNyer-pa was able to effect his reappointment. Another dispute cited by Prinsep<sup>(2)</sup> illustrates how the method of succession by reincarnation was manipulated to challenge an abbot's rights to his office. In that case the identity of the reincarnate abbot of C'ab-mdo Monastery in Khams province, long after his installation, was challenged by the head of another monastery who claimed to be the rightful C'ab-mdo abbot. A feud broke out between the two disputants and their followers and was only quelled by intervention from the Dalai Lama and the Peking authorities who finally awarded the C'ab-mdo throne to the challenger.

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(1) Rockhill (1891a).

(2) Prinsep (1851) pp. 133 - 4. See also Campbell (1875), p. 138.

Within his monastery, an abbot's power was made more secure by the appointment of his kinsmen to key offices. Besides the bLa-bran positions mentioned above, a monk's kinsmen were also to be found in the monastery's scholastic ranks, often in the capacity of mKhan-po. It was unlikely that an abbot's kinsman would have a low status, regardless of his ability. There are no accounts of kinsmen being appointed as tutors to their own relative, but there is one report that the brother of an abbot (the 9th Pan-chen Lama of Tashi Lhun-po Monastery) became his brother's regent after the hierarch's death and before the installation of the successor. (1)

The abbot vis-à-vis the local laity

Kinship ties between an abbot and the local laity operated to further secure his power while promoting their own. Although villages and monasteries were not comprised of members from one clan, families did claim clan membership, especially in the eastern regions of Amdo and Khams. Locality was a factor uniting monks (in the kan-bzans) and for the most part, villagers owed allegiance to their local monastery. Kinship ties among Tibetans were not strong, but it does appear that local ties were, and it is safe to

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(1) Bell (1931), p. 155.

assume that it was preferable for a monastery to recruit its abbot from among the local families. We have one example of this relationship operating in a Sherpa village in Nepal. Snellgrove<sup>(1)</sup> cites the case of two candidates who were competing for the post of abbot of Jiwong Nyingma Monastery; one candidate was a local boy, the other was an outsider from Lhasa. Though the local people acquiesced to the choice and installation of the foreign candidate by the Lhasa ecclesiastic authorities, they retained their own claimant and found him a position in that same monastery.

On the one hand, a local abbot was seen as a patron of his own community; a leader known to the villagers would be expected to have greater concern than an outsider for their interests, to have more tolerance and kindness with them, and to employ the locals as his junior officers. On the other hand, a local abbot, particularly in regard to his succession and his own family ties, was seen as a possible source of conflict in the community. There was always the danger that an abbot's office would be monopolized by a local powerful family. There are indications that small monasteries

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(1) Snellgrove (1957), p. 217. Cf. the report of the incarnate abbots in the Mewu Fantzu monasteries (Stubel, H., 1958).

especially were dominated by local families.<sup>(1)</sup> Local families were influential not only in regard to their own subject families, but also with other families - even subjects of other establishments - in their own locality. There are some suggestions that in order to ensure his influence, an abbot would try to gain the support of local chiefs as devotees. However, the extensive development and use of succession by reincarnation was an effective factor in minimizing the influence of any single family over a monastery and in lessening the conflict between families competing for the abbotship.

As a further means of reducing conflict, there was, in some areas of the Tibetan Buddhist world, a rule restricting candidature to residents outside the monastery's district or province. Such a rule was practised in the selection of the Mongolian Patriarch and the hierarchs of the chief Bön-po monastery. An informant reports that residents of the central Tibetan provinces of Ü and gTsang were excluded from the competition for the abbotship of sMan-ri.

An abbot of a Tibetan monastery did have absolute authority within his realm, but whether or not he could exercise it fully was subject, as we have seen from the above

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall make several references to the power relations between local families and monasteries (1969), pp. 98, 106, 112. See also Rock (1947), p. 355, and Ekvall (1939), p. 70.

discussion, to a number of factors. In addition to spiritual power, an abbot possessed temporal power with which to administer his followers. His spiritual and temporal powers were not as distinct as might first seem the case. They were, rather, complementary and mutually beneficial; the spiritual served to support the temporal power while it in turn enhanced the spiritual authority. Furthermore, peoples' temporal allegiance to an abbot usually coincided with spiritual allegiance. In return for the support of his followers, an abbot and his monastery had a number of obligations to fulfil. Laymen had to be advised and protected, both in regard to physical and spiritual dangers and observances. They had to gain entry into the monastic institutions and have opportunities for success both in the present and future life; and they had to be assisted in attaining a better position and salvation in the afterlife. As a bodhisattva, the abbot was held by his devotees, to be particularly qualified to perform these duties.

To a great extent, the temporal power of an abbot was limited by the nature of his spiritual position; he was sacred and had to remain aloof and protected; he was young and had to be trained; as a priest he had to master the skills of a holy man, and as a member of a religious organization and hierarchy, he had to accept his position in it.



Since much of an abbot's spiritual authority came from the tradition of his ancestors, this too was an effective limitation on his authority. A reincarnate abbot inherited his status and wealth from his spiritual ancestors, and therefore had an obligation both to maintain their traditions and their estates. Although leadership was expected of him, initiation of new practices and policies by him was difficult because of that heritage. Any ambitions an abbot had, were likely to be channelled into economic enterprises and the pursuit of religious knowledge and skills, or into local politics. When it is remembered that an abbot's position in the spiritual hierarchy and in the networks of monasteries was relatively fixed, one can understand why his authority was generally limited to his own monastery and locality. If he were ambitious, it was at this level that his energies and ability would be articulated.

In most cases an incarnate priest had no choice in regard to his spiritual status and role as the leader of a monastic community. Although, upon reaching maturity, he had the possibility of casting off the roles ascribed to him - either by exercising the autocratic power that was theoretically his, or by enjoining in a completely lay life - the role he finally adopted was very much determined by political and economic conditions of the social system within which he operated.

Conclusions

In view of this presentation of monastic organization and leadership, the question arises as to where the actual strength of a monastery lay, and what its role was in the local community. Was it the abbot, the business force, or the scholastic body of monks who gave character and strength to the monastic organization? Or, to put it in more abstract terms, was it the leadership, the economic basis or the ideology and tradition of the monastery which gave this unit of social organization such prominence in Tibetan society?

Although the importance of scholastic achievement has been alluded to, attention has not yet been focussed on this aspect of monastic organization. The scholars (dpé-cha-wa) did not constitute an overt political force. However, they did manage to survive despite the economic, domestic, and militaristic preoccupation of monastic communities. They also managed to dominate the chief offices of the monastery, those of the abbot and the regent. Access to the most prestigious positions in Tibetan society was by two methods: a) spiritual reincarnation, and b) acquisition of religious knowledge and academic skills, both of which involved some period of training and study in a monastery, and scholastic achievement. Kinship ties and economic power often facilitated the attainment of religious prestige, they were not the sole means of achieving success. Intelligence and fortitude were necessary components. These factors provided

a realistic basis for the ideology-promoted in Tibetan society - that honour and prestige was available to anyone in the society and achievement was a matter of personal skills and ability. Academic achievement not only provided a man with prestige; it was a common prerequisite to the highest political offices. Academic achievement and political power went hand in hand. Their relationship was established by the 12th century alliances between the political and religious leaders and the eventual combination of these roles into one office. But there was more than an historical basis for its strength. Scholars acquired both literary knowledge and skills which administrative offices demanded. In fact, they monopolized those skills. Furthermore, knowledge of the sacred books symbolized spiritual power, and spiritual power was a means to economic power. (Indeed, a man was almost expected to increase his wealth as a result X of his spiritual power). More power was (accrued) to the scholar class as a result of their prominent role in the choice and ratification of their hierarchs. It was this group who sought out, tested and detected the incarnate abbots, and then trained the young hierarchs.

The strength and character of local monasteries in Tibet can, in part, be explained by the local lay community to which it was attached economically and from which it drew

many of its members and devotees. By virtue of its economic organization and religious function, a monastery had close relations with the laity. It was not a self-sufficient economic community but operated more as an entrepreneur and landlord. In addition, as a celibate community, it was dependent on the local laity to provide new members and leaders.

As a whole, the monastery was the best equipped institution to serve the everyday needs - mundane and spiritual - of the laity. It educated the young, employed them, treated illnesses, dispensed advice, mediated in disputes, performed religious services and provided refuge for travellers and protection against aggressors. As a central meeting place for business, ritual and political purposes, it played a prominent role in all these social institutions. In addition, its residential organization - in the form of nestling kan-bzans and family cells - provided a structure around which local and kinship ties could be articulated.

To manage the economy and to answer the needs of the laity, a large proportion of the monastic community had to be employed in secular affairs. These offices, besides providing the skills and material benefits already mentioned, were probably the primary means of social mobility and the acquisition of power - both within and outside the monastery. Achievement in business and military enterprises and in administration was rewarded both in economic and political

terms. Within one monastery at least, a man could move through the administrative hierarchy to become chief steward, or bodyguard to high officers such as the abbot. In some cases he might even become an abbot. If he did not wish to remain in the monastery, a man could leave it at any point without shame, and he could take with him the status, skills, and some of the wealth he had acquired therein, to establish himself in a private business as a layman. It was common for a monk to enter the lay community and establish a business such as astrology, divination, medicine, etc.

The claim was made earlier that it was through religious and academic achievements that much mobility took place. While that is true, there were some limitations, for, among the dpe-cha-wa there were fewer places and greater competition. Therefore, it was in the business community where most social mobility, although of a lower order, took place. The business community offered more variety, more positions and more readily tangible results. There, less mental and physical discipline was required of the monks. (It was here that young men from villages and camps would be more comfortable.) Mobility through the monastery is consistent with two ideals of Tibetan society: a) that religious pursuit itself is the means of enlightenment, and b) that the ecclesiastical organization of Tibet was the primary means through which social mobility was achieved; it represented the common man in Tibetan political relations.

The business and military community of the monastery, more than anything else, enabled it to enjoy relative independence from the central authorities. Any power that the latter exercised was likely through the dpè-cha-was. This scholastic group was more significant to the outside religious authorities, with which it had closer ties. The dpè-cha-wa was responsible for maintaining the teaching and the religious ideology and interpreting the doctrine to the local laity. Together with the central authorities, it took an active part in the selection and training of the monastery abbot. The dpè-cha-wa community should be seen as an expression of the power of a central or head monastery over its branches.

It is somewhat surprising that in view of the strength of the Gelugs-pa sect throughout Tibet and the control over the central government that the minority sects and smaller monasteries were able to survive at all. The economic basis of monasteries outlined above partially explains their continuation. Much of the autonomy they enjoyed was that given to them by the central authorities. Minority groups showing minimal allegiance to Lhasa were allowed to manage their own affairs. For the most part, they chose their own leaders, and collected financial support from wherever they could. Had Lhasa not tolerated any minority sect activity, the latter would likely have sought refuge in the distant border areas as many had already done, or they would have collaborated

with alien governments offering better terms. All the minority sects were pre-Gelugs-pa representatives of Tibet's past and its early religious tradition. The autonomy the minority sects enjoyed was a reflection of the respected and historical status accorded them by the contemporary rulers.

CHAPTER V  
VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

The majority of the lay population of Tibet resided in small towns and hamlets scattered throughout the 800,000 square miles of mountains and valleys which constituted Tibet proper and its affiliated border states. From all accounts, villages with an average population of ten to twenty families had an administrative system standardized by the eighteenth century Chinese reforms.<sup>(1)</sup> That basic similarity stood even though there were some regional differences. In the following pages our task will be to outline the general characteristics of village organization; an examination will be made of the conditions under which authority was articulated at various points in the system, and how power was challenged, acquired and exercised. This will introduce us to the general social and economic structure of the village and define its relationship to the wider polity.

The taxation and the system of land-holding were so clearly defined and standardized that the organization of the village was largely determined by the economy of the

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(1) See Petech (1950), pp. 233 - 236.



country. Almost all villagers were engaged in part or full-time agricultural activities: growing crops and herding. They were tenants holding their plots and houses from one of the three land-holding establishments: the Central Government, the Nobility or the Monastery.<sup>(1)</sup> These comprised the privileged land-owning establishments in Tibet. They were authorized to levy taxes in cash, kind and labour, and to exercise jurisdiction over each of their respective subjects. Villagers therefore were economically and legally tied to the estates of one of these establishments. Although most of the monasteries and noblemen were in some way related to the central administrative system in Lhasa, there were some private monasteries, semi-independent principalities such as Sa-sKya, and even some semi-independent chieftains which held landlord status.

Carrasco has adequately summarized the fragmented descriptions of the landholding system which prevailed throughout the country for the last century and a half. His monograph<sup>(2)</sup> provides the most up-to-date description of the peasantry in Tibet in terms of that system. The basic unit of land in the villages was the household allotment (zin-khams)

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(1) Not all monasteries held land. See Chapter IV.

(2) Carrasco (1959).

held by each tenant family. The head of the family was responsible for the payment of taxes. Sometimes, within an allotment, there were a number of landholders or workers (yul-pa) under the household head. It is claimed<sup>(1)</sup> that there was a remarkable stability in the number of holdings, attributed to the rule of indivisibility through inheritance, and by the subjects' relative inability to transfer their holdings.

Although the system of agriculture and landholding had what might be called a restricting and stabilizing influence in the village, there was another facet of the economy which had as much influence in establishing dynamic and wide range relationships. From all accounts trade was a common industry throughout Tibet. Almost the entire population was engaged in the transportation and sale of goods on at least a part-time basis. Even monks, en route from one monastery to another, carried goods to be sold and exchanged, and no pilgrimage was undertaken without extensive trading activities. That situation was not the result of some particular inborn Tibetan entrepreneurial spirit. It was in response to the ecological conditions and to the lack of vehicles which could have carried much larger loads than could men

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(1) Carrasco (1959), p. 79, (after Chen (1949)), Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969) and Peter, Prince (1963).

and animals. In addition, and perhaps more significant, politico-economic conditions encouraged widespread participation in trade. The inflexible landholding system prevented land from being bought, sold or subdivided. Unless one was officially invested with land<sup>(1)</sup> or secured it by force, there were no formal means by which a man could increase his holdings, or acquire ownership rights.<sup>(2)</sup> Nevertheless, though tenant farmers were obliged to work the plot they had inherited and to pay various rents and taxes to the landlord, it was not uncommon for plots to be abandoned or at least, for some members of a tenant household to leave the farm.<sup>(3)</sup> Those who did, entered a monastery or went into a trading business.

Even if a tenant continued to work his land, because of the wholesale nature of the economy, he or his sons would

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- (1) Landlords had acquired their land generations earlier by virtue of their political status and noble ancestry. Monastery landlords had received grants from the government and local chiefs and nobles. Otherwise new estates were limited to the families of incarnate abbots of monasteries and heroes who had given exceptional service to the government.
- (2) Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p.60, noted that new land in the Sherpa communities was sometimes acquired through a wife's dowry, but there is no reference to such a practice operating in Tibet proper. To maintain their holding, a family without a male heir often adopted their sons-in-law. See Peter, Prince (1963), pp. 309, 315, 418, 421.
- (3) One informant reports that many of his fellow villagers left their plots, but it was difficult for a whole family to abandon its holding and its landlord.

have to engage in some entrepreneurial activities in order to sell surplus produce and buy necessary household goods. Since neither trade nor trade profits were not, and could not, be closely checked and controlled by government tax, they thereby offered traders a potentially large margin of profit. Most of all, engagement in trade provided the peasants with some economic and political emancipation, both from their immediate superiors and from the landlord.

#### Family structure and village organization

Clans were evidently of small importance to the village structure. Neither the investigations of Cassinelli and Ekvall nor Carrasco even mention the role of clans in local administration. Two earlier works on sedentary Tibetan populations<sup>(1)</sup> do suggest the organization of families into clans, but do not go so far as to relate clan structure to village structure. All writers imply what Fürer-Haimendorf states explicitly in his Sherpa study: that is, that although lineages were recognized, they were not a social unit articulated in village organization.<sup>(2)</sup>

All evidence on Tibetan family life strongly suggests that there was not a great deal of stress placed on family

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(1) Walsh (1906), pp. 303 - 308 and Ekvall (1939).

(2) Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 102.

cohesion, and that although kinship was sometimes a factor in succession to political office, it was minimal, often giving way to economic and personal principles. The monastic ideals, the mobile economy, the high infant mortality, all placed a premium upon withdrawal from family life and therefore weakened the ideal of fatherhood and biological ancestry. Both the monastic ideology and organization contributed to the fragmentation of the extended family household, thus leaving the nuclear family comprising the household unit. The monastery attracted and recruited young children into their ranks, it provided accommodation and occupation for aged persons and for unmarried women. The highly revered method by which abbots were selected, the family kan-bzans residential units in the monastery, and the priests' demands for servants all functioned to draw young boys away from their parents and households at a very early age. All these factors stressed the relations other than those of kinship on which a member could rely for care, leadership training and employment. (1)

Neither did economic patterns encourage the cohesion of a family household unit. Although family members combined efforts in some agricultural activities such as farming and cottage industries, and cooperation of household members was

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(1) See Chapter IV on monastic organization.

essential at harvest times, the practices of transhumance and distant wholesale trading expeditions - activities monopolized by males - generally drew the husbands and sons away from their households for long periods of time. But even where cooperation between sexes or otherwise was necessary, friendships and monastic bonds and simply local ties predominated over those of kinship. For example, there were cooperative economic mechanisms referred to as "trading friends"<sup>(1)</sup> which had a local rather than kin basis. In Sikkim, it is reported<sup>(2)</sup> that the Lepchas within a given village met shortages by borrowing crops from their neighbour, and that their exogamous trading societies were established on a purely economic basis. The Tibetan feature of a fairly equal distribution of labour and sharing of tasks further minimized the influence of kinship in social organization. Lack of information on secondary offices in villages of central Tibet prevent generalization, but it was customary in many Tibetan border societies that minor offices and communal village services were circulated throughout the community. Attendants of local temples, assistants to headmen, feast-organizers, corvee managers, succeeded to office

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(1) Norbu and Turnbull (1968), p. 58; Gorer (1967), p. 118, and Miller (1956).

(2) Gorer (1967), p. 121.

on a regular basis by a rule of circulating succession.<sup>(1)</sup>

Besides monastic ideals and the general belief that to relinquish family life in the pursuit of religious ideals was a great virtue, there were many more humble beliefs which fragmented family relations. The superstitions associated with illness in general and infant mortality in particular prompted mothers to give up their children either to monasteries, or to other households. To avert illness, parents sometimes promised a child to the monastery; it was not uncommon for a priest to take a child on as a servant in return for restoring health to his family. An old Ladakhi mother told me that her son was promised to the local monastery even before his birth, for at the time of a severe illness in the family, she vowed that if health were restored, she would offer her next born son to the community of monks. Oracles often exerted more influence than priests in effecting the separation of a child from its parent, for many women believed that the frequent death of their infants was induced by malevolent spirits and offended deities. Oracles and astrologers whose advice was frequently sought as to where a woman should bear and rear her child sometimes suggested a change of household. A Tibetan of my acquaintance

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(1) Gorer, p. 131, Walsh (1906), p. 307, and Führer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 114.

explained that one of the reasons he hardly knew his younger sister was because immediately after her birth, his mother removed her to the house of an aunt many miles from their home. The mother had been advised to take such action on the belief that a spirit which had earlier killed two other female infants was still in her house and would harm any other females who remained there. Another case comes from a wealthy noble family in Lhasa. After the death of her first son, the noblewoman consulted an oracle - not of her husband's family but of her own parents' household - which said that it had killed the child because it had not been born in its household. At the time of her next pregnancy, the woman, following the oracle's advice, delivered and cared for her baby in her parents' house.

All these features of social life resulted in certain characteristic household and village compositions. First, villages were often constituted of a number of clusters of households which were not related by kinship. The clusters tended to form a cohesive unit in which locality was promoted as an important relationship.<sup>(1)</sup> Second, the monastic communities, while de-emphasizing kin relations, encouraged ties

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(1) Gorer (1967) writing about the local trading societies in Sikkim, suggests that the ingzong trading relationship of the Lepcha people was established as a substitute for the kin relations which were lacking (p. 120).



among its members according/<sup>to</sup>locality and place of birth. Third, since it was common on the one hand for boys to travel about with their fathers and to be sent to train with uncles and brothers, and on the other for girls to bear and rear their children without a husband, and to be sent to a relative to live, there were disproportionately-sexed households in even non-monastic communities. Many households, it is reported were purely of one sex only.<sup>(1)</sup>

Fourth, there were very wide kinship categories and the classificatory kinship terminology was used. Informants speak of the ready acceptance of adopted family members, both complete strangers and distant kinsmen. They referred to all members of their own generation in the same household as brother or sister, distinguishing them only by seniority and sex. Norbu (1968), writing of his youth in Tibet,<sup>(2)</sup> recalls that "a number of men (in his village) were called brother by my father...they were really not his brothers. Their mothers I called grandmother." This illustrates a very broad brother category. It was noticed that still, among the Tibetan refugees in India, elder men - especially those

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(1) Li's (1947) analysis of two hundred and ninety families in the eastern district of De-ge distinguishes four types of families: one composed of males only, one composed of females only, and two heterosexual.

(2) Norbu and Turnbull (1968), p. 54.

respected in their community - were called pa-la (father), and any housemaid whose primary duty was to care for the children, regardless of her kin relationship to them, was called a-chè, a term also applied to both maternal and paternal aunts.

Fifth, there was with the de-emphasis on the superiority of a lineage head and on physical ancestry, a corresponding emphasis on the importance of personal qualities and local relation in the choice of a community's leader. Together with the suppression of the father role of the household head as an advisor, educator and progenitor, there was the emphasis on the paternalistic role of both the village headman and the priest and ritual specialists.

Although village organization is not directly related to family structure and kinship ties, it can be seen how lack of family cohesion provided certain limitations and particularly how it strengthened the importance of local and religious ties. An examination of the administrative structure of Tibetan villages will elucidate the system of local government in accordance with those local and religious factors. The Tibetan system of local government was relatively simple. Internally, a village was administered by headmen and other local men; externally it was administered by a district officer and finally a landlord.

Internal Administration and the headman<sup>(1)</sup>

The headman was himself a member of the village community. He may have achieved his position by inheritance but that was not the sole means of succession; a headman was often elected by the villagers and sometimes he was appointed by higher authorities. But, by whichever means a man succeeded to this office, the villagers' sanction of the incumbent was necessary. His term of office was not generally prescribed: a headman could continue in office for any length of time as long as he had public approval. Informants report that it was common for a man, once elected, to periodically receive a nominal re-election. Three and five years are mentioned as the official terms of office for headmen whose appointments were subject to reconsideration.

Since the headman was recognized by the outside administrators (the wider polity) as the representative of the village or of a number of subject families,<sup>(2)</sup> he had obligations both to his local community and to the higher authorities. In regard to the latter, the headman's duties were

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(1) The Tibetan name for this office cannot be specified. According to Ekvall (1939, 1964) and personal informants, go-wa (head one) was a common term used in many areas of Tibet. But other authors describing officers with functions similar to that of a headman, have used the terms tsho-pa, gar-pon, no-no, Za-dPon, or sDe-pa.

(2) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 85, report that in Sa-sKya, headmen were responsible for from 10 - 35 families.

primarily economic. He was responsible for the demographic and agricultural data on which tax figures were based, assessment of property for the distribution of seed, the collection and storage of taxes in kind and cash, and for the assemblage of transport and military labour. Generally, the headman together with the council of elders was responsible for maintaining village discipline and harmony. He had the authority to mediate in internal disputes and to take steps to bring about settlements, although he was not entitled to adjudicate and fine disputants.<sup>(1)</sup> If the landlord resided nearby, the headman dealt directly with him, but if he was an absentee landlord, the headman was responsible to a district officer or steward.

In regard to the villagers, the headman had some economic duties, but his primary role was as an administrator. Certain communal activities, such as protection of the forests, collection of wood and preparation for the festivals were carried out by the villagers themselves, their tasks being delegated by the headman. He had to receive and report injuries and complaints from his people to the higher authorities, and to protect the interests of the former. For example

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(1) Cf. Walsh (1906), pp. 304-8, who reports that the senior headmen (kong-du) representing a number of villages, had magisterial powers.

if a family were too poor to work its allotment of land and to pay the standard tax for that holding, they would appeal through the headman for a tax reduction. Unsettled internal disputes and those involving another community were referred by the headman to higher authorities. In some cases, land abandoned by former subjects was turned over to the headman who had the power to reallocate such property.<sup>(1)</sup>

Some headmen had ritual responsibilities, and so were required to initiate and preside over certain ceremonies, especially those related to the economy of the village such as harvest ceremonies. Walsh reports that at the time of the election of the kong-dus in Chumbi Valley, the incumbants were required to spend a considerable portion of their wealth on entertainment at their own installation ceremonies.<sup>(2)</sup> They had also to participate in ceremonies pledging allegiance to a local deity who, they believed, invested them with their temporal authority. The Sherpa pembu, according to Fürer-Haimendorf, were called upon to perform such duties as the purification of ritually polluted persons and sometimes to perform the funeral rites of one of his wards in the event that the latter had no heirs or kinsmen in the village.

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(1) Rockhill (1891), p. 220, and Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 124, noted this practice.

(2) Walsh (1906), p. 306.

In some cases headmen were assisted in their administration of village affairs by other villagers. Some of these minor officers were appointed by the headman or by the village council for a short term. Mainly concerned with community affairs and communal property, they performed such tasks as cutting grass and wood on communal property and grazing the community's livestock.

Some villages had a council of elders (rGan-pa) consisting of several senior members of the community. As a non-corporate body and operating in a society when ancestry was not an important principle, the rGan-pa had no official function or rights. It seems that, where they did function, they were rather like an ad hoc committee which met to decide on internal matters such as disputes. As an informal judicial unit, it is doubtful that this council could have exercised any official control over the headman and there is no mention of their relationship to the wider polity, that is, the district officer and the landlord.<sup>(1)</sup>

The headman was the pivotal office in relations between the social unit of the village and the wider Tibetan polity. The few descriptions we have of internal village structure have generally implied that the headman was a rather impotent

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(1) ~~border nomads, there is little mention of these elders' councils in the literature.~~  
 Except for Ekvall's report on the government of Kansu ~~border nomads, there is little mention of these elders' councils in the literature.~~

force vis-à-vis the wider polity and that within the village he held a stable position.<sup>(1)</sup> But these suggestions appear to be unfounded and we shall in the following pages examine the headman's office in detail, in an attempt to understand its relation to the wider polity and within the local community.

First, in a relatively stable village, the headman was an indigenous leader. His kin and local ties to the subject villagers bound him to that community and excluded him from membership in the landlord class.<sup>(2)</sup> Probably, in addition to his local bonds, the smallness of the community over which he presided, functioned to identify the headman as a paternal figure. The claim is made by all writers on this subject that a headman's influence in the village was largely dependent on his personality and individual prestige. Cassinelli and Ekvall report that even where the office was acquired by heredity, the heir was expected to possess prestigious qualities and

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(1) Norbu and Turnbull (1968) claim that the headman had no real authority in Tibetan villages. Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969) cast the headman in a paternal role. They substantiate this conclusion by accounts of the duties of the headman, and by the reports of informants' concepts of their headmen. Their paternalistic image of the headman may be correct but it does not justify their conclusion that this official had no significant role in the wider political community.

(2) The nobility was endogamous and the government was comprised of only noble and church officials. Succession by heredity and the close contact that a headman had to maintain with his villagers prevented his membership in a monastery.

e/ administrative skill.<sup>(1)</sup> In cases where an incumbent secured the headmanship by election, personal factors were important. One villager from the eastern province of Amdo confirms that the headman was a paternal figure. She claimed that they (there were five headmen in her village) had no governmental authority but acted rather as advisors. She added that they received no salary for their services but only voluntary gifts<sup>(2)</sup> and tax-free land; that was a characteristic of public office which, according to many authors, was widespread in Tibet.

The headman as a priest. The superstitious nature of the Tibetan people is well recorded. At every point in their lives, they relied on priests, shaman, oracles and astrologers to help them make their daily decisions. With the belief that the cause of every event was supernatural and that incidents could be foretold by human media, Tibetans relied on the insights and predictions of religious agents to control supernatural forces. The ordinary Tibetan layman was not himself equipped with the knowledge and skill to communicate with supernatural forces. His main means of control and protection was through the employment of religious specialists

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969) Chapter 4.

(2) These were often quite substantial.



who were not confined to celibate communities with standardized methods. Throughout Tibet, seers, oracle media and medical men were found amongst the laity; some were full-time specialists but many were part-time, combining their religious role with other mundane ones. Among those part-time practitioners were village headmen. Tucci incidentally reported the medical and divinatory skill of a headman whom he met on his travels in Tibet and from whom he received treatment.<sup>(1)</sup> In that case the headman was the leader of a caravan of nomads. Cassinelli and Ekvall noted that an acting village headman in Sa-sKya was, among other things, a sorcerer who performed divinations, exorcised and treated illness. In the case cited by them, it is implied that the headman's poor reputation and unpopularity were a result of his unsuccessful attempts to cure an ill subject.<sup>(2)</sup>

It is conceivable that headmen, upon gaining success as ritual specialists, may have forfeited their temporal office,

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(1) Tucci (1967), p. 143.

(2) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 91. Cf. Gorer (1967), p. 130, discussing the role of the headman in a Sikkimese village, notes that lamas could and did become headmen, but does not mention the ritual role of lay headmen. Cf. Norbu and Turnbull (1968), pp. 69, 73, where the role of the headman in nomadic communities is briefly discussed. These writers confirm that the religious nature of the headman was a factor in his selection.

but until we have actual evidence of that we must assume that more often their religious activities remained part-time and only a supplement to their administrative duties.

Besides the headman, there were usually other members<sup>(1)</sup> of the community who possessed magical skills, and this introduces another element into the power relations in the village. Villagers could employ any of a number of agents and their choice was to a large extent, determined by kin and economic factors, but a religious practitioner's personal reputation was also a factor attracting his clientele. My informants have insisted that a man was free to consult any of a number of religious agents when he required information of a supernatural nature, advice or medical treatment. They claimed that when seeking service, they went to the practitioner whom they heard was the best in their locality. One informant said that while his parents preferred to consult a monk in a nearby monastery with whom they were familiar, when for some reason that monk was not available, they secured the services of their headman. The point illustrated here is that in Tibetan villages, any one of a number of local people - including the headman - could and did compete for employment

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(1) Every community required their own oracle to communicate with the local deity, a temple keeper, and a hail-chaser. In some villages these tasks were performed by full-time specialists who enjoyed tax-free plots in recognition of their services to the community.

in religious services. The presence of skilled and popular practitioners other than the headman presented a challenge to his power and prestige. They sometimes did put a limitation on his authority, but a headman possessing religious skills on a par with those of the specialists could overcome that limitation.

The headman as patron. Of course, the headman's reputation and power were not based exclusively on the religious factor. In addition to any ritual power he might use to increase his power, there were economic factors. Besides his official economic position between the landlord and the subject families, many headmen had a supplementary economic role in the community consistent with the paternal nature of their office. Most headmen had considerable wealth: in fact they were often the wealthiest men in their community. Some of that wealth may have been acquired prior to their holding office, but much was unofficially acquired after their appointment. There was no salary but through nominal gifts in recognition of his status, through concessions from the landlord, and with earnings from ritual services, the office of headman offered its incumbents considerable material rewards. There are indications that a headman was usually wealthy enough to hire labourers to work his own land holdings and

to provide capital and credit to subject families.<sup>(1)</sup> This patron role was not only exercised among a headman's own subject families, but also to some which were not within his jurisdiction. Although Macdonald's report is the only one to explicitly state the broker role of the headman, it is strongly suspected that the practice was widespread in Tibet. Macdonald further declares that most villagers were usually in debt to their headman. Such a relationship inevitably strengthened the headman's power in the local community and it can be assumed that the "paternal" nature of the headman's role had something of a patron-client basis.

The importance of the headman as a broker varied: the availability of alternative sources of capital, the nature of the economic activities of a community and the extent to which they required capital, were variable conditions affecting the economic power of the headman. If there were no alternative creditors and capital was needed to maintain a trading business or to support a monk, a headman was sometimes an important creditor. And the availability of other

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 91, 96, and Macdonald (1932), p. 121. Cf. Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), pp. 122 - 3 in which the pembu's wards are referred to as 'clients'. Further, Fürer-Haimendorf suggests that a pembu could use his authority in regard to abandoned monastery village land to increase his own holdings and economic power.

creditors depended upon the proximity of priests, wealthy nobles and traders. A monastery or large town usually provided these alternatives as it was common for priests of high status to hold land and operate trading businesses.<sup>(1)</sup>

Just as religious practitioners provided alternative means of leadership to the villagers, so the presence of prominent families and priests, and of other headmen, all provided economic alternatives. There are indications that those factors threatened the power of a headman over even his own subject families. It is reported that in the SHab district of Sa-sKya principality, headmen, responsible to the Sa-sKya government for subject families in that district, "were monopolized by prominent (local) families", and, that those local notables succeeded in retaining considerable power in the district despite the government's attempts at centralization.<sup>(2)</sup> The report does not explain exactly by what means the prominent families limited the power of the headmen, but it does

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(1) It is well known that wealthy priests in Tibet engaged in moneylending businesses. Kawaguchi (1909), p. 349, described the moneylending customs of priests. He reported that it was customary for poor scholar monks to borrow money from wealthier ones both for their maintenance while preparing for examination, and for their celebration tea which, upon the receipt of his degree, a monk was expected to sponsor.

(2) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 105.

imply that they did so through their economic influence. Even without official authorization, these other people (priests, local notables, wealthy families) could provide almost all the needs of the subject families that were, in theory, to be provided by the headmen.

In this list of alternative leaders, other headmen must be included. According to the system of headmen-subject family ties, headmen were allotted a certain number of families rather than a locality or a whole village. Thus there were often several headmen operating within the same village or area, and with their wards interspersed.<sup>(1)</sup> There are no cases reported of actual disputes among headmen arising from such a distribution of their families. Nor is there any indication that there were laws allowing subject families to switch their allegiance from one headman to another. But reports of succession (to the office of headman) by rotation suggest that such a method of succession was in some cases a mechanism instituted to minimize conflict between nearby headmen. The alternating system of succession practised by the Sherpa Pembus<sup>(2)</sup> and the institution of a council of

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), Chapter 4, and Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 117 describe such an arrangement. Their reports are substantiated by those of my own informants.

(2) Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 101.

senior headmen (Kong-du) operating in the Chumbi Valley<sup>(1)</sup> may have functioned to minimize conflict among village officials.

Although little has been cited about the operation of a village council or committee of elders in relation to the office of headman,<sup>(2)</sup> there are some reports indicating that these bodies, where they did exist, exercised some influence over the headman. Ekvall<sup>(3)</sup> attributed considerable power to the rGan-po in the Kansu-Tibetan border communities, particularly among tribes who had no chief, and Sandberg<sup>(4)</sup> states explicitly that the village elders actually elected the headman. However, David-Neel<sup>(5)</sup> in her detailed description of the operation of a council of elders in a Bhutanese-Tibetan border village makes no reference to their power in relation to the headman. All that can be concluded from the evidence we have before us is that although the headman's power was sometimes limited by village councils, it was not a rule.

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(1) Walsh (1906), pp. 304 - 8.

(2) Neither of the two most intensive studies on Tibetan village organization, one by Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), and the other by Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), refer to the elders' councils.

(3) Ekvall (1939), p. 70.

(4) Sandberg (1894), p. 191.

(5) David-Neel (1936), p. 35. Cf. the accounts of village administration in Ladak. Cunningham (1884), p. 131 and Francke (1906), p. 325, both refer to the role of village elders in dispute settlement, but do not mention their relationship to the headman.

The headman and the landlord. As indicated above, there was little contact between the landlord and the headmen of his subject families. There were no kinship relations, nor was there any local tie since in most cases the landlord was in an urban area far from his village. However, there was a personal relationship, which is referred to as "domestic", operating between these two levels of administration which did, in fact, affect the headman's power. In Tibet, lords and clerics required household servants and it was customary for them to have a domestic and business staff of considerable size. Generally, servants were recruited from the subject families in the village of the landlord. As might be expected, employment as a landlord's servant was a common aspiration of villagers. A Lhasa nobleman's son informed me that his father (he was a ZHabs-pad or minister and owned eight villages) appointed village headmen from the ranks of his household servants. My informant added that young servants from the villages often became the confidants and bodyguards of young scions such as himself. Loyal servants were often rewarded for their service in the lord's manor with appointments as headmen back in the villages. (Naturally, such appointments were subject to conditions in the village, some of which have been discussed in the previous pages). Kinship ties operated in a slightly different way where the landlord



was a monastery. The monastery's business officer (the gNyer-pa) administered its estates, but like other landlords, it had local headmen to attend to internal affairs of its subjects and to collect the revenue. Those headmen were naturally not monks, but they were often kinsmen of monks recruited from that village occupying administrative posts, such as that of gNyer-pa in the monastery. One informant (he was a monastic official himself) from the Shigatse district reported that it was common for a headman or other local leader, especially in villages distant from their monastery, to secure for his son the office of gNyer-pa in their monastery. With such a link, he claimed, the local leader expected greater autonomy from the central authority.

The headman as kinsman. Within the village, kinship did not play a dominant role in the relationship of a headman to his community. As mentioned above, other means of succession besides heredity were practised, and the subject families over which a headman had jurisdiction were not necessarily his kinsmen. A headman's paternal role and ritual duties applied equally to all the families over which he presided, as illustrated by the duties of the pembu in Sherpa communities. In his role vis-à-vis his clients, the Sherpa pembu's role is described as one "not unlike that of a senior kinsman"<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 124.

The weakness of kinship ties in the village administration is consistent with the absence of clan organization in local government and with the importance of economic and personal factors.

Given the number of outside influences and the variable pattern of leadership, the social function of the headman is difficult to describe precisely, but some generalizations can be made. In the absence of strong kinship ties, together with the physical and social distance of their landlord, a cluster of subject families required some other form of leadership and mechanism of unification. Virtually all villages in Tibet were subject to some higher authority, whether to that of a small private monastery or to the Lhasa government. Although some of these landlords were resident near their subject families, many were absentee. Such conditions gave the local communities considerable autonomy from the landlord, and the freedom to manage their internal affairs. The headman provided the simplest and most direct form of self-government.

#### External administration: the village and the wider polity

##### The landlord

All of the land in Tibet was divided between the Central Government of Lhasa, the Nobility and the Monasteries, with

the monasteries having the largest percentage.<sup>(1)</sup> Property ownership included rights over the inhabitants of that property. Since land was plentiful while people were the scarce resources, wealth was measured in terms of the number of subject families and animals. Although each landlord had almost absolute rights over his land and subjects, which included the right to levy tax and magisterial authority, the Central Government did have extra privileges and powers: it had the right to invest people with land, to confiscate estates and subjects from noblemen and monasteries. In addition, it exercised the right to exact corvée and a military service-tax from the subject peoples of all noblemen. All landlords were required to supply transport labour for all government officials travelling through their estates. This tax, called u-lags was an expression of the subordinate position of the nobility to the Government. The monasteries, however, especially those of the Gelugs-pa sect, had special landlord rights.<sup>(2)</sup>

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(1) Carrasco (1959), p. 86, estimates the Church's share of land (presumably he means cultivated land and grazing pastures) to have been as high as 42% of the total.

(2) In the Sa-sKya study (Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969, p. 292) it is reported that actual relations between the Religious Establishment (the government-supported monasteries) and its subjects were more relaxed than those between the government and its subjects. Apparently Religious Establishment subjects paid a slightly smaller percentage of their crop yield in revenue, but still had to fulfil the corvee obligations. Personal informants did admit that in their villages, it was considered better to be a subject of a monastery, but they did not go so far as to say their tax was lower.

Some exercised a monk levy over their tenant families and received government subsidies. Besides exemption from the u-lags tax, they enjoyed complete authority over the revenue collected from their own estates. The official state church, headed by the three major Gelugs-pa monasteries in Lhasa, were entitled to a share of the government revenue and received regular allowances of butter, grain, and cash, in addition to special grants for national ceremonies and temple maintenance from the government treasuries. Informants claim that these government subsidies applied only to Gelugs-pa sect monasteries, and that those of the minor sects had to rely solely on private donations and taxes from their own subject families.

Many large monasteries exercised landlord rights not only over estates and subjects but also over other small monasteries and their estates, so that some monasteries were themselves subjects of other landlords and were required to pay a tax to them.<sup>(1)</sup> The practice of granting estates to priests holding very high office together with the business acumen of these officers, resulted in the establishment of another category of landlord, the individual priest. Like

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(1) Some monasteries exercised a monk levy. In Sa-skya according to Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), Chapter VI, the two capital monasteries which were closely allied with the principalities central government practised this levy. There are several brief references by other authors that subject families were obliged to send one of their sons to the monastery but the legal relationship between such subject families and monasteries is not stipulated. It is therefore not clear how widespread and formal the practice of monk levy was in Tibet.

the monastery, he enjoyed certain exemptions from the government and privileges over his subjects.

Even though the primary relationship between a landlord and his subjects was economic, the landlord's jural authority did require him to tend to disputes among his subjects; serious cases which could not be settled locally were referred to him since there was no central judicial authority. Landlords themselves had the authority to judge cases and issue penalties in regard to disputes among their own subjects. Even monks who were landlords had magisterial authority over their lay subjects. Although the landlord had no authority to appoint headmen in the villages, there were means by which they could influence the succession of headman and there are indications that while the subjects themselves elected the headman, the landlord had to approve of their choice. Besides presenting candidates for headmanship from among his own domestic staff,<sup>(1)</sup> a landlord could exert authority over that office indirectly through his District Officers who were generally in closer contact with village affairs.

Although the village enjoyed considerable autonomy from the landlord and was left to manage its own internal affairs, a subject family owed allegiance to its landlord. That

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(1) See above, p.

relationship was expressed both in economic terms through payment of tax and in legal terms through an oath of fealty. Subjects sometimes left their holdings in order to trade, to go on pilgrimage, or to enter military or monastic service but such exploits required the landlord's permission. There were no formal means by which a subject could switch allegiance from one landlord to another or for an entire family to leave their landlord's service altogether. As in Sa-sKya principality,<sup>(1)</sup> there had to be an agreement reached among the various landlords concerning their tax rates so that there was not much discrepancy between them, and one landlord could not accept new subjects without full permission from their former lord.

Stability of the landholding class and its effects on village organization

Competition amongst landlords: landlord vis-à-vis landlord.

Although the landlord class was clearly defined in relation to the subjects, and the acquisition of new land and subjects was limited, there are some indications of fluctuation in their estates and of competition between landlords - for land and for subjects. In the records there are several references to noblemen and high priests who, for unspecified reasons,

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 78.

lost the wealth and subjects they had once held.<sup>(1)</sup> The central government in Lhasa had maintained up to this century the right to confiscate the property of other landlords and to reallocate these estates. Although most of the Lhasa nobility and the monasteries had acquired their lands from ancestors and patrons, many of whom had been local kings, new landlords were constantly being created. More recently, the central government had invested younger noble families both with property and titles as a result of their kin relation to the Dalai Lamas.<sup>(2)</sup>

Since all census reports of Tibet indicate a decline in population and a considerable amount of abandoned land, we can only conclude that there was a scarcity of subjects, and that new estates could only be created at the expense of another landlord. Reports of established Lhasa families attest that there was constant turnover of property due partly to the confiscation of estates for political reasons. A common method by which the central government dealt with treason especially by members of the aristocracy and the patriarchy, was through confiscation of their estates and

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 78, 143, 214, 220, 224, 229, and Rock (1956), p. 36, refer to the depleted estates of several reincarnate priests.

(2) It was the rule that each family which supplied a Dalai Lama received such benefits.

titles. Two famous cases illustrating this practice are those of the Tsarong and the Pha-la families,<sup>(1)</sup> both of which are reported to have held vast estates throughout Tibet. Another great landlord - the Ten-ge-ling Monastery and its abbot - had its property confiscated by the central government for alleged conspiracy. Other landlords' status may have declined as a result of their own mismanagement and gradual loss of economic and political prestige.

While the older established families were creating various polyandrous alliances and adopting sons-in-law to maintain their lineage,<sup>(2)</sup> new ones were continually being created by government investiture or by splitting. Often a noble family split into two branches in order to settle sibling disputes and polyandrous divorce problems as was the case in the bifurcation of the Surk'hang family of Lhasa.<sup>(3)</sup> Sometimes famous and powerful commoners were offered noble titles and estates for excellent service to the government or as a political bribe.<sup>(4)</sup> And finally there was the practice of ennobling the family of each succeeding Dalai Lama. Together

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(1) Macdonald (1932), pp. 210 and 137.

(2) Peter, Prince (1963), pp. 418 and 421 and Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 224.

(3) Peter, Prince (1963), p. 428.

(4) Carrasco (1959), pp. 129 and 130, and Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 105.



with the investment of a sizable estate, they were incorporated into the aristocracy of Lhasa as soon as their heir was installed.

Besides these changes instituted by the government, there were other fluctuations in the constitution of the landlord class and in the power of a given landlord over his respective subjects. Such relationships were a result of more subtle economic competition occurring at the village level of administration.

As mentioned above<sup>(1)</sup> in the consideration of the effective limits of the headman's powers, villages in Tibet were sometimes (comprised) of the subject families of several landlords. That is, some villagers held land and owed allegiance to one nobleman or monastery, while their neighbours often had a vassal relation with, say, the central government or another monastery. The competition between headmen which was referred to above was often a reflection of the competition between landlords. The close proximity of another landlord's subjects and local officers did undoubtedly pose a threat to the power of any landlord, which was intensified by the fact that many landlords were absentee. Even though subject families could not legally shift from the control of one landlord and headman, to another, there was always the possibility,

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(1) See page 178.

however remote, of a landlord's subjects being annexed to another estate. An excellent case, provided by a former landlord himself illustrates the problems with which many landowners in Tibet were faced. My informant was, until 1958, an abbot of a monastery in the province of Khams which was overlord to a number of families in a nearby village. He told me of a dispute between his monastery, "T", and another one, "G", which took place forty years ago. Monastery "T" claimed allegiance and rights over villagers a, b and c whose vassalage to the monastery had not been questioned until that time. The nearby monastery, "G", also had subject families in that local village. The dispute began between these two landlords when "G" tried to induce villager a to join its estate. It offered good positions to a's son in the monastery and lower taxes. In addition, monastery "G" asserted that the land a was holding was not the other monastery's, but its own ("G"'), and thus that its claim to a's allegiance and taxes was justified. Villager a appealed to monastery "T" for protection and open hostility between the two claimants ensued. Manifested by raids on each other's trading caravans and villagers, it became a dangerous feud. Finally the two monasteries agreed to call in an adjudicator to settle the matter. At the time, the 9th Panchen Lama was travelling through their area and so the appeal for assistance was made to him, and subsequently a settlement was reached. My

informant concluded his story with the statement that such disputes between landlords were not uncommon: many changes in subject families were effected as a result of such disputes, while many continued unsettled for years.

Ekvall's report on the power wielded by monasteries over villages and tribes in the Kansu-Tibetan border area does not specify to whom those lay communities actually belonged. But he does suggest that it was the monasteries' power that was illegitimate, but maintained as a result of the weak position of the actual landlords. He wrote: "Some of the lamasteries have been able to extend their influence over tribes and reduce chiefs to subordinate positions."<sup>(1)</sup>

The influence of one landlord over the subjects of another was expressed through other relationships, less overt than those described above. In some cases, the services of one landlord, especially a monastery, were required by the subjects of another landlord. Villagers, for example, had ritual needs and relied on the services of both local lay specialists and monks. Besides providing villagers with ritual services, monasteries offered education and employment to their sons. Some also provided an important link in the trading activities of villagers, situated on trading routes and at important centres of economic intercourse, monasteries

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(1) Ekvall (1939), p. 69.

functioned as market places for traders.<sup>(1)</sup> Ekvall's description of a typical Tibetan's visit to a monastery illuminates the important role of that institution as an exchange market.<sup>(2)</sup> There, at the monastery, a traveller obtained information and advice on current prices, supply and demands: he met and made contracts with other traders and even arranged for loans. This latter practice was facilitated by the wealth of the monastic officials themselves who accumulated capital through their own business enterprises and made loans, at high interest rates, to monks and laymen alike.<sup>(3)</sup>

More than anything else, monasteries provided the primary means of social mobility, not only to their own subjects, but also to those of other landlords. Status, training, and the wealth which he could acquire in a monastery freed a man of subject status and so, subject families of noblemen, the government and individual priests endeavoured to establish

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- (1) Teichman (1922), p. 70. In the town of Kanze where this consular officer visited, there was a large Gelugs-pa monastery of one thousand monks. He describes the town as an important trading and political centre, implying that much of that importance was due to the presence of the large monastery.
- (2) Ekvall (1964), pp. 293 - 6.
- (3) Kawaguchi (1909), p. 429, claims that many traders became indebted to priests and that the latter had accumulated many of their subjects in this manner.

ties with a monastery. This may be an explanation of the origin of many family monasteries<sup>(1)</sup> established by wealthy laymen for the benefit of their subjects. Presumably, by having a monastery on his estate, a noble landlord could provide the economic, ritual and other services required by his subjects that a purely lay institution could not.

The landlord and his district officer. The maintenance of a landlord's control over his subject villagers to a great extent relied on the loyalty and effectiveness of his district officer, the rJon-dpon. Since many noble and priestly landlords were absentee, and the property of the central government and large monasteries was scattered far and wide throughout Tibet, many had to rely on their local representative, the district officer.<sup>(2)</sup>

Although the landlord retained the authority to appoint and dismiss the district officers, these delegates enjoyed considerable freedom in the exercise of their duties, facilitated by the factor of geography and the disinterest of the landlord in anything but the receipt of a standard revenue from his subjects..

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(1) See the preceding chapter on monastic organization.

(2) Cassinelli and Ekvall call this officer gZHis KHa (1969), p. 415.

The landlord and foreign powers. Tibet, it will be remembered, was landlocked with no less than three major powers (Russia, China and Britain) sharing its frontiers. This factor, together with the vast size of Tibet and the poor communications linking the populated centres where the major political leaders resided with their peripheral subjects, acted to minimize the landowning power of the major landlords. At the same time, these facts enhanced the power of local landlords such as clan chiefs and small monasteries in the border areas. Personal informants from the far-eastern province of Amdo proudly assert that they owed allegiance neither to Tibetan nor Chinese landlords, and that they held their land with full rights. In the district of De-ge in the province of Khams, even up to 1950, most of the land was ruled by local kings and chieftains who had no obligations to any of the Lhasa establishments.<sup>(1)</sup> Informants from that area also assert their economic independence and add that any Chinese authorities who resided in their locality made no political nor economic demands on them. It appears that the only

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(1) These reports are consistent with that of Ekvall (1939), pp. 31 and 69. In his study of Chinese-Tibetan relations in the border area, Ekvall noted that nomadic groups paid no regular form of tax and that some culturally mixed villages did pay a tax to a local official, but that none of that was turned over to the Chinese government.

effective landlords in Amdo and Khams were local monasteries and clan chiefs. Except in the first two decades of this century, the Lhasa authorities and landowning establishments never possessed or used a military force to assert their political and economic claims on those distant Tibetans.<sup>(1)</sup> Probably the collections made by religious leaders<sup>(2)</sup> were the only form of tribute which could be extracted from the border area people. The limitation of distance, together with the availability of alternative leadership and protection in the local areas, is well illustrated by Cassinelli and Ekvall's description of local government in Sa-sKya. Though only a small principality of approximately 16,000 inhabitants, in some areas (remote from the capital but in close proximity to several powerful noble families) the Sa-sKya government was actually unable to collect its revenue from its own subject families.<sup>(3)</sup> The precarious position of the landlords in Tibetan villages is affirmed by two Tibetan informants who were themselves resident landlords. One was a monastic official who claimed that his monastery did not

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- (1) From 1914-16 the Lhasa government did employ a military force to drive out the Chinese administrators in the eastern provinces and to assert their own leadership. (Teichman, 1922).
- (2) For details of this practice, see the previous chapter, p. 165.
- (3) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 103.

need to rely on a district officer for tax-collection and administration: instead it demanded that the subjects themselves brought their tribute to the monastery compound. My other informant confided that in the case of trouble from subject families and threat from other landlords, a resident landlord could organize a military force to protect his estate and assert his authority. Monasteries even mobilized militia from among their own inmates to assert their landlord rights.

Reports of the lack of mobility between the commoner and aristocratic classes in Tibet, together with the descriptions<sup>(1)</sup> of the legal status and privileges of the landlords on one hand and the obligation and restrictions of the subject families on the other, have created an image of Tibetan society being dominated by a well-established and stable aristocracy. Inaccurate histories of the landowning groups have further promoted these concepts. However, the detailed study of local government in Sa-sKya together with the information presented above, strongly suggests a very different picture of the landlord class in Tibet. There were considerable fluctuations both in the size and strength of a landlord's holdings and in the constitution of the landlord class itself.

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(1) The best known reports are those of Bell, Macdonald, Tucci, Kawaguchi and Carrasco.



Although the mobility of subject families was restricted, there were a number of mechanisms by which the power of their landlord was minimized and there were means, such as the church and economic power, by which some movement from the subject to the landlord class was facilitated.

The district officer<sup>(1)</sup>

The wide social, economic and geographic distance between the landlord on the one hand and the subjects in the villages on the other, necessitated the institution of an intermediate officer. The small monasteries with nearby estates and local chieftains often did not require a district officer, but the larger monasteries, the central government and the nobility whose estates were dispersed through the country, did. The district officer was a member of the landowning establishment, appointed by it and responsible to it. Appointed for a term of three years subject to renewal,<sup>(2)</sup> he usually resided far from the landlord but near his subject families. In the case of government estates, there were two officers responsible for a district, one monk and one layman, but the estates of a nobleman were administered only by a layman, usually the son of the landlord, and monastery lands were administered at the district level by a monk.

(1) Tib. rJon-dpon. Cassinelli and Ekvall use the term gZHis-KHa in reference to district officers.

(2) Cf. Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969). They claim that the Sa-sKya district officers' tenure was indefinite. Such a method would be expected to prevail where heredity was the rule of succession.

The district officer's duties were primarily judicial and economic, and from reports, they were not burdensome. Their obligations were primarily to the landlord although the actual contact between them was far less than between the district officer and his wards. Since their economic duties consisted of the collection of tax, the distribution of seed and upkeep of public buildings and roads, most of their work was limited to the harvest and sowing periods. Much of the time a district officer was occupied in trade, utilizing the revenue he had collected both to procure other goods for his landlord and to accumulate wealth for himself. Since it was customary for a district officer to retain much of the revenue for the upkeep of his own office, to finance his travels, and to reinvest, he sent only a portion of it to his landlord. In matters other than economic the landlord did depend on his local delegate for information about local conditions and for the presentation of appeals regarding unsettled disputes. But since the district officer had magisterial authority to judge cases and impose fines, local disputes were expected to be settled by him and the headman.

To the subjects in the village, the district officer was very much an outsider. As the villagers rarely met officials higher than the district officer, he represented to them the authority of the landlord and the wider political structure. Although villagers had rights in regard to the district officer, and could appeal to the landlord if treated unfairly,

it is reported that this was only occasionally done. One Tibetan informant who was a servant of a notorious government district officer reported that only after several years of hardship under this man, were the local subjects able to effect his dismissal.<sup>(1)</sup> Not only the landlord, but also the subjects in the villages saw relatively little of their district officer. He made only a single annual tour and since his presence was often expensive and time-consuming for the local inhabitants (they were responsible for his accommodation and travel expenses while he was on tour) they tried to minimize their contact with him.

Although Cassinelli and Ekvall maintain that, in Sa-sKya, the status of the district officer was not great (not much above that of the headman), this is contrary to the condition of these officers throughout most of Tibet as described by two foreign reporters and some of my informants.<sup>(2)</sup> Kawaguchi stated that the collection of revenue from government estates was entrusted to lay or clerical officials of higher rank and Macdonald reported that the district officers were always of

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(1) Another case of the operation of democratic means of selection of high officials is provided in Gorer's of local government in Sikkim. There too local villagers were able to appeal to higher authorities and effect the removal of an unpopular muktair (district official). (Gorer, 1967, p. 126).

(2) Kawaguchi (1909), p. 430, and Macdonald (1932), p. 191.

the fourth or fifth rank.<sup>(1)</sup> Regardless of his official status, there is no doubt that he enjoyed a position in which he could wield considerable power. Though he may not have had final authority in all matters, he did possess magisterial authority and the confidence of the landlord in cases that were referred to him, for the landlord did depend on the advice and information presented by the district officer. In addition, the district officer was in a position to influence the selection of the headman by sanctioning an appointment or by making recommendations to the landlord.

The post of district officer had the reputation of providing for its incumbents considerable wealth and it was counted among the most lucrative administrative offices. This is not difficult to understand when we consider their economic position as middlemen between the producers and the landlord, and of the liberties they were allowed in handling the revenue. Under the prevailing system of appointment and distribution of authority, the district officer was never really economically dependent on the landlord while he maintained his office. In fact although the district officer was intended to be an agent of the landlord, representing his interests at the local level, he was a limiting factor on the power

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(1) Cf. the third rank officials who included ennobled fathers and brothers of the Dalai Lama, and fourth rank who consisted of the chief finance officers and chief secretaries in the government ministries.

of the landlord. We have no cases of the independence of district officers reaching the point of secession from the landlord, with the subsequent establishment of an independent estate, but we do have examples of landlords losing all control of their officers to other landlords. Cassinelli and Ekvall, in the most intensive political study of a Tibetan community, is again our best source of information.<sup>(1)</sup> They cite several cases of prominent families in a district acquiring control (including control of succession) of the government offices in their district. In three of the eight districts of Sa-sKya principality the district officers were dominated by a single noble family. In other districts, local wealthy and powerful families had for many years supplied the government's district officers in their respective localities. The rule of succession by heredity which was practised in the case of the district officers in Sikkim, suggests that in that principality, too, local families were able to exert considerable power.<sup>(2)</sup>

The religious collectors as district officers in outlying areas

A variety of district officials assigned from the central monasteries were the religious collectors (gSo-sLong-po).<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 98 - 101.

(2) Gorner (1967), p. 123.

(3) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), p. 465, call these officers aDul-sDud

Although they had no specific obligations either to the laity or to their monasteries, they were, in fact, officers representing the power of the monasteries in the outlying areas. One monk informant reporting on the collecting activities of his monastery, sMan-ri<sup>(1)</sup> claimed that that institution was able to maintain itself solely on the revenue returned by religious collectors. The contributors, he said, were followers of the Bön-po religion who lived a politically independent life herding in the north-west and eastern border areas of Tibet. sMan-ri's economic relation with those herders illustrates the concomitant relation between political allegiance and religious affiliation. It also demonstrates how it was possible for some of the minority sects to continue to operate religious centres within the Lhasa jurisdiction but without land or a local following. Since most of the herders were economically and politically independent, the question arises as to why there was any need at all for them to subscribe to or patronize the distant monasteries. We can only conclude for the present that the people's anxieties about the supernatural, their reverence and fear of religious

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(1) This monastery was the head institution of the Bön-po sect in Tibet. Located in Shigatse district in central Tibet, it was permitted by the Lhasa authorities to function independently and without government interference, but it possessed no land from which to draw financial support.

men and the opportunities of training and employment which the monasteries offered, motivated them to maintain their ties with the monastic centres.

Although monasteries with landed estates acquired most of their revenue through ordinary district officers, many of them also employed religious collectors. Especially the large reputable monasteries sent out religious collectors to the north-east and east of Tibet where followers of their sects were often politically independent and paid no tax or allegiance to a landlord. Like the district officer, the religious collector was allowed to keep for himself much of what he had collected and was free to invest his earnings any way he pleased. (1)

### Conclusion

The operation of local government in Tibet should be seen in terms of the needs of the three constituent elements: the subject families, the district officer and the landlord. At the village level, subjects required leadership, on the one hand to express their obligations to the higher authorities, and on the other, to deal with personal internal

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(1) Princep (1851), p. 84, describes the often fraudulent nature of these religious collections. He reported the case of three lamas who travelled over the whole of Mongolia collecting subscriptions for a Lhasa temple. Eventually they were overtaken by an order from Peking and charged with fraud and forgery.

matters. Trading enterprises, a variety of religious agents and patrons provided villagers with a range of economic and political alternatives. There was, therefore, considerable opportunities for social mobility to occur within the village and between local communities, although mobility between the three levels was minimal.

At the highest level of local administration, the landlord required a regular income from the land, someone to collect and deliver his revenue, and to protect and administer his property. With these administrative concerns attended to, he was free to engage either in religious matters, in economic enterprises of a grander scale, and in political struggles with his peers.

District officers, as delegates of the landlord, had opportunities for gaining secondary power and wealth which would prepare them to enter, at a later stage, the circle of their employer. Generally, the district's officer's was a temporary status leading to a higher administrative rank.<sup>(1)</sup> His minimal contacts with the landlord on the one hand and the subjects on the other, left him considerable time and capital to pursue his own interests.

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(1) A good illustration of this relationship is provided by the case of the uncle of an informant. That uncle, a monk, after serving as a government district officer in East Tibet, became a provincial governor. After three years as governor he took a high office in the executive of the Religious Secretariat.



These factors together with the physical limitations and loose kinship ties operated to maintain the three administrative offices: those of the landlord, the district officer and the headman, quite separate from one another. The autonomy of the village in particular was further enhanced by the strong local ties which, in the absence of those of kinship, became the basic principle through which other relationships were articulated. Although virtually all villagers in Tibet were subject to some higher political authority, within the local political framework there was a considerable degree of autonomy and self government. But the freedom enjoyed by the village and the power of the headmen were clearly limited to the local community. It was only within the local administrative sphere that the headman could exert his authority and competition among his subjects could operate as it did. For there was no competition between the village and the district officer, or between the village and the landlord, nor was there mobility between them.

Cassinelli and Ekvall, however, provide another explanation of the separation of political spheres in the Tibetan principality of Sa-sKya.<sup>(1)</sup> They claim that power and authority were allocated in a way that allowed local officials to make very few final decisions. Further they argue that that

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 151, 119.

policy was consistent with what they consider to be two basic beliefs held by Tibetans about the nature of government: a) that an emphasis on harmony should be achieved without resort to government power, and b) that power should remain concentrated in order to persist. Although Sa-sKya may have been only a small province with a tradition of its own and a special relationship to Lhasa, our investigation of village organization throughout Tibet has revealed that the social organization in Sa-sKya was similar to that in other parts of Tibet. The basic relationships between the local communities and the central authorities, that is, the subject-landlord relationship, the autonomy of the village and of the district officer from the landlord, and the variety of available political and economic alternatives were the same. Therefore some generalizations about both Sa-sKya and the wider Tibetan society can be made. The evidence we have before us suggests reasons - other than those presented by Cassinelli and Ekvall - for the separation of authority in Tibetan society and for the autonomy of each administrative sphere. It is maintained that authority was allocated not in order to deny power to local leaders, but to restrict it to one administrative and social sphere. The power the headman enjoyed, while it met the needs of the local community and the landlord, was subject to a limited type competition which local conditions produced and which

provided opportunities and choices for the members of those communities. Then, within each district, the officer in charge, while allowed considerable freedom in his territory, was restricted to intermediate matters as a liaison between the landlord sphere and the village itself. The restrictions on the district officers' powers may have been responsible for their preoccupation with personal economic achievements, and for the ease with which they came under the control of local powerful families. Finally, in the highest governmental sphere, that of the landlord, authority and power interests extended not down through the district office to the village, but up into the wider political sphere. Belonging to another social class and residing in a community socially and economically of a different scale from that of his subjects, the landlord's power was expressed either in the central government, or in the monastery and church, or in the court. In each of these spheres elements of comparable calibre provided competition and restricted his power over both his subjects and subordinate officers.

Though not directly challenged, the power of each office was limited by the other elements within their own administrative unit. And although there was little or no mobility between the three spheres, there was considerable fluctuation within each one as a result of the competition.

Before leaving this subject completely, something should be said about the factor of religious affiliation in relation to a landlord's authority and political allegiance of villagers. One factor which may not have motivated landlord-subject ties in the way that economic and local conditions did, but which certainly was an expression of a person's or village's bond to a landlord, was their religious affiliation. Throughout Tibet, the expression of religious affiliation was mutually inclusive with political allegiance, and one was an index of the other. In the principality of Sa-sKya, allegiance to the Sa-sKya religious sect of Tibetan Buddhism was a prerequisite to political membership in the Sa-sKya district. Likewise, membership in the polity of Shigatse required allegiance to the monastery and person of that district's ruler, the Panchen Lama. In fact, all the nobility and the subjects in Shigatse held their land and titles by virtue of their kin and religious relationship to the Panchen Lamas. In the eastern border areas of Tibet, where the authority of Lhasa was weak, the Gelugs-pa church was also weak. It is not surprising that the herding populations on the perimeter of Tibet proper who were subjects of local chieftains or completely independent, were, concomitantly, devotees of sects other than the Lhasa-supported Gelugs-pa religion. Particularly in the eastern provinces of Tibet,

political allegiance to local leaders was combined with affiliation to one of the four minor sects, either the Kagyü-pa, the Nying-ma, the Sa-sKya or the Bön-po.

This situation was more than an expression of the use of religious ideology to define political distinctiveness and autonomy: the system of taxation and the vassal status of tenants simply did not allow a member of one political unit to be the follower of a religious sect other than that of his employer or landlord. In Tibet, every political unit was affiliated with one of the religious orders, a situation which resulted from the 12th century political segmentation of the country and the introduction of a variety of Buddhist schools and from the patronage of monasteries by wealthy laymen. The offerings and patronage which monasteries and priests demanded of their devotees did not allow a Tibetan much alternative. Unless he could afford a double tax, one to his monastery or priest, and another to the landlord, a householder was forced to follow the sect of his landlord. An informant belonging to a minor sect maintained that subjects who were members of that sect, while occupying land owned by the central government, did attempt to maintain their traditional religious affiliation, but found it difficult and either had to leave the land or follow the government sponsored sect. Our information is insufficient to allow any

conclusions at this point, but one suggestion which might be investigated is that religious sects first acquired their members as political subjects and that political allegiance was assured once religious ties had been established. In Sa-sKya, where the government and the Sa-sKya religion were inextricably woven, a monk levy was applied to all subjects who held government land or property of the other major landlord, the religious establishment. It has been suggested<sup>(1)</sup> that the purpose of that levy was to ensure a supply of monks from a reluctant people and to involve the commoners in the government through religious observance. Further, the authors of the Sa-sKya study maintain that the emphasis on getting people from Sa-sKya proper into monastic office was clearly an expression of the interconnection between the religious sect and the polity.

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 294 - 6.

PART 3CHAPTER VITHE DISTRIBUTION OF POWER IN TIBETAN SOCIETY

Several major characteristics of social organization in Tibet have emerged from our examination of the local, monastic and Lhasa political communities which existed there during the last century. From the information before us, we can now identify the most important features of Tibetan society and offer some explanations for their operation and predominance of certain mechanisms. The characteristics in question are as follows:

- I. A system of loosely related autonomous units permeated Tibetan society characterizing relationships at every level of social life.
- II. A monastic system and method of succession (by spiritual reincarnation) operated which enhanced authority and at the same time provided for its devolution.
- III. A dynamic social structure made for a wide range of choice at all levels of social life and in the various spheres of political and economic activity.

I. A system of loosely related autonomous units permeated Tibetan society characterizing relationships at every level.

The autonomy that was characteristic of the villagers' and headmen's relation to their landlord and the wider political community was manifest at other political levels. The independence from the Lhasa authority that was enjoyed by the principalities, clans and monasteries further exemplifies that autonomy. Many nobles, princes and leaders of minority sects showed only a nominal allegiance to the Lhasa government. In some cases it was expressed by the contribution of some of their subjects to the Lhasa military force; in others it was by the payment of tribute to Lhasa or of transport labour to travelling officials of the central government. Some small political communities acknowledged the superiority of Lhasa by submitting their own leaders to the Lhasa government for final ratification. But, for the most part, subjects of these non-governmental establishments had very few relations with the central government. It is suggested that in addition to the sociological factors already examined which contributed to these loose political associations, the autonomy enjoyed by the small political units and the survival of numerous pockets of minority groups throughout Tibet proper, was tolerated as a matter of Lhasa policy. There may have been a gradual absorption of these small polities by the central government and Gelugs-pa church exercising a policy of total but gradual



3) suppression which our data does not reveal, but it seems more likely that a compromise between the dominant powers and the minorities was reached: in return for nominal tribute and participation in choosing the secondary leaders, the Lhasa authorities granted a considerable degree of economic and political independence in order to maintain at least a loose confederation. More could not be expected. For the minority groups were sufficiently distinct from one another ideologically, historically and geographically, so that they did not constitute one single bloc to oppose the superiority of Lhasa, and they were dispersed throughout the country with relatively easy access to the protection of foreign powers.

Autonomy was also a feature of social relationships of a lower order: those of the family, the economy, and the religion. Within the family, individuals were free to move out of their household to establish economic links with strangers, to become adopted into the households of distant kin or strangers and to marry people of their own personal choice. The economic activities both of villagers and of monasteries and noblemen drew people away from their kinsmen and household economic unit for long periods of time. The family unit in Tibet, it seems, had very few functions both in regard to the individual's needs and the society's needs. The religion contributed to the individual's existence and success quite independent of the family.

The autonomy of the individual in economic activities was a striking characteristic of Tibetan social life. The participation of both men and women, monks and laymen, in most economic activities minimized the reliance of one sex or community on another for various economic services. Most of a villager's needs were provided by the agricultural produce and his own craft skills: the few objects brought from outside were usually obtained through the family's own trading activities. Trade offered an important economic alternative to agriculturalists tied to the lands of a landowner. Since subject families could not purchase land, they had to look to another means of gaining some emancipation from the land and the landlord. Trade and the monasteries both offered such economic freedom. Monasteries were important centres of education where economically profitable skills were obtained. Religious and medical knowledge and magical skills were acquired from the sacred books and from senior priests; these skills were often the basis for a monk's private business and income. The economic autonomy of the offices of religious steward, trader and religious collector was striking. Those officers enjoyed great economic freedom; although they were dealing with a monastery's capital and labour, they had so few obligations to the monastery, they could increase their own economic power in such offices. The economic structure of the monastery was characterized by autonomy. The bLa-bran,

the Kan-bzans, the grva-t'san, and the individual residences of the monks were quite distinct economically. The three major social units each with their own treasury and stewards, administered their own economic activities, the profit from which was utilized only by their respective members.

The differentiation of religious schools in Tibet and the individuality of monastic communities throughout the lamaist world can be explained in part by their historical development and by the use of religious symbols to express political distinctiveness and independence. But two features of Tibetan religious systems suggest that religious concepts and practices themselves functioned to maintain the distinctiveness of religious schools and to give them and their devotees autonomy. One of these features was the method by which religious or spiritual authority was transferred. Knowledge of the texts and traditional techniques was passed on directly from master to pupil. Further the pupil had to be initiated by the master in a sacred ceremony, that is, he had to be authorized by the master to participate in a ritual and to acquire certain knowledge which would give him power. The sacred doctrines and powers of each sect were recognized by the others and allowed each to develop and maintain doctrinal and methodological distinctiveness. The other feature was the division of the Tibetan Buddhist world into supernatural spheres presided over by their own gods. The allocation of

specific powers and qualities to different gods further suggests the ideological basis of the autonomous features of the Tibetan social system.

II. General religious practices and the method of succession (by spiritual reincarnation) operated to enhance authority and at the same time provide for its devolution.

In the widest political sphere - the Lhasa organization - and in the local monastic and lay communities throughout Tibet, religious symbols enhanced the authority of persons in possession of them. (In fact the historical development of the schools and monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism strongly suggests that religious symbols were adopted in order that rivalling political units might gain power over their competitors). The causative relation between knowledge of the sacred books, magical skills and authority was noted long ago by Weber in his analysis of the development of different kinds of religious power.<sup>(1)</sup> "Sacred texts", he argued, "were subject to both continual editing and complex processes of interpretation...as a result they tend to become the focus of specialized intellectual competence and prestige". Weber maintained that with their esoteric knowledge of the doctrine it became the task of the priesthood to translate the ideology of the scriptures into everyday terms, and that such a role

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(1) Weber (1922), p. 67.

gave the priests considerable authority. He argued that if the priesthood was to be effective in the total society, it had to interpret the religious tradition in terms of the everyday needs of the followers. And so authority in religious dogma is transformed to authority over social behaviour. There is no reason for us to doubt that such a development took place in Tibet. In fact it may have occurred long before the establishment of the Tibetan Buddhist priesthood, when shaman already held a key position between the ideology and social behaviour and when the early kings had temporal and spiritual power. But when religion in Tibet became woven into a social organization through which leaders were trained, selected and sanctioned, then the priesthood acquired a power of a different order. Their influence became institutional.

Before dealing with the social functions of spiritual reincarnation in particular, let us examine some other beliefs and practices which worked for both the assertion and dispersal of authority. In the first section of this chapter, the autonomous nature of units of Tibetan social organization as suggested by our data was pointed out. It was suggested that the power and independence from a central authority which was enjoyed by members of the various social units could partly be explained by reference to the policy of the former and by sociological factors operating to limit their power. Now, when monastic organization and the traditions of Tibetan

religious schools are examined in regard to the way power was held and distributed, a familiar pattern or theme emerges.

a) Dispersal of spiritual power. Despite the common features which all Tibetan sects exhibit and the unrestricted exchange of their members, the religious organization in Tibet was not one all encompassing Buddhist community and monastic order. Non-Buddhist practices of Bon and other early religions were continued by individual monks and priests, even within the monasteries. The Indian Tantrism too remained a respected and institutionalized technique. Although the shamanistic and tantric practices were standardized by some sects and institutionalized by incorporation into the curricula of religious communities, they did remain highly individualistic methods of acquiring spiritual power practised in villages and hermitages by individuals who had no wish to join a monastery or to follow the techniques of only one teacher. It is suggested that tantrism and shamanism were effective and respectable means by which religious practitioners could bypass the academic community, the church hierarchy, and the prescribed role of a skilled priest (as far as the priest was an agent between the layman and the supernatural beings). Although they may not have been able to compete with the priests in a monastic community or in the church hierarchies, within their own local community, these specialists could exercise considerable freedom and influence. Magical and medita-

techniques, astrological, oracular and other such practices of the unorthodox religions offered laymen and women both spiritual and political power within their own local community. They were means through which celibacy and long periods of study and disciplined preparation for special examinations were avoided. Men could remain in lay communities to check and challenge the power of local lay and monastic officials.

Even at the highest governmental levels, magicians, oracles, astrologers provided what might be legitimately termed spiritual checks on officials and religious leaders of another sort. Supernatural sanctions were frequently sought even by very high officials in order, perhaps, that the former may be freed of blame for errors in governmental affairs, or effect a policy which they could not by non-religious means. The power of individuals in the role of oracle or astrologer was illustrated in the examination of the forces operating in the selection of the monastery abbots and even the Dalai Lamas.

b) Dispersal of authority in the monastery. In the monasteries the abbots, in theory, were autocrats, but there were a number of officers and groups of monks who, while legitimately assisting the abbots, also served to dissolve their power. Scholars, with the prestige and authority of their degrees and concern with the sacred texts exercised considerable

power over the abbots. As tutors and advisors, the scholars served as a check and channel of power not only between the abbot and his own monastic and lay community, but also between the abbot and the church hierarchy to which the monastery belonged. The scholars reiterated the techniques and the doctrine laid down by the founders of their centre and the leaders of the sect to which they subscribed. Thus, it can be seen how, despite his autocratic rights, an abbot could not diverge too much from the wishes of his subordinates and from the teachings of his spiritual ancestors to whom he owed his position.

c) Division of economic powers in the monastery. Because of their economic foundation and their political relations with the laity in the village and the wider polity, a monastery had a variety of social functions. They were reflected in the segmentation of the monastery into the family cells, the Kan-bzans, the bLa-brans, and the grva-t'sans. That economic compartmentalization acted to further disperse power within the monasteries among different classes of monks and through the diverse activities in which the monastery engaged.

d) Devolution of doctrinal authority. One of the features of the Tibetan monastic system and of the religion in general was the diversity of doctrines and techniques expressed through the existence of numerous religious orders.



Those schools may have developed in response to political leadership and the need of groups to distinguish themselves, but such an historical explanation throws no light on their perpetuation and continued exclusiveness within a wider religious community, the network of monasteries and churches. It is suggested that in addition to allowing political autonomy and distinctiveness to be expressed, within a wider political community that the differentiation of schools also functioned to disperse authority away from the politically dominant sect and their patriarchs. Although there were recognized hierarchs of each sect and the political superiority of the Dalai Lama was acknowledged by all, the leaders of the sub-sects and of individual monasteries had considerable power, not only within their community, but in regard to the particular doctrine and technique they followed. In fact most monasteries claimed their existence by their relation to their founder who was a teacher with a particular approach to the doctrine. Thus the abbot of each monastery as the spiritual descendant of the founder, together with his disciples, were considered authorities of their own doctrines and techniques. The belief was held that the teachings of a religious master were occult and could only be acquired by true initiates. Since power could be passed only by masters of the doctrine, students (of any sect) had to go to a master to receive initiation. The result was the dispersal of the

teaching, but the power to teach and divulge the occult powers was retained by the masters of each school. These rules functioned to maintain the individuality of the various Tibetan religious schools and to limit the doctrinal authority of any one sect or church.

### Spiritual reincarnation

The position and role of reincarnate priests in the Tibetan social structure demands that the process of succession applied to them be examined and interpreted both as a political and as a religious phenomenon. That approach was pointed out by Tucci who saw reincarnation as a "working compromise between hereditary succession and overt choice, entirely to the advantage of the ruling monastic class and the continuation of its sway."<sup>(1)</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson have no doubt that "the system of reincarnating lamas...was maintained primarily for reasons of statecraft."<sup>(2)</sup> These writers even go so far as to suggest an explanation for this mechanism in their idea that "succession by reincarnation" seems to have been adopted where there was no one dominant family line which might not have liked the risk of a reincarnated successor being found outside the family. The corruption of the system of

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(1) Tucci (1967), p. 201.

(2) Snellgrove and Richardson (1968), p. 136.

succession has been noted by almost all writers on Tibet. According to reports from the perimeters of Tibet, the Tibetan-Buddhist societies in Mongolia, Ladak, China and Sikkim all exhibit the same correspondence between reincarnate priests and the aristocratic class as has been noted in Tibet.

Particularly as a method of succession to political office spiritual reincarnation was a special feature of Tibetan religion which, on the one hand enhanced authority, and on the other, provided for the dispersal of power.

It was its supreme authority and spiritual sanction which made reincarnation such a highly prized and sought after status by those competing for power. Material which would allow us to examine the psychological relations between reincarnation and authority in Tibetan society is not yet available. At present all that can be suggested is that there was a strong charismatic element in spiritual reincarnation.

While we are limited in our ability to explain the power of reincarnation in psychological terms, we are not so limited in offering some sociological explanations. There are several factors which could be said to contribute to the political importance of spiritual reincarnation. First, spiritual reincarnation was one of the primary qualifications to high political office in Tibet. The Dalai Lamas, the princes of Sa-sKya, Tashi Lhunpo and De-ge, their regents and tutors and the heads of most monasteries, acquired their offices

first through spiritual reincarnation. Second, it was held that a reincarnate priest possessed the powers and knowledge all of his predecessors had accumulated. His power therefore was inherited in that it was an accumulation of past generations. Third, however high one's spiritual status, it had to be supplemented and refined before the reincarnate could express all the power due him. Each reincarnate priest had to go through a long period of training. As a leader of a doctrinal school and of a lay following, such a priest was obliged to learn skills in order to serve the religious needs of his followers. If he fulfilled his religious role in these respects, his influence would be increased.

Fifth, the authority that reincarnation bestowed upon e/ its incumbents, was further enhanced by the element of status. In addition to inheriting spiritual and temporal powers, a reincarnate priest possessed, at least initially, all the status of his predecessors. In fact, some reincarnations were the heirs of only the title and status of their predecessors and nothing more. These were reincarnations of priests who reached a high position in the church through ability and reputation but could not inherit their offices as reincarnations. The best known office of this sort was that of the Ganden Khri-pa, the head of Ganden Monastery. This officer was elected or appointed for only a short term. Each incumbent upon retiring was honoured by being reincarnated. However

the reincarnation had no claim to the office of the Ganden Khri-pa.<sup>(1)</sup>

The final crystallizing feature of succession of reincarnation was economic. With each office there was a considerable estate that each succeeding incumbent, during his life tenure, could use as he pleased. That estate was a means by which the influence of a reincarnation's family could be drawn into monastic affairs. As the estate of the abbot consisted of fixed property, subject families and capital, it could be used in different ways to acquire more followers, more property and a grander temple. The income an abbot accumulated from religious services rendered to his patrons and followers was another way by which his personal wealth could be supplemented. In the end, all these factors served to increase the power and status of the office and to attract people around it.

There were two features of succession by reincarnation which, while not at all opposing the centrifugal forces, did make this mechanism an important means/<sup>by</sup> which authority was dispersed through the society. One was the indeterminacy of the method of selection; the other was the rule of regency

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(1)

Rock (1956), p. 36, makes references to the numerous reincarnations of former Ganden Khri-pas residing in Labrang Monastery in Amdo.

e/ necessary during each incumbent's lengthy period of minority. Although some monopoly or privilege was exercised over the offices of spiritual reincarnations by wealthy families, reincarnation was a means by which dynastic control could be minimized. Candidacy to a reincarnate priest's post was completely open allowing people of the humblest social strata to compete for power.

The method of selection and training of reincarnate priests functioned not only to disperse authority throughout the monastic community, but also throughout the lay community who supplied the secondary officials. The oracles, the tutors, the secretaries and the regents of the reincarnates, often represented the various competing factions in the locality. The monastic offices to which their sons succeeded, gave those families opportunities to check the autocratic power of the abbot.

This method of succession also allowed the church to break the power monopoly held by the early aristocratic class (they had been regularly supplying hierarchs to monasteries) and to prevent any one family from dominating any locality where there were large monasteries. The system was also a means through which the churches or the government with a priest at its apex, could establish the connection most profitable at the time. By being able to appeal to the widest possible community in selecting their leaders, the church too

fulfilled its spiritual ideal. It offered its followers the means of supreme spiritual and social mobility with the reward of political power. At the same time, it controlled the rights of succession and kept reincarnation a religious concern.

III. A dynamic social structure made for a wide range of choice in many spheres of social life and at a number of political levels.

At the national level, in the monastic community, and in the village, the relationships were neither operating according to the political ideology nor to the rules and norms laid down by the institutions themselves. Our examinations of the three political units has clearly illustrated that the actual social structure was far from the rigid hierarchical one which the ideals and the rules both of Tibetan government and of the histories and travelogues of Tibet have presented. The distribution of economic resources, the sharing of tasks, the methods of succession to office, the prestigious symbols and skills which were recognized and utilized by the society, provided for a considerable amount of flexibility and competition in the social structure.

There were a great number of choices open to individuals within any one political or social community. For example, in the village, there were a number of skills and criteria by which a headman succeeded to office and exercised power.

Heredity, the most common method by which power is maintained in many societies, could not be used to ensure one's position in the chief offices of the village or monastery. A person possessing any one of a number of skills and utilizing kinship, economic, local or monastic ties, could compete for the headman's position. And, since the villagers themselves possessed the right to reappoint or dismiss their headman, e/ incumbants in that office were never secure. A headman had continually to maintain his services and offer the best economic conditions and opportunities to his families.

The flexibility of subject villagers in establishing political alliances was an expression of the number of choices available to them. Besides competing in a number of economic activities (trade, agriculture, herding, domestic labour) they could compete in any one of a number of religious-political communities. The ease with which subject families could leave and join the village community further challenged the power of village officers.

The competition among headmen for the economic services and allegiance of subject families was reflected in the competition among landlords whom the headmen represented. Despite the laws which kept commoners distinct from the aristocratic class, restricted their rights of ownership and forced them to express fealty to one landlord or another, the subjects did have a choice as to whom or what institution they would



give their allegiance. A man could join a small independent monastery, a large government-supported monastery, a local independent chief, a nobleman's estate, the central government, a nomadic community, or even the Chinese or another foreign government. Each kind of landlord offered certain conditions and advantages, depending on the need of the subjects. Thus there was competition between landlords offering services, protection and mobility to their prospective members.

It is interesting that while at one level there was considerable competition between landlords, partly stimulated by the needs and power of subject families, at the village level there was an almost independent kind of competition. The competition was not directly between the subjects and landlords, but between the landlords and landlords on the one hand, and subjects and subjects on the other. There was no competition and little social mobility directly between them but that did not restrict choice to members within each sphere.

Within the family unit, competition was equally vigorous as in the larger political communities. The absence of strict rules of inheritance and a unilineal principle in regard to property, children, women, and offices provided for a wider range of possibilities in the distribution of these resources. Therefore, even in family relationships the individual was presented with a considerable number of choices. Though a

man or a woman could not exchange or sell their land, they could abandon and divide it in a number of ways. Rights over transferable and non-transferable property could be given not only to bilateral kin but to children and spouses adopted into a family. Often an eldest son received preference but primogeniture was not a strict rule in the transfer of rights over property, children, women and offices. Since there were no rigid rules regarding rights over offspring, illegitimate children and distant kin were readily absorbed into a household. Widows, divorcees, unmarried girls were also easily accommodated either in polygamic households or in monasteries and nunneries. The monastic institutions functioned to provide what might be called alternative households and economic training for family members who were driven out of their household either by personal conflicts, caused either by economic scarcity or personal differences, polyandric practices, old-age, etc.

As in the lay communities and institutions, so in the monastic centres of Tibet, a number of choices were open to their members. There was some stratification in the monasteries, but that did little to limit competition among the inmates. More important than the system of ranking and the religious hierarchy, there was a segmentation of economy, labour and residence in the monastery. The bla-bran, the

Kan-bzans, the grva-t'san, each had their own economic and political organization: the competition among them was expressed in economic, ideological and political terms.

Further, each type of monk - scholar, business, warrior, - although holding different kinds of power, was in competition with one another. Comparable wealth, political power and prestige was enjoyed by each of them. The business monks, the scholar monks, the fighting monks, each had a means by which to influence and limit the powers of the highest monastic offices; each had means of acquiring economic power and of offering their members offices of leadership. When a monk entered a monastery, although his opportunities and role were somewhat limited and defined by his kin ties and economic power, his role was not ascribed. He could enter into any one of a number of those administrative and labour sectors, and within the one he chose or was led to, there were men engaged in the same kind of activity with whom he could compete for influence and for the offices of that sector. So there was competition both between the segments of a monastery and within each segment among its respective members.

The ease with which members moved in and out of the household unit in Tibet and the flexibility in their kin relationships was duplicated in the monasteries. Vows of celibacy and poverty together with renunciation of the material desires affected the behaviour of few ostensibly religious men. Most

monks continued to have close relations with the laity, either economic, political or ritual whom the monastery saw itself in a position both to serve and to administer. Movement from monastic office to civil or lay administrative positions was common and the reverse was also practised. Personal and economic freedom granted to Tibetan Buddhist monks maintained and even encouraged relationships between individual monks and laymen. The facility with which a monk could take up training in any number of skills in the monastery and then leave that community to rejoin his lay brothers gave the monastic inmate in Tibet an unusual range of choice.

If this competition and range of choice to members of the family, monastery and village was as extensive as our data suggest<sup>d</sup>, then the question arises as to how any cohesion and social organization was effected, and how any semblance of unity was maintained. Part of the answer was provided earlier: the type of religious leadership, the maintenance of control of economic resources by a limited class of landowners, and the policy of minimal governmental interference all functioned to maintain the dependence of one political sphere on another: of monasteries on their churches, of principalities on a national government, and so on.

Further explanations for the social cohesion of Tibetan communities are to be found in the chief unit of social organization which itself provided the most important

institution through which social mobility and competition were effected. It was the church - the networks of monasteries and schools. They were linked together doctrinally, economically and politically. Just as intra-sect monasteries were related and movement of members from one to another was effected, so monasteries of different sects, by reference to the political hierarchy, to the spiritual hierarchy, and to the academic standards and status of the major monasteries were interrelated.

An examination of the church's role in relation to the problems of the distribution of resources provides a sociological explanation for the success of the youngest but most powerful sect - the Gelugs-pa. The role of the Gelugs-pa church in national politics and its strength throughout the entire Tibetan-Buddhist world stretching far beyond the realm of the Lhasa government, may be explained in terms of the ideology of its monks and of the proselytizing power of its leaders. However, elements within the social structure of that church itself contributed to its dominance. The superior position reached by individual monasteries of all sects, and by the Gelugs-pa church in particular, must in part be attributed to the ideology of Tibetan Buddhism and the special links between the church and the lay members of the society. The links between the aristocratic class and the church in Tibet were strong, and it is clear that they did operate to

the advantage of those already in power; but they did not function completely to the exclusion of the commoners and minority groups in the society, or to the detriment of princes and other local chiefs. The church was organized and operated so as to create and maintain its links with all segments and levels of the society. It could offer some services and power to all. In fact, it was the church which provided the chief means by which entry into the aristocratic class, political and economic power, and status were effected. First, within the church, few obstacles were placed in the way of an intelligent, hardworking monk who aspired to high office. Second, there were a number of criteria by which success in the church was measured, and through which offices, titles and wealth were obtained. Third, the Buddhist tenants themselves promoted the ideal of spiritual mobility, which when interpreted by the church was supplemented by the ideal of economic success and social mobility.

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### Abbreviations

HRAF	Human Relations Area Files
JRAI	Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JRASB	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal
JWCBRS	Journal of the West China Border Research Society
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
Is. M.E.O.	Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente
Is. P.D.S.	Instituto Poligraphico Dello Strato
SJA	Southwestern Journal of Anthropology



## APPENDIX A

FEATURES OF REINCARNATION AS APPLIED  
TO SUCCESSION TO HIGH OFFICES IN TIBET

In some cases, such as the offices of the Nying-ma-pa leaders and the Sa-sKya hierarch, spiritual reincarnation and heredity operated together. That is, the spirit of a bodhisattva was manifested only within his lineage: in the son or brother's son of an incumbent. This practice restricted spiritual reincarnation to some extent, but for the most part reincarnation operated without the predeterminating influence of heredity. It was such an open method of selection that some rules had to be developed especially so that the priesthood itself exercised some control, and also that the property attached to the office might be dealt with systematically. Since no official set of rules is known to exist (and I suspect that no one system is used) the following list of the features and rules of succession by reincarnation is an unofficial and incomplete one devised from my observations of the selection of sprul-sKus among the refugee Tibetans in India and through my conversations with Tibetan priests, many of whom were themselves sprul-sKus. Below them, are a number of the rules applied in the selection and training of sprul-sKus.

- 2/v/
- a) The incumbent assumes his religious post and status as soon as his identification is made and sanctioned by the necessary authorities. This usually occurs when the

reincarnation is three or four years of age, and certainly not later than the age of twelve.

- b) Besides the spiritual power of his predecessor, an incumbent assumes the economic and temporal power of his office. If one reincarnate priest has acquired the post of monastery abbot, his reincarnation would also inherit that office.
- c) A reincarnate priest gains the temporal power of his office only at maturity and after some training; this is usually at the age of sixteen or eighteen. In the interregnum, a regent is appointed who may be a relative of the incumbent.
- d) In theory, during his lifetime, and especially his youth, a reincarnate priest is obliged to familiarize himself with the doctrine taught and propounded by his predecessors and to continue the traditions established by them.
- e) A bodhisattva may be reincarnated in up to three bodies: his mind may be reincarnated in one, his body in another, and his speech in the third. The head priests of the Bri-kung and Karma-pa schools of the Kagyü sect are Bri-kungted in this manner. (1)
- f) A reincarnation may appear anywhere: in a humble or noble

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(1) Snellgrove and Richardson (1968), p. 137.

family, in any locality, even in the same family of his predecessor.

- g) A sprul-sKu, once selected and installed, does not always lead a religious and celibate life. Without incurring complete disrepute, he may renounce his priestly role to marry and engage in purely secular affairs. If he has not brought dishonour to his monastery and devotees, he will, it is believed, continue to be reincarnated. The successor of such a sprul-sKu will not be sought at the time of his withdrawal from office, but only upon his death. Meanwhile a regent is selected.
- h) A new line of reincarnate priests may be founded at any time. Any holy person who founds a monastery or is deemed to have become a bodhisattva will be expected to reappear in a sprul-sKu.
- i) A line of sprul-sKus may be terminated at any time. Such a decision is usually made by the head priest of a sect for political reasons,<sup>(1)</sup> but sometimes an incumbent himself announces that he or a particular successor will be

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(1)

Richardson (1958) notes that the line of the Zva-dmar-pa incarnations was officially terminated in 1792 because of the participation of the 9th Zva-dmar sprul-sKu in the Nepalese invasion of Tibet.

Another well-known case is that of the Ten-gye-ling reincarnate abbot. In the early part of this century, because of his alleged conspiracy against the government and affiliation with the Chinese, his line was terminated.

the last in the line. The latter situation occurs in regard to the Karma-pa sprul-sKu, for the 16th Karma-pa is said to have predicted that the 25th in his line, the present Karma-pa sprul-sKu and leader of all the Kagyü-pas will be the last.

is / j) Reincarnate priests are located and verified by a number of means. Although there is no set pattern, a combination of some of the following procedures ~~are~~ employed, both in regard to very important sprul-sKus such as the Dalai Lamas and for relatively obscure leaders:

- i) a sprul-sKu, before departing from one body, may give signs to his followers as to where he will be reborn. Thus there may be some element of predetermination on the part of an incumbent, over his successor.
- ii) upon the death of one incumbent, or shortly before, an oracle, or priest, or lay devotee, may have a vision indicating where the new sprul-sKu should be sought.
- iii) a child, possessed by the spirit of a defunct priest, may himself announce his identity and show signs of familiarity with his predecessor. The family of such a child then notify the authorities who proceed with a series of tests to check the validity of the pronouncements.

- iv) the tests administered to a candidate seek to test the relation between him and his predecessor. Anatomical peculiarities are compared and the candidate is required to select from among a number of objects those belonging to the deceased priest. A candidate may also make certain statements or perform acts indicating a familiarity with his spiritual predecessor. The examiners are usually high-ranking officials (scholars) of the religious order concerned, and who were familiar with the previous sprul-sKu.
- v) the names of claimants who are accepted as the most plausible candidates may be placed in a vase or otherwise presented to an oracle or another authority for the final selection. In some cases, lots are drawn by a prominent religious or lay official.
- vi) if the selection of one final candidate cannot be made, the strongest contenders - there may be two or three - are declared to be different manifestations or emanations of the immediate predecessor or others in his ancestral line. Either the powers and estate are divided between them or a new office is established for the superfluous claimant(s). Often, one claimant is recognized by the institution with the power of sanction, yet local followers of a sprul-sKu candidate continue to support him and create a new office and estate for him.

## APPENDIX B

THE PAN-CHEN<sup>(1)</sup> LAMA AND THE SHIGATSE GOVERNMENT

Shigatse, 135 miles south-west of Lhasa, in the province of gTsang, has always been a political unit distinct from Lhasa. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the Rimpungs and Karma-pa princes of gTsang asserted the power of that centre through much of Central Tibet. But for the most part, gTsang with Shigatse as its capital was content to rule itself.

Shigatse had a special significance for several reasons: it was the seat of the early lay princes; it was an active trading centre in the midst of a fertile valley and on the main route between Lhasa and the Indian border towns and passes; and it was the seat of the Abbot of Tashi-Lhunpo Monastery, the chief Gelugs-pa centre in gTsang province. Although the early Gelugs-pa leader Gedün Truppa (he was later bestowed with the title of the 1st Dalai Lama) founded Tashi Lhunpo along with the great monastic centres in Lhasa, Tashi Lhunpo never enjoyed the religious or political stature in the Tibetan Buddhist world as did the Gelugs-pa communities around Lhasa. For the first two hundred years of its history, Tashi Lhunpo was but a branch monastery having to accept its

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(1) Pan-chen Lama is a contraction of Pandita Chen-po meaning great teacher. Tibetans usually refer to this officer as Pan-chen Rin-po-che.

abbots from among those honoured scholars appointed from the Lhasa monasteries. Shigatse and Tashi Lhunpo together had to wait until long after succession by reincarnation had been practised in Lhasa and for the selection of the Dalai Lamas before it was applied in the selection of their hierarch. That was in 1662 after the powerful 5th Dalai Lama decreed that henceforth his revered teacher would be reincarnated continuously in the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo. Then the Pan-chen Lama was recognized as the manifestation of the Buddha of Boundless Light, Ö-dPa-med<sup>(1)</sup> and given a high position in the spiritual hierarchy of the Tibetans.

Since the establishment of a sprul-sKu abbot at Shigatse, the government there and its closely linked monastery, Tashi Lhunpo, held the control of that office, even though they recognized the superiority of Lhasa and the Dalai Lama by submitting their final candidate to the latter for ratification. It seems that the Tashi Lhunpo Pan-chen served - and this may be the important function of any such figure - as a focal point around which power groups competed and under which one political faction identified itself. Although the Pan-chen Lama was initially only the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo, he became,

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(1) There seems to be, even up to the present, a certain amount of confusion or ambiguity about the spiritual relationship between the Dalai Lama and Pan-chen Lama and their respective deities whom they represent, and which has higher spiritual status. See Bell (1928), Snellgrove and Richardson (1968).

during the century or so after succession by reincarnation was adopted, the political-spiritual leader of most of gTsang province with his centre at Shigatse. Like that of the Dalai Lama, the family of each succeeding Pan-chen became ennobled and was granted tax-free estates within the Pan-chen's domain. The result was the establishment of a new aristocratic class based in Shigatse (possibly the families of the former gTsang princes were absorbed into this body too). Some of the Pan-chen Lamas were recruited from among the old aristocracy and wealthy gTsang families while others had humbler origins. But, as far as is known, they all came from gTsang province itself.

Shigatse and its surrounding province has always, as mentioned, been a part of Tibet proper; they had close economic relations and the aristocracy of each exchanged wives, while their monasteries exchanged monks and officers. But gTsang always enjoyed a considerable amount of political independence from the central government of Tibet. It was like a principality in that its own hierarch was chosen from within, and it maintained its own aristocracy and church. All of these combined to constitute a government whose task it was to administer all those people it counted as its subjects. The Shigatse government too exercised extensive landowning rights over the property and inhabitants in most of the province, and, although it was required to pay a tax to Lhasa and to



offer Lhasa officials transport service, it retained much of the tax it collected from the subject families whose allegiance it claimed. This situation provides a further illustration of the autonomy enjoyed by a Tibetan state in the loose Lhasa-centred federation.

An important link between Lhasa and Shigatse was maintained by virtue of the relation between their politico-religious leaders. Despite the ambiguity about their relative statuses, the two leading sprul-sKus of the Gelugs-pa church did maintain a close tie when their age and power factions allowed them to do so. Because of the relationship of their predecessors, they showed a mutual respect to one another, and on some occasions the Dalai Lama himself was required to sanction a new Pan-chen. (In one case during the minority of the 8th Dalai Lama, the Pan-chen at that time became his regent). The autonomy of the Pan-chen was checked by the role of the Dalai Lama and his Religious Secretariat in his selection and in the selection of the Pan-chen's chief tutors and regent. The potential power those subordinate offices could hold over their abbot as illustrated earlier,<sup>(1)</sup> was sufficient for us to assume that the control which Lhasa and the Gelugs-pa centres exercised over the Pan-chen through these offices was not insignificant.

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(1) As outlined in Chapters III and IV.

As for the Dalai Lama's office, so in the Pan-chen's there were other power groups and methods by which they could extend their influence over the chief office of gTsang and his government. One element which pulled in the direction away from Lhasa was the family of the chief hierarch of Tashi-Lhunpo. A Pan-chen's family took an active part in his government's affairs, taking such offices as ministers in the government, and on two occasions the elder brother of the sprul-sKu became his own regent. It is suggested by European writers<sup>(1)</sup> that, in an effort to assert its independence from Lhasa, the Shigatse government, led by the Pan-chen Lama set about to establish close ties with the foreign powers - England and China in particular - and further that China exploited the Lhasa-Shigatse cleavage and the autonomy of the Pan-chen to promote their own interests and secure a stronger hold in Lhasa. Certainly the two attempts by China in this century to enthrone the Pan-chen Lama in the Potala as the chief Tibetan hierarch does support that claim. But Shigatse and Tashi Lhunpo's alliances with foreign powers must also be interpreted as an expression of their own interests and independent policy.

Succession to the chief office was supposed to be completely open and beyond human control, but it was still subject

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(1) Bell, Ekvall, Turner.

to the same manipulation by interest groups as was that of the Dalai Lama. More often than not, the Pan-chens were recruited from the wealthy families of gTsang, and some were even recruited from among Lhasa families that had also provided a Dalai Lama.<sup>(1)</sup> There were candidates who were presented by a Chinese supported faction, and others who were promoted by a Lhasa party. These facts all contribute to the conclusion that the incumbents of this office, although they may not have been able to exercise much power themselves, provided two important political functions: the office of the Pan-chen Lama acted as a rallying point around which gTsang lay and clerical leaders could mobilize to express their independence from Lhasa; their political distinctiveness was facilitated by a spiritual and historical distinctiveness. And the Pan-chen's office was, in the same way as the Dalai Lama's and other abbots' points around which struggles for power within the Shigatse polity itself were expressed.

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(1) Das (1902, 188), Bell (1928).

## APPENDIX C

TIBETAN BUDDHIST NUNNERIES<sup>(1)</sup>

There is some doubt regarding the organization and operation of nunneries in Tibet; so little information about religious centres and the education of women in Tibetan societies is available either from the literature or from informants. The assumption of writers on Tibet has been that nunneries were few and unimportant both in the political relations and in the religious organization and activities. Yet, the demographic data,<sup>(2)</sup> the high percentage of males in the monasteries and several almost incidental references<sup>(3)</sup> in the writings of historians and travellers, do suggest that nunneries were a common feature of Tibetan society. Their obscurity does limit our discussion and prevent an understanding of the role of nunneries both in the religious and wider social community; however, some characteristics can be outlined.

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- (1) They are known in Tibetan as 'a-ne dGon-pa ('a-ne = nun or sister; dGon-pa = monastery or secluded place).
- (2) There are no reports of a surplus of females among the lay population due to the recruitment of males into the monasteries. It is therefore assumed that nunneries absorbed the number of unmarried women created by the monastic drain.
- (3) Teichman (1922), Bell (1928), Macdonald (1929), Sandberg (1905), Rockhill (1891a) and Waddel (1895).

Nunneries in the Lamaist society, as far as is known, were relatively small institutions housing as few as five and as many as a hundred celibate females of all ages. Their buildings were often annexed to larger monasteries. Although theoretically there was little contact between monks and nuns in their everyday operation, it seems that many nunneries were administered by the abbot of the monastery to which they were attached. Cassinelli and Ekvall<sup>(1)</sup> report of Sa-sKya that even where a nunnery was not physically attached to a monastery, it was administratively an annexe to which the monastery abbot paid an annual visit and in which he resided for a short time. An anthropologist<sup>(2)</sup> recently returned from Ladak claims that in that Buddhist territory, there were several nunneries, all of which were attached to and administered by their monastery. Some of those institutions, he said, had not their own political structure or religious services; except for their residences, they joined in the routine of the monks in the main monastery building. In other cases throughout the Tibetan Buddhist society, nunneries were quite independent of any monastery. Sometimes headed by girls from very wealthy families and enjoying considerable wealth, a nunnery managed its own affairs.

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), pp. 404 - 5.

(2) Bharpur Singh, by personal communication.

As Fűr'er-Haimendorf pointed out in his Sherpa study,<sup>(1)</sup> there was (with two exceptions) no figure corresponding to a reincarnate priest or permanent abbot heading a nunnery. If a nunnery were attached to a monastery (administratively or economically or both) then it was administered by an officer from the monastery. If, on the other hand, it was something of a private or family nunnery with its own tradition and means of support, then it was led by one of its own members and enjoyed more autonomy from a monastic centre.

In any case internal matters and routine were managed by the nuns themselves. Either by appointment or election, the chief female officers of the nunnery were selected from among the body of nuns. The chief chanter (Umdze) or mistress of the rites (dorje lobpön) usually held the highest status and power within the nunnery (depending on the existence and participation of an abbot). The incumbent of this office was the head nun. Other nuns filled the offices of secretary, steward, image keeper, ritual attendant and head cook. These positions which were usually held for a year or two changed by election and appointment, but from the information I have it seems that the office of head nun was held for a very much

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(1) Fűr'er-Haimendorf (1964), p. 150.

longer period. Informants in the nunnery in which I resided<sup>(1)</sup> maintained this organization in their refugee situation and reported that it closely followed the pattern of their institutions in Tibet. That it~~z~~, it was administered by a male abbot but the Umdze was the chief nun; neither of their incumbents were changed during the six years but the other offices were succeeded to by various nuns, while the menial tasks of the nunnery were shared by the poorest and least skilled nuns. The picture thus presented is not inconsistent with that of nunneries in Sa-sKya as described by Cassinelli and Ekvall.<sup>(2)</sup>

In cases where a nunnery is a more private residence associated with and headed by the daughter of a prominent family, it is assumed that the head nun or abbess is recruited from the patron family - the office being succeeded, as in the case of family monasteries,<sup>(3)</sup> from aunt to niece. However, there is insufficient information to allow us to generalize further about leadership of nunneries.

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(1) In north India, the Tibetan refugees have established a modest Mahayana Buddhist nunnery containing about thirty girls and women who were nuns in Tibet, either of a Kagyul abbot who headed his own monastery in Tibet to which was attached a small nunnery. I lived there for fifteen months in 1963 - 4.

(2) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969).

(3) See Chapter IV, pp. 111 - 114.

In the nunneries there was no female counterpart to the reincarnate abbot but there are two cases of succession by reincarnation of a female. Both examples come from nunneries of the Kagyü-pa sect. One of this church's branches was Chong-tse 'a-ne dGon-pa near Lhasa. Its head, an abbess, was reincarnated according to the system by which most monastic heads in Tibet succeeded to office. Her title was Chong-tse Chos-bTsun Rin-po-che.<sup>(1)</sup> Fifteen years ago the former incumbent was found reincarnated in the daughter of a prominent Sikkimese family, but because of the political situation in Tibet the present Chong-tse sprul-sKu has never headed her nunnery nor has she yet adopted the customs of a nun. The other female reincarnation was more widely known and reported in the literature. She was the abbess of bSam-ldin in south Tibet, but this post was more than the headship of a community of nuns. bSam-ldin was a monastery of a considerable size to which was attached a nunnery. Both these communities were ruled by rDorji Pdag-mo,<sup>(2)</sup> the reincarnation of the goddess Dorjepema, consort of the tutelary god bDe-mChog.<sup>(3)</sup>

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(1) Chos = religion, btsun = priestess or woman of high rank, Rin-po-che is the term of address and reference for a reincarnate priest.

(2) This sprul-sKu has frequently been referred to in the literature as the "thunderbolt sow" or "diamond sow".

(3) See Li An-che (1949) and Sandberg (1905).



Other nuns of high status earned their position by virtue of their relation to a high or particularly famous reincarnate abbot. Often the mother of such a man, when her son was identified and installed in office, gave up her family life to become a nun and serve her sacred son. She often lived nearby his monastery and became devoted to him; at the same time, she enjoyed considerable sanctity herself.

The economic foundation of nunneries in Tibet varied just as did that of monastic centres. There are two reports<sup>(1)</sup> that nunneries, like monasteries, had their own land and were able to support themselves from its produce or the taxes of its tenants. These writers and others<sup>(2)</sup> indicate that it was also not uncommon for nuns to obtain employment as domestics in the lay community, to work on their own families' property for part of the year, to beg, or to receive assistance from their families. One informant, discussing the three nunneries in the Lhasa area, reports that the nuns from those centres, many of whom were wealthy and of aristocratic families, did not hold or work land. Many of the nuns there, he claimed, kept animals and produced dairy products which they sold in the city both to the laity and members of the

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969) and Macdonald (1929), p. 76.

(2) Ibid. and Bell (1928), p. 89, and informants.

priesthood. The economic and religious activities of nuns, it appears, were related to the economic role of the nunnery: its estates and patrons, the wealth of its incumbents, its proximity to a market and its relation to a monastery. The activities of nuns, partly depended - like those of monks - on the economic position of their own families, and of the economic foundation of the whole nunnery. Like their male counterparts too, the nuns in Tibet were not cloistered, although they could if they so wished, go into retreat for several months or even years. They were quite free to leave the nunnery for short or long periods to travel about on pilgrimage, to undertake employment, to visit their families or religious masters, and to engage in economic activities such as those mentioned above. It seems that it was neither uncommon nor shameful for a nun to give up her religious status and work in order to marry and raise a family.

Fürer-Haimendorf is the only writer on this subject to report the religious role of nuns in the lay community.<sup>(1)</sup> The nuns of Devuche, he writes, were sometimes called to the home of a layman to perform a mourning or memorial rite. Although the inmates of the Tibetan refugee nunnery mentioned above never, to my knowledge, left the nunnery to perform such a religious ceremony, they frequently carried out memorial

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(1) Fürer-Haimendorf (1964), p. 150.

services within the nunnery at the request of lay patrons. On those occasions the layman requiring the service, first visited the nunnery and left a fee with his request. It seems that nuns on the whole were neither expected nor wanted to be skilled in the religious arts or texts. They could read some standard texts and perform certain techniques of meditation, but beyond that, their knowledge and skills were very limited. One informant remarked on how beautifully the nuns sang some of the prayers and how they were admired for that. From my own experience with Tibetan nuns, I can testify both to their ignorance of their doctrine and books, and to their melodious renditions of the songs of Mila-répa.

The role of nuns and nunneries in the wider Tibetan and lamaist societies cannot emerge from this scanty information. It is clear that nunneries did not have an educating and training role through which social mobility was obtained. Nor did they seem to have any importance as economic centres. Some suggestions, however, are provided by the limited information we have on the recruitment of nuns. Nuns were recruited from all classes: prominent families, tenant families, aristocrats, and independent women wandering alone. There is one report<sup>(1)</sup> that many of the members of nunneries in Sa-sKya

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(1) Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969).

were levied from the families occupying the land owned by the nunnery or head monastery. That may well have been a common occurrence in Tibet, practised by monastery landlords whose subject families could not provide sons for the monastery. Widowhood, the practice of polyandry, and the devotion of a girl or her parents to a priest were all factors which encouraged a girl's entry into the sisterhood. Many old women living among the laity in the Tibetan refugee communities in India were nuns. Though unable to secure entry into the new nunnery or to perform religious services, these women continued to shave their heads and spend much time in prayer. They all claimed to have become nuns in Tibet when they became widows. The nun's habit and life was also enjoined by girls and women seeking to escape from family conflict situations. Many such outcasts, reportedly spent their first few years away from home in a nunnery since such centres readily accepted them.

Kinship ties may also have effected entry into a nunnery. In the nunnery referred to above, four of the inmates were full sisters (they had all been nuns in Tibet too), ranging in age from twenty-three to forty-five.<sup>(1)</sup> Two others in that same centre were full sisters, while yet another was the

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(1) That was in 1964.

maternal aunt of a younger inmate. Other nuns there had brothers who were monks in Tibet.

All that can be suggested from this limited information is that a nunnery in Tibet was an institution whose partial function at least was to cope with some of the problems created by the drain of men to the monasteries, by the polyandric practices, and by the weak kinship ties and fragmentation of the nuclear family.