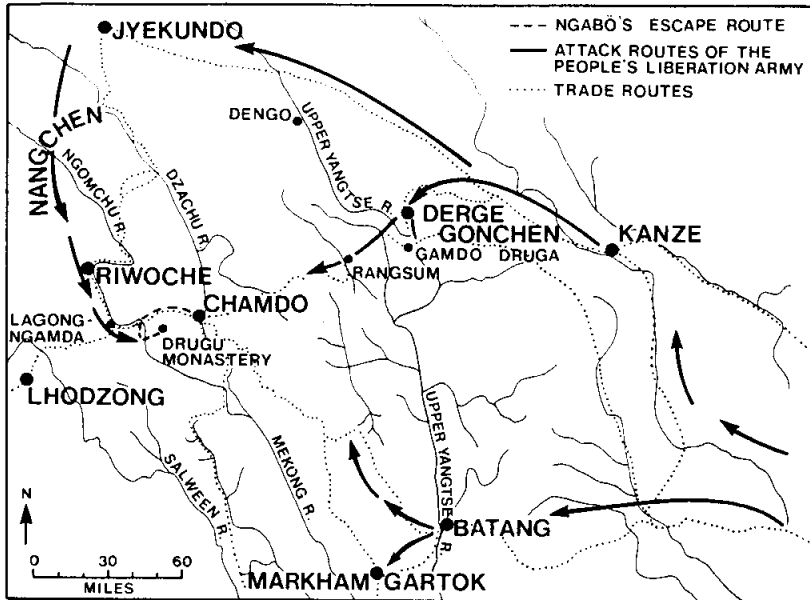


## INTRODUCTION: TIBETAN SOCIETY, 1913-1951



11.

Attack routes of the People's Liberation Army in Kham

The Gelugpa or Yellow Hat sect of the Dalai Lamas was a group of reformists dedicated to cleaning up abuses in the Tibetan monastic system.<sup>1</sup> Emphasizing celibacy and scholasticism as prerequisites to more advanced tantric studies and practices and seeing themselves as returning to "pure" Buddhism, they had the fervor and deep commitment of fundamentalists. This placed them in conflict with the older and then dominant Red Hat sects, which advocated "instantaneous" practices to attain enlightenment and were less concerned with celibacy and study. The Gelugpa, in turn, viewed these Red Hat practices as corruptions and debasements.

The most powerful of the Red Hat sects, the Karmapa, and their patron, the king of Tsang, strove to retard the spread of the Gelugpa sect. In response, the 5th Dalai Lama enlisted the army of Gushri Khan, his Qoshot Mongol patron, to defend his sect and unify the country under his rule. After a brief war the Tsang king was defeated, and in 1642 the 5th Dalai Lama became the ruler of Tibet.<sup>2</sup> He set out to

1. *Gelugpa* literally means "the ones of the virtuous path." It is known as the Yellow Hat sect because, in contrast to all other sects, which wear red hats, its monks wear yellow hats.

2. The 5th Dalai Lama was a Gelugpa-sect incarnate lama. (The Tibetan practice of recognizing incarnations began with the Karmapa sect in the thirteenth century A.D.) Before he acquired political power, the Dalai Lama's incarnation line was generally known in Drepung monastery as Simkangwaw. The title of Dalai Lama, first given to

create a perfect environment for the practice of Tibetan Buddhism in general and for the Gelugpa sect in particular.<sup>3</sup> He established a number of new monasteries and reorganized the economic support system for others by giving many large Gelugpa monasteries manorial estates with serfs.<sup>4</sup> The early Gelugpa government also formally established the optimum number of monks for some monasteries and gave these monasteries the right to conscript children from their serfs if they fell short of this number. Similarly, it established government subsidies in such commodities as barley, butter, and tea for monasteries without large estates, and it set up regular funding for numerous major ritual prayer ceremonies.<sup>5</sup>

The government expressed its religious ideology with the term *chösi nyitrel*, which translates as "religion and political affairs joined together." The monks of the three key Gelugpa monasteries located around Lhasa—Drepung, Sera, and Ganden—expressed this in the saying, "Ganden Photrang [the Tibetan government] is the head of the religion and the patron of the religion."<sup>6</sup> This commitment to Tibet as a religious state and to the universality of religion as the core metaphor of Tibetan national identity will be seen in later chapters to be a major factor underlying Tibet's inability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Sonam Gyatso in the fifteenth-century by the Mongol chief Altan Khan, is a mixture of Mongolian and Tibetan: *Dalai* means "ocean" in Mongolian, and *Lama* means "spiritual master" in Tibetan. Although Sonam Gyatso was the first Dalai Lama to be recognized as an incarnation, he is known as the 3rd Dalai Lama because two previous Gelugpa masters were posthumously declared Dalai Lamas.

3. The Gelugpa orientation of the new government is seen in a land-tenure document for Kalung estate (handwritten copy of original document) given to the 9th Dalai Lama's family in the Water-Horse year (1822) by the Demo Regent. The introduction says: "By the order of the great Emperor Manjushri [the Manchu Emperor of China], I, Genden Sherige Thushashin Badarkol Husamati Pakshi Huthukto Nomihan Regent of Tibet, am in charge of civil administration and of upholding the Yellow Hat sect's religious doctrine." (*Jam dbyangs gong ma chen po'i bka'i lung gis / bod kyi las don khur 'dzin zhwa ser bstan pa 'dzin byed dga' ldan she re ge thu sha jin ni bha dar kol hu sa ma ti pak shi bo thog thu rgyal tshab.*)

4. His own monastery, Drepung, received the lion's share of these estates. It was also given control of Lhasa during the twenty-one days of the Great Prayer Festival (Mönlam Chemo) held during the first Tibetan month.

5. Dung dkar (Dunggar) 1983: 104.

6. In Tibetan: *bstan pa chos sbyin gyi mnga' bdag/ gzhung dga' ldan pho brang pa chen mo* (Gelek [Rimpoche], interview). Ganden Photrang was the residence of the Dalai Lamas in Drepung monastery until the 5th Dalai Lama assumed political power and built a magnificent new palace, the Potala, in Lhasa (see Figure 6).

## THE MANORIAL ESTATE AND SERFDOM, 1913–1951

The two types of economically productive landholdings in Tibet were manorial estates held by lay aristocrats, monasteries, and incarnate lamas, and land directly held by the government. The majority of the country's land and people were organized into manorial estates: recent Chinese accounts state that they accounted for 62 percent of the total arable land, 37 percent in the form of religious estates and 25 percent in aristocratic estates.<sup>7</sup>

Manorial estates were hereditary and, as in Europe, the main source of wealth. They consisted of arable land and a "bound" labor force of serfs obligated to farm it. Tibetan manorial estates consisted of two distinct sections: demesne fields, constituting about one-half to three-fourths of an estate's arable land, from which the lord received the total yield; and the remaining fields, from which the serfs derived their subsistence. The serfs' primary function was to cultivate the lord's demesne fields. They did all the agricultural work on these fields, at the times specified by the estate lord. They received no wages and, generally, no food from the lord on the days they worked. The lord, however, provided seed and, in most cases, plow animals. Serfs were also responsible for such other tasks as repairing the lord's house, transporting his crops, and collecting his firewood. They also often had to make some payments in kind. Some serfs, moreover, were selected in childhood for lifetime labor obligations as soldiers, monks, nuns, or house servants.<sup>8</sup>

In Tibetan social theory, serfs were obliged to provide this free labor because they held a *treten* ("tax base"), consisting of their hereditary tenement fields. They had complete control over these fields with the exception of the power of sale. They planted what and when they wanted, and they retained the entire harvest. They could also lease their fields to others. Within any given estate, the tax a serf was obligated to pay was specified in written documents. The total labor and tax obliga-

7. Epstein 1983: 406. The late Surkhang Shape estimated that monastic and lay estates accounted for slightly more than 50 percent of the total land including Kham (eastern Tibet), and for a greater percentage of Central Tibet. Epstein's figure is derived from official figures exhibited in Lhasa.

8. House serfs (servants) did not have their own land base but were supplied with food and clothes by the lord.

tion of a family of serfs was normally proportional to the percentage of the tenement fields it held. For example, in the Nyare valley east of Sera monastery, a woman we will call Pema grew up as a serf of Sera monastery. Her family had to pay taxes on two tax bases, one directly from the monastery and the other from the central government. They were a wealthy family with landholdings (42 *ke* of land) larger than those currently held by families in Nyare.<sup>9</sup> Pema's family tax obligations were substantial. They had to send one worker virtually every day to work on their lord's demesne fields or to do other tasks such as carrying manure. In addition, they had to provide a second laborer during the period from the sixth day of the Tibetan seventh month to the twentieth day of the Tibetan twelfth month, and then another worker in autumn for sixty-one days. They also had to supply a special type of cookie when the monks of Sera went on their annual retreat for sixteen days in the seventh month, and perform the difficult *corvée* transportation obligation.

The transportation *corvée* was one of the backbones of the central government's administration of the country. Tibet was divided into major routes which were subdivided into stations (*satsig*), each of which was located one half-day's walk from the next to insure that peasants in one area would be able to make a round trip to the next station in a single day. The system operated simply. The central government issued permits (*lamyik*) authorizing the holder to demand transportation and riding animals, often numbering in the hundreds, from the serfs upon presentation of the permit at a station. Holders of these permits could also obtain shelter and food either free or at minimal cost.<sup>10</sup> This system enabled the government to move people and goods effectively throughout its vast territory at no expense to itself and with no need to employ officials in villages throughout the countryside. Providing animals and accommodations on demand was one of the most difficult labor obligations for serfs, because the permit holder could arrive at a station as late as the afternoon before the animals were required. This made it necessary for the serfs to maintain sizable numbers of carrying animals

9. A *ke* is a standard Tibetan volume measure, equivalent to about 33 pounds of barley.

10. Surkhang, interview.

in their houses rather than in distant pasture areas.<sup>11</sup> In turn, this meant that they had to grow or purchase enormous quantities of fodder for these animals.

Tibetan serfs, however, were not necessarily downtrodden, and some serfs, such as Pema's family, held substantial amounts of land and were quite affluent. They might well have their own "hereditary" servants and numerous tenants who provided agricultural labor in return for the lease of some of their fields. The Tibetan serf system also had a category of landless serfs who could live and work away from their estate, although they were still tied to their lord, to whom they paid an annual fee called *mibo* ("human lease").<sup>12</sup>

Serfdom was the foundation for the manorial estate system and for the political and monastic system. It was an efficient system of economic exploitation that guaranteed to the country's religious and secular elites a permanent and secure labor force to cultivate their landholdings without burdening them either with any direct day-to-day responsibility for the serfs' subsistence or with the need to compete for labor in a market context.

The Tibetan serf-based system also delegated substantial government rights to the lords. As a consequence, the government maintained no police or magistrate force in the rural areas, and district commissioners intervened in local disputes only when one of the parties brought the case before them. The serf-estate system therefore greatly reduced the need for a complex and elaborate structure of government and relieved the government of the necessity of generating large revenues for the salaries of lay officials and for maintaining a vast monastic complex in which as many as 15 to 20 percent of the males were monks.<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that at the height of its power, during the period 1913–1951, there were only 400 to 500 fully gazetted lay and monk officials administering a country that contained at least

11. Animals such as yaks, mules, and horses were normally kept in mountain pasture areas several days' distance from the village.

12. For detailed discussion of human-lease serfs see Goldstein 1971, and Goldstein, 1986.

13. Surkhang (interview) said that a government survey conducted in the 1950s revealed a total of about 90,000 monks in Tibet, and the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences mentioned a 1950s survey reporting 2,700 monasteries and 120,000 monks (Pawang, interview). It is not clear whether these refer to the same survey.

one million inhabitants in an area that was almost as large as Western Europe.<sup>14</sup>

This, however, does not imply that the central government did not exercise authority over the entire country; it did.

## POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

### *Lay Officials*

The government was administered by lay and monk officials. Lay officials were normally recruited from the estate-holding, hereditary, lay aristocracy, which consisted of about 150 to 200 families. These were differentiated internally into a small group of about 30 higher-status families, known as *Depön Mitra*, and about 120 to 170 lower or "common" aristocratic families. The higher-status aristocrats were generally wealthier and held multiple estates, whereas "common" aristocrats generally possessed only a single estate.<sup>15</sup>

Although the aristocracy was hereditary, families were occasionally added to their ranks; for example, the family of each new Dalai Lama was ennobled. This mobility, however, did not threaten the integrity of the aristocracy, since the newly ennobled families received estates and serfs and inevitably developed the same interests as the older aristocracy.

The generic name for a government official, *shungshab* ("servant of the government"), reflects the subordination of the aristocracy to the government. Each aristocratic family had to provide one male from the family to serve as a government official; the government could confiscate its estates for disloyalty, dereliction of duty, or failure to provide an official. On the other hand, it would be overly simplistic to view these officials simply as employees and their estates as salary-estates. Estates

14. Epstein (1983: 407) cites a figure of 616: 333 monk officials and 283 lay officials. The Tibetan government had theoretically fixed the number of officials at 175 each, for a total of 350, but there was no real attempt to maintain that limit in the modern period (Surkhang, interview). The Epstein figure appears to represent the total in the very late 1950s, when many new officials were inducted.

15. Although not all estates required provision of a government official, every aristocratic family had one that did, known as *shabten phashi*, "the estate that is the base of [government] service."

were hereditary, and their size was not tied to the importance of an official's position; the largest estate-holding family might be represented by only a very junior official; and many families held estates for which they were not required to provide an official. The aristocracy, therefore, had a somewhat ambivalent status. They were not an autonomous landholding elite, nor were they merely employees of the government. Though clearly subordinate to the government, they saw themselves as an hereditary elite. They valued their government service highly and jealously guarded what, from their point of view, was a monopoly over the lay positions in the government.

The process by which aristocrats became government officials reveals this ambivalence: it was really controlled by the bureaucracy of the lay aristocracy, and not, despite outward appearances, by the ruler. To enroll a son as a government official, an aristocratic family had to educate the son either in one of the private schools in Lhasa or at home with private tutors. Since good handwriting was a major requisite of government service, the basic education consisted mainly of learning to write the various Tibetan scripts properly.

After this, the family registered the son as a "student" in the Tsigang Office (Revenue Office), usually at about age fourteen. Such "students" underwent a loosely organized training program in which they studied subjects such as fractions and *diu*, the Tibetan method of making arithmetic calculations.<sup>16</sup> After this training, Tsigang "students" could be nominated for appointment as full government officials.

This nomination was in the hands of the Tsigang and Kashag, the two highest offices in charge of lay officials. Three times a year they nominated three or four "students" to present samples of their handwriting to the ruler (i.e., the Dalai Lama or the regent), who then selected two for appointment.<sup>17</sup> Although the ruler made the final choice, his power was mitigated because he was not given the entire list of Tsigang "students" to choose from. Also, although he could delay the appointment, he could not permanently prevent the son of an aristocratic family from entering the service without "denobling" the fam-

16. This training could also be done privately, in which case the boy would be given a test by the Tsigang.

17. This was known as the *mibab jenshu*.

ily itself or showing some unusual cause. The striking characteristic of the lay bureaucracy, then, was that while it was theoretically subordinate to the government, to a large extent it controlled its own recruitment.

### *Monk Officials*

The origin of the appointment of monks as officials appears to date back to the founding of the Gelugpa government, when the 5th Dalai Lama created sixteen positions to be filled by monks.<sup>18</sup> As government activities expanded over the years, particularly in the twentieth century, the government chose to enlarge the number of monk officials rather than create more aristocrats, so that at the time of the demise of the traditional Tibetan state there were several hundred monk officials who controlled religious and monastic affairs and played important roles in the administration of secular affairs.

Although they were required to be celibate, monk officials differed considerably from other monks in outlook, training, and comportment. They may be appropriately called "token monks," since most of them had merely been registered in one of the big Gelugpa monasteries without actually having lived and studied there.<sup>19</sup> One night's stay in a monastery was sufficient to have one's name registered in its rolls and thereby achieve eligibility for entering the ranks of the monk officials. In general, most monk officials resided no more than a few weeks in their monasteries. Consequently, these monk officials did not have the intense loyalties and ties to the monastery and monastic college that typified regular monks.

Most commonly, monk officials were either the sons of the Lhasa middle class or members of the families of existing monk officials. These *shagtsang* families were the functional equivalent of lay families in that they owned property, had internal organization in the person of a household head, and had domiciles where the members lived. They

18. Surkhang, interview.

19. The eligible Gelugpa monasteries were Sera, Drepung, Ganden, Riwa Dechen, Pho Lamrim, Riwo Chöling, Ganden Chökor, Tshetshog, Namdra, and Nechung (Surkhang, interview).

were usually well-to-do and sometimes possessed estates acquired in past generations. They differed, however, from lay families in one essential respect: since monk officials were celibate, these households were perpetuated not by procreation but by adoption, usually of a close relative such as a brother's or a sister's son, but not uncommonly an unrelated boy. The head of the *shagtsang* supported and educated such a boy and ultimately procured a government position for his "disciple," as these wards were called in Tibetan. These boys were made full members of the family and inherited all the family's property when the household head died.

A small number of aristocratic families, such as Tregang, Rong Namse, Möndrong, and Rong Pelhün, were required to provide a monk official for government service. Furthermore, aristocratic families sometimes voluntarily enrolled a second son in that service.

A third method of monk-official recruitment, known as *traja*, involved the conscription of special levies of bright young monks from the monasteries. These young monks were brought to Lhasa and educated by the office in charge of monk officials, the Yigtsang Office. However, during the 1913–1951 period, middle-class and *shagtsang* families so eagerly competed for the monk official positions that conscription was largely unnecessary. And even when the *traja* mechanism was utilized in 1933 and 1940, it was completely monopolized by *shagtsang* and middle-class boys who had been enrolled as monks specifically to qualify for the *traja*.

Like lay officials, monk officials basically controlled their own recruitment. A candidate needed an existing monk official (called his teacher) to sponsor his entry. This teacher was generally the head of the young candidate's *shagtsang*. In the modern period, this was so important that some parents with no monk-official relatives arranged for another *shagtsang* head to sponsor their son. In such cases it was not unusual for them to sign a contract guaranteeing that their son would make no claims on the wealth of the nominal teacher's *shagtsang*. The boy's teacher would then submit his name and handwriting sample to the Yigtsang Office, which maintained a comprehensive list of all such applicants. From this list, the Yigtsang's four officials decided how many candidates to present to the ruler each year and then selected and ranked these. Both the comprehensive list and the Yigtsang's nominees

were then presented to the higher-ranking monk official, the *Chigyab khembo*, and they would discuss the matter until a final recommendation was reached. These candidates then presented their handwriting to the ruler in person just as the lay nominees did, and the ruler made the final choice.<sup>20</sup> Again, the ruler did not have the complete list of Yigtsang Office "students" to choose from.

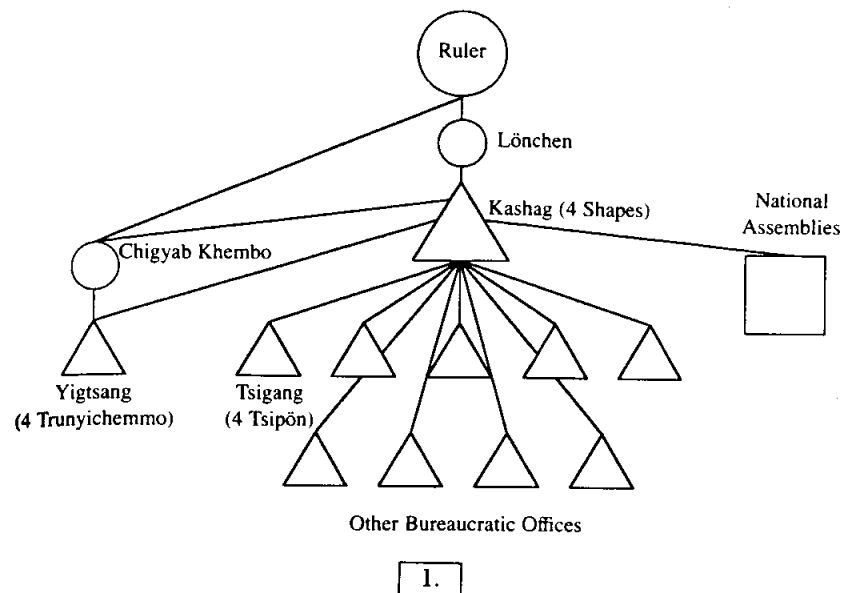
Monk officials, therefore, cannot be considered to have been representatives of the Gelugpa monasteries. While some had close ties with monasteries, by and large they did not have the intense loyalties that ordinary monks had, and the monastic leadership did not perceive them as true monks or consider them completely reliable. H. E. Richardson, the British official who headed the Lhasa Mission for many years in the 1930s and 1940s, aptly expressed this: "Although they acted as the watchdogs of the Church in the civil administration they seemed to fall between two stools and were often viewed with some suspicion by the main body of monks."<sup>21</sup> Monk officials also differed from lay officials in that they depended on income from their government positions rather than hereditary estates. Consequently they tended to see themselves as the true upholders of the interests of the government vis-à-vis the estate-holders.

### *Structure of Government*

Tibet was organized as a simple bureaucracy, in that: (1) in the hierarchy of offices and positions, each had a reasonably clearly delimited sphere of activity (see Figure 1); (2) recruitment was based on qualifications which were measured by a limited system of examinations of handwriting and appearance; (3) the system of internal promotions was theoretically based on ability; (4) written records were used extensively; and (5) disciplinary action was taken if responsibilities were not fulfilled or rules were disobeyed.

20. Unlike the lay official service, where appointment as a full official was routine, there was considerable competition in the monk service for nomination as a full monk official. Consequently, the households of the candidates generally recruited support by giving gifts of varying value to one or more of the five officials mentioned above.

21. Richardson 1984: 24.



**Structure of the Tibetan government**

At the head of this set of offices and positions was the Dalai Lama. He had ultimate authority over all decisions and appointments and, theoretically, all recommendations for action had to be submitted to him for approval. The Dalai Lamas are believed to be incarnations of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Avalokiteśvara's essence long ago emanated into a male fetus, which then became the manifestation of that deity on earth: the Dalai Lama. When a Dalai Lama dies, the deity's essence is believed to be freed from the physical body and once again, after one or two years, to emanate into a fetus. Thus, incarnation as a principle of succession results in an inevitable period when the Dalai Lama is a minor and a regent rules in his place.

The nature of the regency has varied during different historical periods of the Gelugpa State. During the twentieth century, regents were incarnate lamas selected to rule by the National Assembly. In theory, the regent's authority was the same as that of the Dalai Lama, but since regents ruled by selection rather than divine inheritance, they were more vulnerable and usually less able or willing to rule as autocratically

as could a strong Dalai Lama. The fact that they were always affiliated with one or another of the great monasteries around Lhasa and, further, with one of the colleges within that monastery fostered rivalries and also worked against their commanding the broad loyalty held by a Dalai Lama.<sup>22</sup>

Another important, but not permanent, position in the government was that of the *lönchen* (or *silön*), often translated as "prime minister" in English, but not really an equivalent title. In the period covered by this study, it was first used when the 13th Dalai Lama appointed three officials to rule jointly while he was in exile in Mongolia.<sup>23</sup> After the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet in 1913, their power was greatly diminished and their main function became that of transmitting lay officials' recommendations to the Dalai Lama. In 1933, when the 13th Dalai Lama died, only one *lönchen* remained, and after he resigned in 1939, the position was not used until the 14th Dalai Lama fled Lhasa in December 1950.

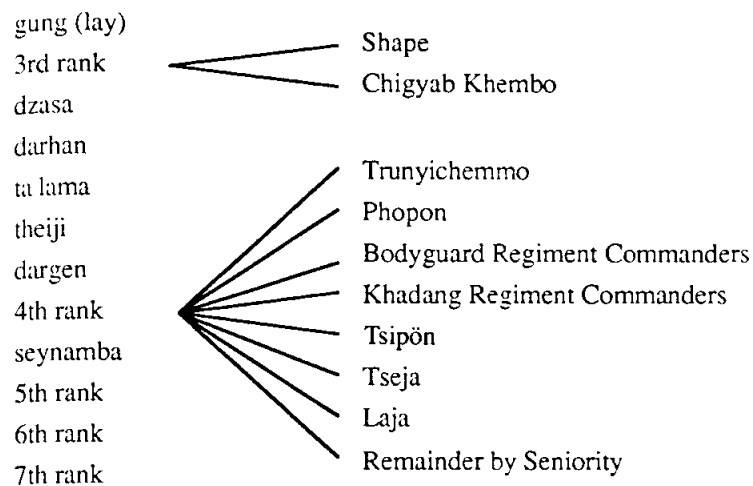
Beneath the Dalai Lama and *lönchen* were the offices of the Tibetan government. These varied in composition and function, each being headed by a fixed number of officials and a fixed ratio of monk to lay officials if they included both. There was also a hierarchical system of ranks into which all offices and positions fitted. Some of these ranks were numerical—for example, the fourth rank—while others bore names such as *dzasa* or *khenche*. Figure 2 illustrates this for the third and fourth ranks. This ranking system was displayed in deference behavior, particularly in seating and marching arrangements at state processions and government ceremonies. The ranking system itself, however, did not involve political power, and many high ranks, such as *darhan* and *khenche*, had no duties or offices attached to them. Officials of these sinecure ranks could be appointed to real offices, but then it was clearly the actual position that gave political power, not the rank.

No position in the government required special training, even that of army commander. Promotions were theoretically based on ability,

22. Older regents with only a few years to live, however, were often as autocratic as a strong Dalai Lama.

23. They were Shatra, Sholkang, and Changkhyim.

### RANKS      INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION BY POSITIONS



2.

Ranks and positions in the Tibetan government

but it was common for hopefuls to attempt to recruit support among those controlling the appointment process by giving gifts. Although a few offices and positions such as the district commissioners had fixed terms, the majority, particularly the higher ones such as the Kashag, Yigtsang, and Tsigang, had none, their incumbents remaining until they were either promoted or demoted, or retired or died. Promotion to one of the highest offices, therefore, was tantamount to obtaining the position for life.

The highest government office beneath the regent and *lönchen* was the Kashag. During most of the period of this history it consisted of four *shapes*, three of whom were lay officials and one a monk official. The monk shape was always formally treated as the senior member, but this was merely ceremonial. New shapes were appointed by the ruler on the recommendation of the Kashag, which submitted a ranked list of

four to five nominees. The ruler could ignore this list, but he generally chose one of the recommended candidates. The four shapes had equal authority, and all decision making was done by consensus.

The Kashag was the administrative center of the Tibetan government. It ultimately received all secular information—requests, telegrams, and the like—sorted them, and then sent each item to the appropriate office or official for examination. It was often referred to as the throat between the head (the ruler) and the body (the other secular offices). It could decide which requests to respond to (either by acting itself or by sending the request to the ruler) and could alter recommendations from lower offices. No secular matter could reach the ruler without going through the Kashag, and the Kashag's seal was required for most formal orders of the government. In addition, it normally initiated surveys, investigations, and new policies and submitted recommendations for promotions and demotions for lay officials to the ruler.

The Kashag's recommendations to the ruler were written in the form of a final implementation order which gave the ruler internal choices, including the final option of accepting or rejecting the order as a whole. To illustrate this, the late Surkhang Shape composed a hypothetical recommendation that went from the Tsigang Office to the Kashag, to the Dalai Lama, then back to the Kashag. Since the higher offices each used a different-colored ink, it was always clear to the reader who had added what comments. When lengthy additions were made, these were written on a separate piece of paper and glued at one edge, over the original proposal but in such a way that it could be uncovered. The following example conveys this by using capital letters for the additions by the Kashag and italics and strike-throughs for the ruler's choices.

It was examined [by the Dalai Lama] on the fifth day of the ninth month of the Wood-Tiger year.

Wood-Tiger year. A report has arrived from Gyantse district. This year because of heavy rains, the people of Samada's fields have become covered with water and they were not able to harvest a crop. Based on the great difficulties caused by that, WHICH OTHERS HAVE NO MEANS FOR IMITATING, after doing their corvée taxes, for 3, 4, 5 years we are requesting a concession of taxes in kind. ~~AND ON TOP OF THAT, TO MAKE UP FOR THE LOSS, SILVER COINS 200, 250,~~

~~300, AND BARLEY KE 70, 80, 90, TO BE GIVEN AS A GIFT.~~ Please instruct if it is *all right* or not to do this.

Thus, the Tsigang recommended that the Samada people should be given a concession of their taxes in kind for either three, four, or five years. The Kashag added a gift from the government with an option of 200, 250, or 300 silver coins, and an option of seventy, eighty, or ninety *ke* of barley. The Dalai Lama approved five years for the tax-in-kind concession and approved a gift of 70 *ke* of barley, but rejected giving the village coins.

The Kashag, however, did not necessarily present all recommendations to the ruler before sending them for implementation. The ruler had to approve decisions regarding the expenditure of government funds, the transfer of land from one owner to another, permanent tax exemptions (*chayang*), promotions and demotions, and border and foreign relations, but most other topics were settled by the Kashag.<sup>24</sup> The late Surkhang Shape estimated that in a normal six-day work week (during the mid-1940s) about one hundred pieces of business (30 percent of the total) were sent to the ruler for final confirmation. The remainder were settled by the Kashag, which wrote the recommendation as if it had been seen by the ruler. This was possible because the Kashag's seal functioned as the official government seal. The percentage of items settled by the Kashag increased considerably during rule by a regent and decreased or vanished during the period of a strong Dalai Lama such as the 13th.

The dominant power of the Kashag, then, stemmed from several sources. It was the only office that could send secular items to the ruler for approval and the only secular office that could have direct contact with the ruler. By virtue of its gatekeeper position, it could also block transmission of requests, petitions, or recommendations simply by not acting on them. Moreover, because it was also the repository of government records and edicts, it could and did attack enemies by, for example, locating and collecting old debts or by passing information to

24. Although all decisions theoretically had to be sent to the ruler, many types of cases were decided by the Kashag under the convenient fiction that they were too minor to be worth bothering the ruler about.



friends—for example, that X's land-tenure document for an estate was dubious—and thus encouraging litigation.

The power of the Kashag was counterbalanced by its lack of authority both over the monk officials and over affairs dealing with religion and the monastic system. These were controlled by the chigyab khembo and the Yigtsang Office. The chigyab khembo was the ranking monk official. He was in charge of the entire staff of the Dalai Lama and stood between the Yigtsang and the ruler. On all important issues the Yigtsang had to take their recommendations to him before sending them on to the ruler, and the chigyab khembo had the right to alter them. In issues of national importance, he was normally invited by the Kashag to meet jointly with them before a recommendation to the ruler was made.<sup>25</sup> The Yigtsang was headed by four monk officials known as *trunychemmo*. It functioned like the Kashag for religious and monastic issues, making recommendations via the chigyab khembo to the ruler. The stature of the Yigtsang also derived from its control of the process of appointments and promotions of monk officials. If an office needed a monk official, the Yigtsang prepared a list of four or five nominees and, after consulting with the chigyab khembo, sent it to the ruler. The Yigtsang also had an important function as one-half of the committee that chaired National Assembly meetings.

The most powerful lay office beneath the Kashag was the Tsigang. Although often translated as the Finance Office, it did not make fiscal policy for the country, nor was it responsible for Tibet's currency. Its main function was to keep accounts and oversee tax revenue from estates, and it was sometimes called on to investigate important disputes over land tenure and taxes. It was also a stepping-stone to promotion to the Kashag. It was headed by four fourth-rank officials known as *tsipöns*, who were the other half of the committee that chaired the National Assembly.

Twenty-odd other offices, such as the Mint and the Foreign Office, made up the government of Tibet.

25. Michael (1982: 54–55) is incorrect in his placement of the chigyab khembo above the shapes in his "Chart of Tibetan Polity." Not only did the chigyab khembo come below the shapes in official processions, but he unquestionably had less authority and power over secular matters than did the shapes. With regard to secular affairs, the Kashag was clearly dominant.

### *Promotions, Power, and Competition*

The division within the aristocracy between the high-status and the common families had important consequences for political competition. The high-status, wealthy families tended to seek positions that had or led to power and influence, while the poorer, common aristocratic families (and monk officials) tended to seek positions that offered potential for making income. The significance of this emerges when we examine the composition of the two most important positions in the government, the shapes (of the Kashag) and the chigyab khembo, during the period 1900 to 1959.

Of the forty-one shapes during these fifty-nine years, twelve were monk officials and twenty-nine were lay officials. Of the lay officials, 72 percent were from high-status aristocratic families. Of the remaining 28 percent, half were from very rich, common aristocratic families. Therefore, 86 percent of the lay shapes were either from the high-status families or from lower-status but very rich families. Of the remaining shapes, only one was actually from a poor family. Of the twelve monk-official shapes, 33 percent were from aristocratic families and 33 percent from wealthy shagtsang families.

Six of the ten chigyab khembos in this century were monk officials from aristocratic families; three were from the big shagtsang families; and only one was from a lower socioeconomic background.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the holders of large estates, along with the rich shagtsang families, dominated the important bureaucratic positions. The lack of adequate salary, the frequent necessity of large gifts to secure the higher positions, and also the greater expenses (such as ceremonial responsibilities and the need to maintain a large house in Lhasa) required by higher positions made it difficult for the poorer aristocrats to compete for high positions such as shape. While monk officials had lower ceremonial expenses, the same factors were generally applicable.

Another facet of the competition for power involved the ruler, whose theoretically absolute power was not necessarily attainable. When a new ruler took office he inherited incumbents entrenched in the highest offices of the bureaucracy. As time progressed, however, the

26. Surkhang, interview.

new ruler asserted his authority by demoting "difficult" incumbents and appointing his own supporters,<sup>27</sup> and by establishing around himself a network of favorites who played an enormous role in Tibetan politics. These favorites afforded the ruler sources of information and opinions that were independent of the formal bureaucratic network. Unlike the ranking government officials, they could be counted on to work for the ruler's interests, since their position was totally dependent on him. Both laymen (often servants) and monks could be favorites.

In addition to such favorites, there was an informal category of officials favored by the ruler. These "followers" supported the ruler and were rewarded with choice positions and promotions. In some cases, individuals in this category could have as much influence with the ruler as the nongovernmental favorites.

The opposite of this in-group was the category of persons out of favor with the ruler. Its members were either actually discriminated against or felt that they might be discriminated against. Generally, these persons waited either for an opportunity to move back into favor with the ruler or until one of the periodic shifts of Dalai Lama and regent occurred. Officials who were actively competing for power and influence but failed often fell into the out-group.

Between these two extremes were the majority of the bureaucratic officials. They stood on more or less neutral ground in the competition for political influence. They were more interested in winning the lower bureaucratic posts and improving their economic situation than in gaining the higher political posts with their attendant dangers. Although it was hard to move up onto the favorite/followers' level, it was all too easy to move downward to the out-group, this downward movement usually being accompanied by loss of the manorial estate. Fear of losing their estates was the key to the conservative comportment of the majority of lay officials. Even monk officials, who generally did not have hereditary estates, tended to act conservatively in order to protect their positions and those of their families. These officials had no ideo-

27. Since government officials could be demoted or dismissed only for some misdeed, the ruler had to wait for either natural vacancies or breaches in behavior. Nevertheless, if the ruler remained in office for any length of time he could generally fill a majority of the crucial offices.

logical commitment other than self-preservation and tended therefore to bend readily with the political breezes.

### *The National Assembly*

The National Assembly appears to have arisen during the 1860s when the lay aristocrat Shatra convened an ad hoc body that called itself "the great Ganden Monastery, Drepung Monastery, and the government officials" (Gandredrungche). It deposed the Regent (Reting)<sup>28</sup> and replaced him with Shatra. After Shatra's death the assembly, or Tshongdu, as it came to be called, selected the regents and came to play an important role in national affairs. In the modern period (1913–1951), there were three types of assemblies, all of which met irregularly at the request of the Kashag to consider and give opinions on specific questions supplied to it by the Kashag.

The smallest of the assemblies was a standing committee consisting of the four heads of the Yigtsang (the four trunyichemmo) and the four heads of the Tsigang Office (the four tsipön). Called the Eight Trunyichemmo and Tshipöns (Trungtsigye), it was usually convened by the Kashag to widen the base of support for a proposal to be presented to the ruler.

The larger of the other two assemblies is called the Full National Assembly (Tshongdu Gyentsom), but this is somewhat misleading since it was not at all national in its makeup. It consisted of: (1) all the abbots and ex-abbots of the three major Gelugpa monasteries, Ganden, Sera, and Drepung; (2) the Trungtsigye; (3) all the lay and monk officials present in Lhasa at the time; (4) representatives from a number of incarnations and monasteries such as Reting, Kundeling, Tshomöling, Tshechöling, Ditru, Tashilhunpo, the Ganden Thri Rimpoché, and Sakya; (5) the captains (*rupön*) and lieutenants (*gyagpön*) of the army who were stationed in Lhasa; (6) the approximately twenty minor offi-

28. Sera monastery was not involved since Reting was from Sera and they supported him.

cial (*tshopa*) who were in charge of collecting house taxes and arranging corvée taxes in Lhasa;<sup>29</sup> and (7) about 30 clerks (*drungtog*).

Like the Trungtsigye, the Tshongdu Gyentsom was convened by the Kashag. However, the Kashag did not attend its meetings, which were presided over by the Trungtsigye, one of whom opened the meeting by reading the topic to be discussed. Since votes were not taken, the final decision was generally reached when one of the Trungtsigye summed up the feelings expressed by the members. If there were no dissenting views, a draft was written, and if there were no objections to the wording of this, it would be taken by the Trungtsigye to the Kashag. If the Kashag disagreed or had questions, the assembly discussed these and generally rewrote the draft. In the end, four seals were affixed to the assembly's documents: one representing all the government officials, and one for each of the three great Gelugpa monasteries.<sup>30</sup>

The full National Assembly, however, rarely remained in session for more than a day or two, normally adjourning in favor of the third main type of assembly, the Abbreviated National Assembly (Tshongdu Hragdu). This consisted of between twenty and fifty members: the abbots and ex-abbots of the three major Gelugpa monasteries and several government officials chosen by the Kashag and the Yigtsang to represent the various governmental ranks. This Abbreviated National Assembly was the type of assembly usually convened. It used the same seals as the full National Assembly and operated in the same manner.

None of these assemblies could initiate action, nor could they ultimately determine administrative action. Whether or not their advice was heeded and converted into policy depended on the Kashag and the ruler. The assemblies, in short, were consultative bodies which represented primarily the monks of Sera, Drepung, and Ganden and the mass of government officials. As will be seen, the influence and power of these three monasteries gave their representatives a kind of veto power in the assembly.

29. The responsibility for this work was delegated to three aristocratic families on an hereditary basis and to another twenty or so families on a nonhereditary basis. Of these twenty, most were wealthy traders who owned property in Lhasa.

30. The government official's seal was known as the *chidam*. Sera and Drepung used the seal of their Lachi committees and Ganden's representatives used their own seal.

## THE MONASTIC SYSTEM

It is impossible to understand either the operation of the Tibetan political process or the events of modern Tibetan history without exploring briefly the nature of the monastic system and in particular the structure and organization of Drepung, Sera, and Ganden monasteries.

Monasticism is fundamental to both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist philosophies and is found wherever Buddhism exists. However, the Tibetan form of monasticism differed from other forms in important ways. For one thing, the Tibetan monastic system adhered to a mass monk ideology, supporting a staggering number of monks. Surveys showed that there were 97,528 monks in Central Tibet and Kham in 1694, and 319,270 monks in 1733.<sup>31</sup> Assuming a population in these areas in 1733 of about 2.5 million, about 13 percent of the total population and about 26 percent of the males were monks. The magnitude of this can be appreciated by comparing it with Thailand, another prominent Buddhist society, where only about 1–2 percent of the total number of males were monks.<sup>32</sup> Tibetans believed that monks *per se* were superior to laymen and that the state should foster both religion and the spiritual development of the country by making monkhood available to the largest possible number. Monasticism in Tibet, therefore, was not the otherworldly domain of a minute elite but a mass phenomenon.

The Tibetan monastic system was also unusual in that the overwhelming majority of monks were placed in monasteries by their parents when they were between the ages of seven and ten, without particular regard to their personality or wishes, and because becoming a monk was a lifelong commitment, not a temporary undertaking. There were many reasons why parents might make a son a monk. For some, it was their deep religious belief that being a monk was a great privilege and honor. For others, it was a culturally valued way to reduce the number of mouths to feed, while also insuring that their son would never have to experience the hardships of village life. In some cases the

31. Dung dkar (Dunggar) 1983: 109.

32. Tambiah 1976: 266–67.

son helped support the family by sharing the money distributions (*gye*) that monks received throughout the year. These monks, derogatorily known as "disciples of their mothers," lived and worked at home and only went to the monastery when they heard there was a money distribution.<sup>33</sup> Again, sometimes parents made a son a monk to fulfill a solemn promise made to a deity when the son was very ill. In yet other cases, recruitment was simply the result of a *corvée* tax obligation: monastic serfs with three sons often had to make one a monk.<sup>34</sup>

Parents sometimes broached the subject with a son but usually simply told the child of their decision. The monastery officially asked the young boy whether he wanted to be a monk, but this was really pro forma: if, for example, a newly made child monk ran away from the monastery, this would not result in his dismissal on the grounds that he did not want to be a monk. A number of monks related that they had run away to their home after a few months' initial stay in the monastery, only to receive a beating from their father, who immediately returned them to the monastery. The monks relating these incidents did not see this as abusive. Rather, they laughed at how stupid they had been at that time to want to give up being a monk. Tibetans feel that young boys cannot comprehend how wonderful being a monk is, and that it is up to their elders to see to it that they have the right opportunities. In any case, children seven or eight years of age are too young to comprehend the significance of lifelong celibate monkhood and make informed decisions.

The expectation was that the boy, once accepted, would remain a monk for his entire life. However, since a monk did have the right to leave, powerful mechanisms were needed to retain young monks facing a life of celibacy. The monastic system was structured to facilitate this: a monk enjoyed high status, but an ex-monk was looked down upon. The monastery did not place severe restrictions on comportment or expect educational achievement, and even illiterate monks were accommodated. Rather than diligently weeding out all novices who seemed unsuited for a rigorous life of prayer, study, and meditation, the Tibetan monastic system expelled monks only if they committed murder or en-

gaged in heterosexual intercourse.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, there were no exams that novices or monks had to pass in order to remain in the monastery (although there were exams for higher statuses within the monks' ranks). Monks who had no interest in studying or meditating were as welcome as the virtuoso scholar monks.

Furthermore, leaving the monastery posed important economic problems. Monks lost whatever rights they might otherwise have had in their family farm when they entered the monastery. Monks who left the monastery therefore had to face the task of finding some source of income. They also reverted to their original serf status and were liable for service to their lord. In contrast, if they remained monks their basic economic needs were met without having to work hard. All these factors made it both easier and more advantageous for monks to remain in the monastery.

The special status of monks was manifested also in the monasteries being treated as semi-autonomous units within the Tibetan state, with the exclusive right to judge and discipline the monks for all crimes except murder and treason. This relative autonomy, however, did not mean that the monastic system was disinterested in the political affairs of the country. It was actually very concerned. The Gelugpa monastic leadership espoused the belief that since the Tibetan state was first and foremost the supporter and patron of religion, the needs and interests of religion should take primacy. The Dalai Lama and the rest of the government agreed with this in principle, but there was no unanimity on who was to determine what in fact was in the best interests of religion.

The monasteries held themselves to represent the essence of religion, for it was in monkhood that the highest religious values were expressed. Therefore, the monks believed that the political and economic system existed to further *their* ends and that *they*, not the government, could best judge what was in the short- and long-term interests of religion. Thus, it was their religious duty and right to intervene whenever they felt the government was acting against the interests of religion. This, of

33. In spoken Tibetan, *to lempa amey gitru* ("mother's disciple for getting food").

34. In Tibetan this is expressed as *phusum pharwa* ("the middle of three sons").

35. While Tibetan monasteries enforced heterosexual celibacy, homosexual intercourse was generally overlooked so long as no orifice was penetrated. Thus, if a monk engaged in homosexual intercourse, it was typically done between the legs of the partner.

course, brought them into the mainstream of political affairs and into potential conflict with the ruler and the government, which also felt that they were acting in the best interests of religion.

This monastic political involvement, however, was practically restricted to Sera, Drepung, and Ganden monasteries, although a few smaller monasteries in Lhasa that belonged to incarnations who had formerly acted as regents were sometimes also involved.

### *The Three Major Gelugpa Monasteries*

Sera, Drepung, and Ganden were collectively known by two main names. Often they were called the "three seats" (*densa sum*) of the Gelugpa sect, because they acted as the main monasteries for hundreds of smaller branch monasteries. More commonly they were known simply as *sendregasum*, an abbreviation of the first syllable of each of their names. (Hereafter, the term "Three Seats" will be used.) Sera and Drepung were both located within the Lhasa valley, Sera about three miles north of the city of Lhasa and Drepung about five and a half miles northwest of the city (see Figures 3–6 and Map 2). Ganden was located outside the valley about twenty miles east of the city.

These three monasteries were enormous, resembling bustling towns as much as sanctuaries for the pursuit of otherworldly studies. Their monks were basically divided into two groups, those who were pursuing higher studies, the "readers,"<sup>36</sup> and those who were not. The former became the scholars, while the latter typically could only read and chant their prayer books.<sup>37</sup> In the Mey college of Sera monastery, for example, only about 800 of the 2,800 monks, or 29 percent, were "readers."<sup>38</sup> And of these 800, many never went beyond the lower levels of learning. The nonreaders worked for the monastery (or for themselves) or simply lived off the daily distributions and teas provided by the monastery during the collective prayer sessions. However, although many of the

36. In spoken Tibetan, *pecawa*.

37. Although the past tense is used here, the Three Seats are again functioning in Tibet, albeit in an attenuated form.

38. Dunggar, interview.



3A.

Sera monastery (aerial view)

monks were engaged in nonscholarly and nonmeditative pursuits, all were celibate.

Drepung, the largest of the three monasteries, officially held 7,700 monks, but actually contained about 10,000 in 1951. Sera officially held 5,500 and Ganden 3,300, with each also actually housing more monks: Sera about 7,000, and Ganden about 5,000. By contrast, the army normally present in Lhasa numbered only 1,000 or 1,500 troops. Moreover, as many as 10 to 15 percent of the monks housed in the Three Seats were *dobdos* or "fighting monks." These monks had a distinctive appearance (style of hair, manner of tying their robes) and belonged to clubs that held regular athletic competitions. They also typically engaged in ritualized combat with weapons according to a code of chivalry, and often acted as bodyguards for the monastery.<sup>39</sup> The presence of 20,000 monks in and around Lhasa, thousands of whom

39. See Goldstein (1964) for a discussion of these *dobdo* monks.



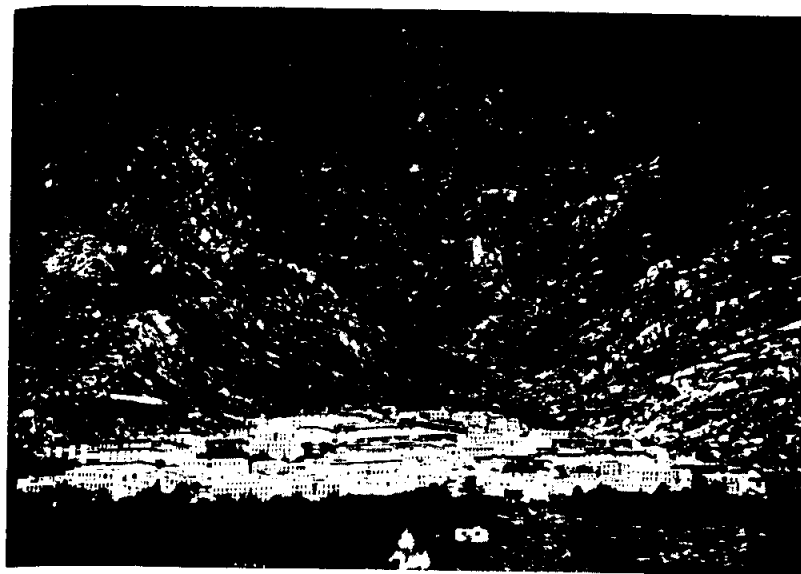
3B.

Sera monastery

were this-worldly, aggressive, fighting monks, traditionally afforded the three monasteries tremendous coercive leverage vis-à-vis the government, whose army in the pre-1913 period they dwarfed.

These three monasteries had extensive networks of affiliated monasteries throughout the country, and there was a continuous flow of monks and monastic officials between smaller village and regional monasteries and the parent monastery. Thus, when the Three Seats took a position on some issue they could claim to be speaking for the overwhelming majority of Gelugpa monks.

The Three Seats somewhat resembled the classic British universities such as Oxford in that the overall entity, the monastery, was in reality a combination of semi-autonomous subunits known in Tibetan as *tratsang*; by analogy with British universities, these are commonly called colleges in English. Monks belonged to a monastery only through their membership in a college, and although there was a standing committee that functioned with regard to monastery-wide issues, there was no



4.

Drepung monastery

abbot for the whole monastery, only for the individual colleges. Each *tratsang* or college had its own administration and resources and in turn was comprised of important residential subunits known as *khamtsen* which contained the actual apartments or cells of their monks. Like the college, they had their own administration and, to a degree, their own resources.

A potential monk could enter any of the Three Seats, but within the monastery he had to enroll in a specific *khamtsen*, determined by his region of origin. Membership in a *khamtsen*, therefore, was automatic and mutually exclusive.<sup>40</sup> Thus, *khamtsen* exhibited considerable internal linguistic and cultural homogeneity. Since different *khamtsen* were affiliated with different colleges, the college level also often had a regional flavor. Colleges and their *khamtsen* units occupied a specific spa-

40. *Khamtsen* sometimes contained dormitory subunits known as *mitsen* which were even more specific with regard to the geographic origin of the monks.



5.

Lhasa valley and city as seen from the south (1936)  
(photo courtesy of India Office Library and Records, British Library)



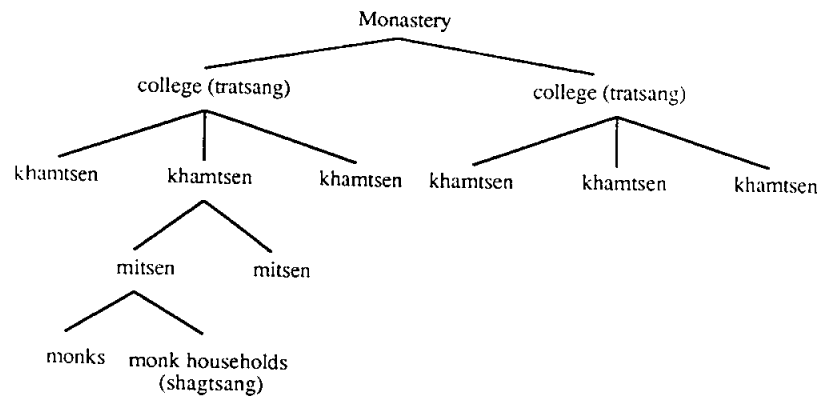
6.

Potala and Shöl Town (1936) (photo courtesy  
of India Office Library and Records,  
British Library)

tial area within the monastery and were the center of the ritual, educational, social, and political activities for their members (see Figure 7).

Each of these units—the monastery, the various colleges, and the khamtsen was a corporate entity. Each had an identity and a name that was carried across generations; each owned property and wealth in the name of the entity; and each had its own internal organization. The monks came and went, but the entity and its property endured.

It is essential to note that a monk's loyalties were primarily rooted at the khamtsen and college levels, and often little feeling of brotherhood existed between monks of different colleges within a single monastery. For example, when the Che college of Sera rebelled against the government in 1947, Sera's other large college, Mey, sided with the central government and did not assist its brother college (although its members were physically present in the monastery) (see Chapter 14). Simi-



7.

**Monastic structure**

larly, Drepung's Gomang college did not come to the support of Loseling college during its confrontation with the Dalai Lama in 1921 (see Chapter 3). The Three Seats, then, were really federations of semi-autonomous colleges and khamtsen which jealously guarded their own prerogatives.

*Monastic Organization*

Drepung, the largest monastery in Tibet, can be used to illustrate monastic organization. It was comprised of seven colleges, but by the twentieth century three no longer had monks and existed in name only. The four functioning colleges were Loseling, Gomang, Deyang, and Ngagpa. Of these, the first two were dominant in numbers, wealth, and power.<sup>41</sup> Loseling had twenty-three khamtsen and Gomang had sixteen. Deyang and Ngagpa had no khamtsen; all their monks instead formed a single, unnamed unit.

41. Loseling had 4,500–5,000 monks and Gomang 3,500–4,000. The three colleges without monks were Gyepa, Shagaw, and Düwa. Although these no longer had monks, the practice of appointing an abbot for them continued, so they remained politically important.

Within the khamtsen, monks either lived alone, in households with other monks, or in shagtsang, whose wealth and power gave them importance out of proportion to their numbers: they formed a kind of a monastic aristocracy and the monks themselves often called them the "monastery's aristocrats."<sup>42</sup> Monastic shagtsang families were structurally identical to those of the monk officials mentioned earlier. They had their own houses (*shag*), wealth, and possessions, and the larger ones usually kept numerous servant monks. They reproduced themselves by adopting relatives or, less frequently, by adopting unrelated young monks. They were extremely influential in khamtsen and college administrative affairs and held many of the important nonreligious positions, since a substantial independent income was needed to accept some of these positions. They were also a dominant force in molding the opinion of the mass of monks.

Of Loseling's twenty-three khamtsen, three held virtually all the power: Gonggo, Tsha, and Phugang. These were composed predominantly of monks from Kham (Eastern Tibet), although Gonggo khamtsen had a number of monks from Kongpo and Ü (the Lhasa area) in addition to Khambas from Shotalthosum. In general, roughly 65 to 70 percent of Loseling's monks were from Kham, with many, if not most, being from regions under Chinese control during the period this history covers.

## COLLEGE AND KHAMTSEN ORGANIZATION

The highest official of the college was the abbot. He held his office for a term of six years, which could be renewed for a second term. He was appointed by the Dalai Lama or the regent from a list, submitted by the college, which normally contained about seven ranked nominees all of whom had completed the highest monastic scholarly degree, the Geshe Lharampa. Although the abbot was usually chosen from this list, the Dalai Lama could appoint someone else. Under the abbot were three officials known collectively as the "religious heads" (*uchö*). These monks, who were primarily responsible for the religious rituals, the

42. In spoken Tibetan, *gombey kudra*.



prayer sessions, and the educational activities of their college, were the prayer leader (*umdze*), the disciplinary head (*gegö*), and the monk in charge of studies (*lama shunglenba*).

Another very important group of officials known as "managers" (*chabu*) were in charge of administering the college's and khamtsen's estates, loans, and capital funds. There were eight of them in Loseling:

1. The manager of Phugang khamtsen's resources, known as the *phuja*.
2. The manager of Gonggo khamtsen's resources, known as the *gongja*.
3. The manager of Tsha khamtsen's resources, known as the *tshaja*. These three were appointed for life.
4. The manager of another set of college resources, known as the *labrang chantsö*. He was appointed by the abbot for the duration of the abbot's term.

Until the Loseling disturbance of 1921, the first three were appointed by the respective khamtsens. Afterward, the central government made the final appointments. (The reasons for this are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 in the section on the Loseling disturbance.)

5–8. Four additional appointees of the abbot, known as the *phungtsö*. These administered land acquired after the Loseling disturbance of 1921.

Each of these managers was responsible for the estates, loans, and capital funds of his khamtsen or office. Each operated independently and was responsible to his khamtsen rather than to the college. However, when economic or political pan-college issues arose, these managers played an important role both through individual discussions and via the monastic assemblies, which were convened by the abbot. These key positions tended to be monopolized by the big shagtsang households.

College assemblies could range in size from only a few of the top officials to virtually all the monks. Normally, however, the main decision-making figures included the current abbot, the ex-abbots, the *uchö*, and the various managers and special representatives sent by the khamtsen. On major issues, it was common for each khamtsen to dis-

cuss the issue before sending their delegates to the college-level assembly.<sup>43</sup>

Each khamtsen had its own officials, led by officials known as *chigen* and *khamtsen gegen*; they had parallel mechanisms for convening meetings of various sizes to discuss the khamtsen's position on an issue.

#### THE PAN-MONASTIC STRUCTURE

The monastery as a whole also owned extensive manorial estates, had officials, and sponsored religious activities. The main monastery-level disciplinary officials were the two *tshogcen shenago*. They were selected on a rotating basis from the four colleges and served one-year terms during which their word was law. They could even criticize or fine the abbots and could not be either withdrawn or punished during their term. However, the day their term ended they were again vulnerable, and this usually restrained their behavior while they were in power.<sup>44</sup> They had nothing to do with economic affairs.

The main economic managers for the monastery as a whole were the two *chiso*. One of these was always appointed from Loseling college and the other from Gomang college. Each served a ten-year term and together they were in charge of the revenue and estates (with serfs).

Another powerful official in Drepung was the *photrang depa*. He functioned as the liaison with the central government and was responsible for all the government's property in the monastery. This post was held by a monk from Gomang college. (Loseling controlled an equally powerful position: the stewardship of Lhasa's famous Tsuglagang Temple, the site of Tibet's holiest statue.) The *photrang depa* was chosen from the wealthier shagtsang families and wore monk-official's dress rather than ordinary monk's robes.

The Lachi was the main assembly or parliament of the monastery. It consisted of the present abbots, the ex-abbots of all the colleges, the *photrang depa*, the two *tshogcen shenago*, the two *chiso*, and the prayer

43. The same held true for the pan-monastery level of organization: each college would first meet to decide its own policy before going to discussion with the other colleges at monastery-level meetings.

44. Surkhang, interview.

leader (*umdze*) of the pan-monastery prayer hall (*tshogcen*). It was the main decision-making body for monastery-level policy but was not concerned with discipline and controlled no land or capital.

The Richi was another pan-monastery committee. It consisted only of the six current abbots of the colleges that taught logic (*tshenyi*), excluding the abbot of the Mantra college (Ngagpa Tratsang). It owned its own estates.

### *Monastic Economics*

The great monasteries in Tibet depended economically on manorial estates, endowment funds, grants from the central government, and donations from the faithful. Many controlled enormous estates: for example, Drepung monastery was reputed to have held 185 estates, 20,000 serfs, 300 pastures, and 16,000 nomads.<sup>45</sup> The yields from these holdings were used in part to maintain the ten thousand-odd monks it housed, but the manner in which this occurred is important to understand.

In Drepung, monks not pursuing religious studies received only a very small salary in grain, and even those engaged in study received annual or monthly salaries that were insufficient to live on. Moreover, there was no monastery- or college-run communal kitchen to provide meals; monks had to prepare their own food. Monks supplemented their modest salary from the monastery in a number of indirect ways.

All monks received tea and some food when they attended the various khamtsen-, college-, and monastery-level prayer sessions, which occurred almost daily throughout the year. These were held at different times during the day in the respective prayer halls and were sponsored by individual lay persons or by the monastery, college, or khamtsen through special endowment funds or estate revenues. Responsibility for providing the food for each of these festivals was usually given to an individual monk or group of monks, who had to collect the grain and

45. Grunfeld 1975: 17. During the 5th Dalai Lama's era, Drepung had 4,200 monks, 553 serf families, and a yield from its estates of 37,922 *ke* of grain. (Dung dkar [Dunggar] 1983: 107).

money for one particular prayer event that year. For example, if the session was supported by an endowment fund, the monks responsible for the session would lend out the endowment fund's capital and use the interest from this to cover the costs. In addition to the food distribution at prayer sessions, monks received a share of all money donations (*gye*). These came from patrons who sponsored prayer ceremonies, as well as from monastery endowments. It was possible for a monk to subsist by these two mechanisms if he was willing to attend all or most of the various prayer assemblies. The nonscholarly monks also commonly worked as servants for incarnate lamas, wealthy monks, and shagtsang families and engaged in private business. The scholarly monks also sometimes received income from performing religious services for laymen.

For the Three Seats, then, the profits from estates and loans were not used as salaries for the monks. Instead, they were used to support a cycle of religious prayer ceremonies at which attending monks received food. Thus the yield from the land and serfs the monastery controlled was used for prayers for the good of all sentient beings, and, as such, was seen by the monasteries as essential for the nation.

### *Incarnations*

Any discussion of the nature of the monastic system requires consideration of the position of the incarnate lamas—that is, lamas such as the Dalai Lama, who were believed to be continually reincarnated in human form. There were many such incarnate lamas in Tibet, and for the Gelugpa each was affiliated with the college of the Three Seats at which he had received his education. For example, the lama Reting Rimpoche was from Sera's Che college, Demo Rimpoche was from Drepung's Loseling college, and Taktra from Drepung's Gomang college.

Each incarnate lama had what in Tibetan is called a *labrang*, which in essence was the corporation of his line of incarnations. All the past property of that line of incarnations was the property of the *labrang*, and all new property and wealth acquired by the current incumbent likewise became part of this *labrang*. Like modern corporations, these

*labrang* retained their identity across generations, and when a lama died his *labrang* was inherited by his successor. The size and wealth of the different *labrangs* varied considerably depending on the importance of the lama and on past history; for example, incarnate lamas who had become regents of Tibet became fabulously wealthy, while other less well-known lamas might only have modest wealth. All *labrangs*, however, were structurally identical.

The most powerful of these *labrang* officials, the *chantsö* or manager, was the person in charge of the economic aspects of the *labrang*. A *labrang* manager was not only responsible for and in control of the economics of the *labrang*, but because he was generally the lama's closest and most influential advisor, he tended to be the avenue through which others contacted and influenced the lama. To understand the behavior of a lama, one usually has to look at the views of his manager. In many instances, the manager made virtually all secular and political decisions in the name of the lama. When a lama became the regent of Tibet, his manager typically played a major role in Tibetan history.

## CONCLUSIONS

While the Tibetan state espoused a religious ideology, there was no clear uniformity of purpose among the key religious elements—the Dalai Lama, the Three Seats, and the monk officials. In fact, the Tibetan political process was typified by a network of crosscutting interests and alliances. For example, on the one hand, the interests of the ruler, the monk officials, and the lay officials typically were opposed to those of the Three Seats. On the other hand, the aristocracy shared dependence on the estate serf system with the monasteries, while the monk officials were totally dependent on the government. Furthermore, each aristocratic family maintained close ties with one or more khamtsen and colleges, for which it acted as patron. They also had close links with the powerful shagtsang families. The monk officials, ironically, often had poorer relationships with the Three Seats than did the lay aristocratic officials.

Moreover, competing units existed within the Three Seats. The monastic colleges were often at odds with one another, and even the

incarnate lamas were allied with specific monastic colleges and khamtsen. An essential flaw in the Tibetan politico-religious system was, therefore, that while religious priority was universally accepted, the definition of what benefited religion was often contested.

Religion, then, though a homogeneous force in Tibetan politics in one sense, was also a fragmenting and conflicting force. Competition among the various religious entities to increase their influence and prestige and the lack of consensus regarding which policies were in the interests of religion plagued twentieth-century Tibetan history. Furthermore, the mass monk ideology and the annual cycle of prayer festivals led the monasteries continually to seek more land and endowments and vigorously to oppose any attempt on the part of the government to decrease their revenues. It also made them advocates of the serf-estate economic system and, thus, extremely conservative. As Tibet attempted to adapt to the rapid changes of the twentieth century, religion and the monasteries played a major role in thwarting progress.