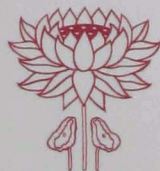


**The Cultural Monuments
of Tibet's Outer Provinces**

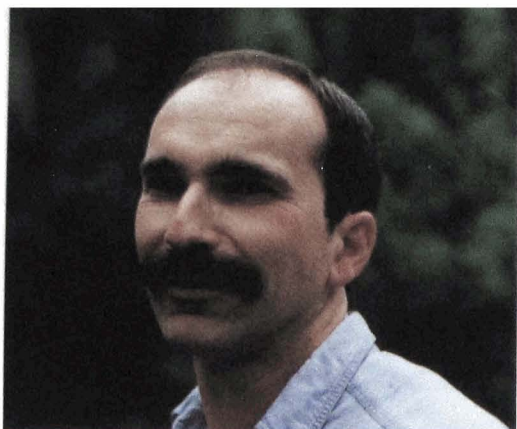
AMDO

**Volume 2. The Gansu and Sichuan
Parts of Amdo**

Andreas Gruschke



White Lotus



Andreas Gruschke was born in 1960, and now lives and works in the Southwest German city of Freiburg. From 1982 to 1990 he studied geography, ethnology (cultural anthropology), and sinology at the universities in Aachen, Freiburg, and Beijing (1984/85). He worked as a lecturer at Shanxi Agricultural University in Taigu, Shanxi, PRC, in (1985/86), and at Kangweon National University in Chuncheon, South Korea (1992/93). From 1987 he has guided study tours through Eastern and Central Asia, with emphasis on Tibet and the Silk Road. During numerous private stays the author continued research on Tibetan culture, with special interest in the ethnic development and the relationship between various peoples in contact. Altogether, he has been more than 25 times to the various parts of the Tibetan realm, thus having travelled some 70,000 km in the highlands, from Ladakh and Western Tibet, several Tibetan areas in the Himalayas, Southern and Central Tibet, and the vast steppes of the Changthang in the plateau's heart, up to almost every area in Amdo and Kham in the East. His publications mostly deal with Tibetan culture, including picture albums on Tibet, books on the oral tradition of the Tibetans, and articles on ethnography, history, and society.

His publications include the following books:

- * *"Weisheit der Tibeter"*, [**Wisdom of the Tibetans**] with meditation plates and wall paintings of Tibetan monasteries, Stürtz Publications, Würzburg (Germany) 1995.
- Special edition by Flechsig Buchvertrieb, Würzburg 1998
- * *"Mythen und Legenden der Tibeter. Von Kriegerern, Mönchen, Dämonen und dem Ursprung der Welt"*, [**Myths and Legends of the Tibetans. Tales of Warriors, Monks, Demons and the Origine of the World**], an anthology as a "mythical geography of Tibet". Diederichs Publications, Yellow Series DG 124, Munich (Germany) 1996
- * *"Dach der Welt"*, [**Roof of the World**], volume of plates of the book series "Encounter with the Horizon", C.J. Bucher Publications, Munich (Germany) 1996, Reprint 1998
- * *"Tibet"*, [**Tibet**], volume of plates of the book series "Encounter with the Horizon", C.J. Bucher Publications, Munich (Germany) 1996, Reprint 1998
- * *"Die heiligen Stätten der Tibeter. Mythen und Legenden von Kailash bis Shambhala"*, [**The Holy Sites of the Tibetans. Myths and Legends from Kailash to Shambhala**], an anthology as a "mythical geography of Tibet", Yellow Series DG 137, Diederichs Publications, Munich (Germany) 1997

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- Picture no. 136 Dzamthang's *parkhang* offers prints of writings of Dolpopa, Taranatha and other important teachers of the Jonangpa order.
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- Picture no. 145 A long row of paintings portrays eminent masters of the Buddhist Doctrine: starting with the mythical kings of Shambhala and ending with the 46th Jonangpa Dharmaraja. Below are the Tantric deities Kalacakra and Cakrasamvara.
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7. Serta and the world's largest Buddhist Academy

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Amdo and Tibet: Common cultural features and differences

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Foreword

The plan to survey Tibet's cultural monuments originated from the idea of publishing Michael Henss' 1981 *Tibet - Die Kulturdenkmäler*, in an English translation. Until the mid-1990s, travelling all over the Tibetan Highland was far from easy and a monograph producing extensive coverage of these monuments was still awaited by interested readers. During the 1990s a number of comprehensive guide books were published, most dealing only with the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Gyurme Dorje's *Tibet Handbook* (Bath 1996) was the first to provide an impressive general overview of the entire Tibetan Plateau, including some culturally affiliated areas such as Bhutan and the Kathmandu Valley.

At about the same time, Michael Henss and myself agreed to collaborate on a synopsis of the historical monuments of Tibet, as had earlier been discussed. As he planned to extend his earlier German work for the English edition, he asked whether I would be willing to undertake the research and the writing up of the east Tibetan region. Of course, I felt—and still feel—honoured at having been asked to cooperate with this great expert on the art and iconography of ancient Tibet. I then presented him with a preliminary outline of the material I believed, at the time, I would collate to elaborate the specific features of the historical monuments of the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau, with special reference to its culture, history, tribal and ethnic variety.

Michael Henss was well aware that eastern Tibet—the so-called 'provinces' of Amdo and Kham—is also of cultural and historical importance for central Tibet. This was never well reflected in the works of Tibetan historiography, nor to speak of in Western historical treatises on Tibet. This meant that, unexpectedly, the material I had presented to him was quite considerable. The data was collated from Western and Chinese sources, including

travelogues and research findings by Han-Chinese Tibetologists,¹ or Tibetan social scientists, living and working within the bounds of the PRC. These materials were to be complemented by personal on site descriptions, visual and written, obtained during extensive travel on many occasions to the area—up to now almost all the some 200 administrative units (on county-level) on the Tibetan high plateau having been visited. Countless talks, informal interviews and discussions with Tibetans at home and in exile, with Chinese² of different ethnicity in respective areas, together with a deep personal interest and on-going research on matters of identity, ethnicity and cultural self-perception, led me to concentrate on eastern Tibet—although not to the point of reducing my interest in central and western Tibet and related areas in the Himalayas to a purely secondary level.

The various 'outer regions' of the Tibetan cultural realm cannot be understood without knowledge of Tibet proper (Tib. *bod yul*), or central Tibet. On the other hand, the distinct features of eastern Tibet, and even more so of the latter's fringe zones in Amdo and Gyarong, will never be correctly interpreted and well appreciated without a deep insight into the history and culture of China. China's self-perception differs considerably from Western perceptions, and it is China—its 'inner land' (*nei di*)³ mainly populated by Han-Chinese and some closely related ethnic groups of so-called 'national minorities'—which is a close, intimate and not always beloved neighbour of the east Tibetans.

It is evident from all these aspects that historical and cultural developments in Amdo and Kham may sometimes vary very considerably from those of central Tibet. Until now, east Tibet has not been thoroughly researched to any extent, and certainly not been comprehensively documented or presented. Areas comprising part of what is called east Tibet, however, make up a major share of the Tibetan high

plateau, accounting for some two thirds of its huge surface.

Bearing this in mind, it became my desire and aspiration to prepare a synopsis of cultural monuments in east Tibet that would provide a real appreciation both of its 'Tibetanness' and its uniqueness, having common traits with the Tibetan heartland in Ü-Tsang, but otherwise its own history, cultural traits and socio-political developments. Thus, it became clear from the outset, that my approach toward the historical monuments would be different, at least partially, from Michael Henss, who, as an art historian, would stress the extremely beautiful, often incredibly intricate examples of old Tibet's early pieces of fine arts: painting, sculpture, bronze, architecture. On the other hand, I would be dealing with a rather unexplored realm as far as art history is concerned, since in the entire region of Amdo and Kham, frequently ravaged by wars and ethnic strife, monuments and relics were more often than not destroyed. Therefore I did not expect to find more than a very few antiquities. This, as will be proved later on, was a misapprehension, and whilst I had to revise my expectations, at the same time I was able to gain deeper insight into a revived Buddhist (and secular) Tibetan culture and the exciting revival of Tibetan civilization by east Tibetans, who bring together old conventions, traditional customs and beliefs, choosing what suits them from a wide range of modern cultural, social and even political developments.

In surveying all this, our different approaches—the art historian perspective of Michael Henss and that of a history-minded social-anthropological one on my side—has provided a multitude of fruitful discussions between us and interesting new perspectives, which have found their way into this book.

We may call this the inner development of our common project, in regard to its contents. However, there has been a rather dramatic and more visible outer development of our comprehensive survey of Tibetan cultural monuments, namely growth in size. At the time of Michael Henss' German publication in 1981, not so many places were accessible in Tibet proper, good research material on the sites was difficult to obtain and repeated travelling there was still extremely difficult. When we started our work on a joint English edition in the 1990s, the knowledge

situation had improved already as far as the major monuments in central Tibet were concerned, but the situation in east Tibet still resembled the earlier state of information in Tibet proper (*bod yul*). So, the first plan to produce one single volume on the whole of Tibet seemed reasonable.

After I started my work on Amdo and Kham, it soon became clear that there was much more information and much better Chinese documents and materials (often translated or elaborated from Tibetan sources) than originally expected. Hence, we came up with the plan of separating one volume on Central Tibet, which Michael Henss is about to complete now, from a separate volume on what we call Tibet's 'outer provinces'—west and east Tibet. As might be expected, the actual extent of research and field work in an area long neglected, is difficult to assess in advance. The size of the final book might be anything between a slim volume and a large pondreous tome. The latter became more and more probable as time went on, and then rather certain. Furthermore, the more fruitful and rewarding my work on Amdo and Kham became, the more obvious it was that besides needing separate volumes on west and east Tibet, two separate volumes would be required for Amdo and Kham.

We were most fortunate to find in White Lotus an extremely cooperative publisher, who not only appreciated our work very much, but edited it with regard to the size and extent of our project, promptly adapting to changes in circumstances and the working process. As far as eastern Tibet is concerned, the manuscript of Amdo was delivered first, together with more than 300 photos to help the reader imagine, side by side with the text, the development and extent of Amdo's cultural monuments and historical relics. Once editing was completed, the type-setting phase showed that the manuscript was too long and the pictures too many to publish in one compact and handy volume. The author was then informed by the publisher that in his professional opinion, and not wanting to "...cut off the author's nose and ears", he would be willing to publish Amdo in two volumes, if the author agreed and considered this feasible.

So, finally, this is the end—for the time being—of a long, rewarding, though never complete or infallible work, on the first part of east Tibet's cultural monuments. I would like to thank the editor for

facilitating the presentation of this second volume on Amdo's cultural monuments, for the reader's enjoyment and interest.

My thanks expressed in the first volume apply here, as without the generous assistance and encouragement of a great number of people this work would never have borne fruit. For me these books on Tibetan monuments and relics are also

meant as a monument in their own right, always remembering the friendly reception I received from the local people in the many places visited all over the Tibetan Plateau.

Andreas Gruschke
Freiburg in February 2001

List of Abbreviations

- AP: Autonomous Prefecture
- AZZ: *Aba Zangzu Qiangzu Zizhizhou Zhi* [Records of the Tibetan and Qiang nationalities' Autonomous Prefecture of Aba (Ngawa)]
- CDCT: *Han-Zang Duizhao Cidian* [A Comparative Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary]
- CMCR: Chinese Ministry of Cultural Relics
- DCF: *Zhongguo Meishu Cidian* [Dictionary of Chinese Fine Arts]
- DRM: *Zhongguo Ge Minzu Zongjiao Yu Shenhua Da Cidian* [Dictionary of Religion and Myths of Every Chinese Nationality]
- ECF: *Zhongguo Meishu Quanji* [An Encyclopedia of Chinese Fine Arts]
- GSM: *Gansu Shaoshu Minzu* [National Minorities of Gansu]
- GZZG: *Gannan Zangzu Zizhizhou Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Southern Gansu]
- HHZG: *Hualong Huizu Zizhixian Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Hui Autonomous County of Hualong]
- HNZG: *Hainan Zangzu Zizhizhou Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Hainan]
- HTZG: *Huzhu Tuzu Zizhixian Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Tu Autonomous County of Huzhu]
- HZZG: *Huangnan Zangzu Zizhizhou Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Huangnan]
- LAB: *Labulengsi Monastery* (book title)
- MHT: *Minhe Huizu Tuzu Zizhi Xian Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Hui and Tu Autonomous County of Minhe]
- MPR: Mongolian People's Republic
- PRC: People's Republic of China
- PRHA: *Anduo Zhengjiao Shi* [A Political and Religious History of Amdo]
- QW: *Qinghai Wenwu* [Qinghai Cultural Relics]
- TAP: Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
- TAR: Tibet Autonomous Region (Chin. *Xizang Zizhiqu*)
- TCD: *rgya-bod ming mdzod - Zang-Han Cidian* [A Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary]
- XSZX: *Xunhua Salazu Zizhi Xian Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Salar Autonomous County of Xunhua]
- XZD: *Xizang Zizhiqu Dituce* [An Atlas of the Tibet Autonomous Region]
- XZGK: *Xizang Zizhiqu Gaikuang* [A Survey of the Tibet Autonomous Region]
- ZHCD: *rgya bod ming mdzod/ Zang Han Cidian* [Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary]

Introductory Notes

In Tibetan areas cultural relics are mostly of a religious nature, although this should not lead to the assumption that Tibetan culture is an entirely religious culture. Buddhism may play a major role in Tibetan society, as religion does in any traditional society, and religious belief of Tibetans may seem stronger than that of many other peoples, yet the people of Tibet have always been very rich in various customs and traditions which are not of a religious nature. The Tibetan oral folk-literature, handicrafts of daily life, ordinary housing, folk music offer beautiful examples of such secular culture.

However, religion, that is to say Tibetan Buddhism, is the most important factor when it comes to the remains of historic and restored cultural relics, as far as architecture, painting, sculpture, and so on are concerned. As the adoption of Buddhism had completely altered the superstructure of Tibetan society by setting up a new pattern of institutions, establishing a new class of political organization and of hierarchies of authority,¹ even relics originating in the political and social background of Tibetan society often have a religious touch.

Like in other areas of the Tibetan realm, Amdo also became politically organized by monasteries to the same extent as the complex hierarchy of lamas developed. Once the exigency of spreading the Buddhist doctrine throughout the country had been accepted,

it became imperative to create an elite which was initiated, disciplined and organised enough to spread the message... The monastery developed as the headquarters of this campaign and gradually a social system emerged whereby potential monks were recruited in childhood. ... Patronage of these monasteries gradually spread in Tibet to the rich landlords and aristocratic families who, by letting out their lands to tenants, were able

to amass fortunes and share it with the monasteries.²

This is how the many great monasteries evolved, matured and spread across the country. As the lamas, their spiritual leaders, were most important both for managing religious affairs and influencing the people's everyday life, even politically, the institutions are therefore often designated after these lamas: lamaseries. The basic prerequisite for the flourishing of monasticism also carried the seeds of its demise, due to excessive development of the system, which brought religion, politics and social welfare into conflict. And the demise of important monasteries happened earlier and more rapidly, where there were competing political systems, like Muslim neighbours, legal bodies of Imperial China, and even Tibetan compatriots in culturally differing Amdo.

At the beginning of the 1980s the significance of Amdo, as far as Tibet's cultural history was concerned, was still severely underestimated. Khosla maintained that 'the centres of Tibetan life lie in the south'.³ In 1981 M. Henss⁴ wrote: 'The ... space of Ü (*dbUs*), Tsang and Kham became the most important centres of Tibetan cultural history.' Amdo was not even mentioned in this context, although it should be noted that Henss depicted an attitude which was the typical position of Tibetans of the core cultural areas. The actual situation in Amdo and the importance of its monastic centres was probably never much appreciated in central Tibet, because they did not interfere with politics in Tibet proper (*bod yul*).

This is all the more astounding since Amdo was very well represented in lamaseries all over Tibet, notably in Lhasa's Drepung, Sera and Ganden monasteries. This is due to the circumstance that in modern sources people from Amdo are often mistaken as being people of Kham. Older Tibetan

sources did not, at least until the 19th century, differentiate between those two eastern Tibetan 'provinces'. Rather they used the joint term *mdo khams*. It seems that where this term is used it was often interpreted as Kham, thus neglecting a considerable Amdo part. So it is that the monks who initiated the Buddhist revival in central Tibet, such as Lu-me for instance, are often seen as having studied in Kham, although they were ordained and taught in Amdo.⁵

The anthropological, historical and therefore cultural background of Amdo differs in many respects from central Tibet. That is why the history of this region is often only peripherally the same as that represented by Lhasa chroniclers, and so we have to shed some light on historical developments in specific areas in northeastern Tibet. Although many historical facts can be seen from one aspect or the other, we sometimes have to interpret them in a way with which today's refugee Tibetan politicians may not feel comfortable. This must not be misunderstood as a plea in favour of absolute Chinese control, although

Tibet's system of ecclesiastical rule was fatally flawed by its dependence upon foreign political and military patronage. ...

China's sovereignty over Tibet has been internationally recognized both before and after 1951. The legalistic argument, which China can easily refute, has been emphasized at the expense of the self-determination argument, which China cannot answer. ...

It is one of the mysteries (some people may say tragedies) of the Tibetan case that its leaders in exile and their advisers have sought to show that Tibet has a right to absolute statehood, perhaps gambling to attract Western support, rather than to seek its people's right to decolonization. ...

The principle of self-determination is not dependent upon Tibet's historical or legal status. Tibet does not have to demonstrate an unbroken history of political independence in order to demand self-determination in the present.⁶

This notion is not the last word on all the political, social and economic problems on the Tibetan Plateau. The mystification of Tibetan history and

the distortion of the multi-ethnic character of considerable parts of the Tibetan realm moves people to close their eyes to the possible consequences of a shift from Chinese imperialism to what may be a Tibetan one.

Our position in describing the situation in Amdo is neutral. Our sympathy will always be with the oppressed—be they Tibetans, Han-Chinese or Hui Muslims. It cannot be viewed as a political statement related to modern problems to have come to the conclusion that at a specific time the realm of Chinese or Tibetan control went as far as this region or that administrative border. This insight should be taken as a step towards a further understanding of historical, socio-cultural and ethno-political processes. These are critical and necessary for the solution of modern and post-modern political problems which are not as easily resolved as many of us often believe.

Tibet's best case is the whole truth, unobscured by fairy tale interpretations of the past or denials of the realities of the present.⁷

Tibet's Amdo region is extremely complex and only apparently homogenous. It is therefore difficult to elaborate a comprehensive plan to follow when presenting the different cultural areas of northeastern Tibet. The number of historic landscapes is too big, and they often do not coincide with tribal, natural or administrative borders. Due to the complexity which has persisted until modern times, neither is it feasible to arrange the present synopsis according to the historical development. The cultural mosaic of northeastern Tibet is too colourful to find an optimal solution. We have therefore used the current administrative organization of Tibet to draw a major delineation. It is much more strongly based on historical borderlines than is generally admitted, and this will help the reader to locate the sites in question more easily. That is to say, we have a tripartite arrangement of Amdo cultural relics in the present-day provinces of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan, yet restricted to those areas which are considered as belonging to Amdo. The region of Kham, which also shares in the provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan, will, as stated, be dealt with in a separate volume.

The first visits to cultural monuments described (in this volume) took place in 1985, continuing to 2000, with some places visited only once and others

several times. These descriptions provide both a view of conditions as found as well as setting these in a historic perspective, which has a long recorded background. Besides the interest of present readers, it is the author's hope that visitors to these remarkable sites may be able to assess and record progress and change, thereby providing another link for future study, as the author has benefitted and built on all those who have preceded him in their dedication to Tibetan cultural development.

In volume 1 we started with the Qinghai part of Amdo, covering by far the largest area with monastic centres. Therein, Kumbum Jampa Ling was the first to be presented, the birthplace of the Tibetan Buddhist reformer Tsongkhapa and therefore of major cultural-historical importance. For a long period it was the only Amdo lamasery well known in the West. It is followed by four areas which can

be naturally delineated: Tsongkha, Rongwo, Ngolok and the Kokonor-Tsaidam Basin. Non-Buddhist relics are dealt with in a thematic chapter. Major examples are found in Qinghai; similar relics and monuments are also found in neighbouring provinces.

In this volume 2, Amdo areas outside the former imperial province of Qinghai-Kokonor are dealt with, starting with the description of the Gansu part of Tibetan areas in the highland's northeast—beginning with an examination of the situation in two geographically defined regions, the Silk Road margin and Kanlho; while the major lamasery Labrang Tashi Chil merits a chapter of its own. The Amdo section of Sichuan follows, disclosing several surprising features and monuments. The concluding chapter presents a survey of some cultural features which Tibet proper and Amdo have in common, or where they differ from each other.

**Introduction to Tibet's
Cultural Provinces
Amdo and Kham**

Part 1. Northeast and eastern Tibet

Settlement pattern and current political divisions

The designation of Tibet as the realm of Tibetan culture and people ('ethnic Tibet') is, as far as its dimension is concerned, a highly ambiguous term. The general public believes the size of the 'political Tibet', which was *de facto* independent from 1914 to 1950, to have covered the natural entity of the Tibetan Plateau, 'geographical Tibet'. A careful attention to details quickly reveals the complexity of the region. The most extensive highland of the world, the Tibetan Plateau, has never been a political entity for a longer period of time, and most probably it was never inhabited by a homogenous population. Expressed in modern terms, we would have to admit that Tibet, like China, Nepal, or India, and by virtue of its expanse over the entire plateau, has always been and still is multi-ethnic and multicultural. It is clear that the various peoples and cultures on the plateau were influenced and formed by the civilisations and political events of southern Tibet, China and Central Asia. Consequently we should, as members of modern states, be they pseudo-nationalistic or federate, try to perceive a culture from its centre, rather than from its boundaries. The appreciation of a cultural realm cannot be achieved from a political point of view, much less from a nationalistic one.

Tibetan culture has, like that of all other countries, expressed itself in a variety of forms. These cannot always be understood in relation to the linguistic, religious, historical, or socio-economic situation at what is considered the core of the culture, i.e. the Tibetan language, Buddhism, the empire of ancient times, or pastoralism. The frontiers of the country have their particular features that distinguish them from Tibet proper, and yet they have not been corrupted by the direct interference of a foreign regime. The reasons for this are manifold, the most important being the existence in former and present times of a specific local civilisation and the influx of cultural elements from outside. This makes it all the

more difficult to draw a more or less exact borderline between the Tibetan realm and its principal neighbouring cultures, the Himalayan states, and—due to a very long shared history—especially China.

One ethnically but not geographically defined Tibet is: those regions whose inhabitants call themselves Böpa (*bod pa*), speak Bökhe (*bod khas*), i.e. all Tibetan dialects related to that spoken in Lhasa, who use the Tibetan script and belong to either the Bön religion or Tantric Buddhism.¹ As the term Böpa, strictly speaking, only refers to the people of the former realm of the Dalai Lamas, our definition has to be extended to include the complementary term Böchenpa (*bod chen pa*) or—man of Greater Tibet. As such it may be applied to the people of the central Tibetan provinces Ü, Tsang and Lhokha, Ngari and Ladakh in western Tibet, and to those ethnic Tibetan populations in several valley regions in the Himalayas as well as in Amdo and Kham, which are located in the plateau's northeast and east respectively.²

With respect to the eastern Part of the Tibetan Plateau, the regions east and northeast of the Lhasa-dominated areas are called Do-Kham (*mdo khams*). Amdo and Kham are generally considered to be the two Tibetan 'provinces' that make up eastern Tibet. These 'provinces' are seen from a Lhasa perspective as extending as far as the foot of the mountain ranges that frame the Tibetan Highland to the north and east, i.e. the geographical boundaries of the plateau. If this were so Amdo would be bordered in the north by the oases along the southern edge of the Mongolian Gobi: Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Zhangye and Wuwei. These old trade markets of the ancient Silk Road belonged to the Tibetan empire during the eighth and ninth centuries; yet such a delimitation of ethnic Tibet is obviously questionable. Tibetans live in some zones of the Nan Shan mountains stretching on the border of China's Gansu

and Qinghai provinces,³ but they can hardly be considered as the main population of the Silk Road oases; in some areas there are none at all.

The Chinese province of Qinghai is generally identified with the greater part of Amdo. This Tibetan term, however, refers to an area stretching far into the neighbouring Chinese provinces of Gansu and Sichuan. Moreover, Tibetans consider the Qinghai-administered regions of Yushu and Nangchen as belonging to Kham. Kham reaches further north in the inner part of the plateau than in the east, whereas Amdo occupies some areas in northern Sichuan province. Historical reasons may play an essential role in the distinction of what is a part of Amdo and what belongs to Kham. For general purposes it is useful to look at the river systems which dominate the two areas.⁴

Although maps on the Do-Kham region tend to show some indistinct borderlines, it can be easily recognized that Amdo mainly comprises the river system of the Ma Chu—as the Yellow River is called by Tibetans—and of its tributaries that join the stream before reaching Gansu's capital Lanzhou. Kham, on the other hand, occupies that part of the Tibetan Plateau that is characterized by deep gorges cut by China's largest river, the Chang Jiang or Yangzi Jiang (Yangtse; Dri Chu in Tibetan) and its tributaries like the Yalong Jiang (Nya Chu), as well as the Southeast Asian rivers Mekong (Dza Chu) and Salween (Nag Chu).

This is a rough outline of how the two areas could be distinguished from each other, although the Ngawa (Chin. *Aba*) area makes it obvious that the river systems cannot be taken as an absolute criterion. The rivers of that area drain south into the Yangtse system although they belong to Amdo in the north. The main reason for this may be the ethnic structure of that region: the Ngawa Prefecture is populated by members of the Ngolok-Seta tribes and therefore has close relations with the famous Ngoloks who live in the adjacent area of Amnye Machen, Amdo's most famous sacred mountain.

The absence of distinct borderlines indicates that Amdo and Kham, or rather Do-Kham, are not and may never have been provinces in an administrative sense.⁵ As they exhibit some distinct features which distinguish them not only from central Tibet but also from each other, we should rather speak of Amdo and Kham in the sense of 'cultural or geographical provinces' of Tibet. During the 18th century, Amdo

even created the impression of being at least relatively autonomous, if not independent.

From the states of Hor and Amdoa no soldiers are taken, from motives of distrust, as the first are adherents of the Tatar rather than the Tibetan cause, and usually speak the Tatar language, while the second dwell on the confines of China beyond the Great Wall, and speak more Tibetan than Tatar and Chinese.⁶

On the other hand, had Amdo and Kham been under the Dalai Lama's secular and not only spiritual rule, the extent of his incumbency would still have seemed to be quite unclear; central Tibetans of the 18th century seemed to be very ignorant about the location and extension of Amdo:

The King of Tibet is also ruler over the state of Amdoa, mentioned above, which is bounded on the east by China, on the north by Kokonor and Chang, on the west by Kham, and on the south by Tonquin, Pegu, or Siam, as far as is known; but this is not known for certain, as the Tibetans have very little knowledge of those countries and the states neighbouring them.⁷

Whatever the political relationship between Lhasa and Amdo may have been, it can certainly be noted that throughout a very long period of Tibetan history Amdo was a region on the Tibetan Plateau that was felt to be quite different from central Tibet:

In my time nearly all the lecturers and lamas of the university, masters of the Supreme Lama, and the Grand Lamas who have been born again, came from Amdoa, a province from which they do not draft soldiers, as mentioned above. (...) Notwithstanding the (...) blameable habits of the Tibetans, they have some good points, among which, being generally intelligent (although not equal to the people of the state of Amdoa, who are extremely quick), they are gentle and humane and amenable to reason.⁸

Administratively, the Do-Kham territory seems to have been torn apart and distributed among modern China's Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR, Chin. *Xizang zizhiqu*) and the four Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. This 'dismantling' of Tibet, especially of the Do-Kham region, is usually attributed to the Communist government of the People's Republic of China,

founded in 1949. This is not quite correct, as the administrative pattern had already been created during the Chinese Empire and the Republican era. Details of the historical development will be illustrated in the section on Amdo, and, in a separate volume, on Kham. However, the divisional character, the disunity and particularism in Amdo is a reality that is accepted even by Tibetan scholars: 'The Amdowa had never been ruled by any one leader as a united people ever since the fall of the Tibetan empire in the ninth century A.D.'⁹

The area of Amdo forms part of three present-day Chinese provinces. It occupies the bulk of Qinghai, the southwestern edge of Gansu and the northernmost grasslands of Sichuan. Historically it comprises the former kingdoms and tribal areas of Chone (*cone*) and Thewo (*the bo*), the Ngolok (*mgo lok*), Thrika (*khri kha*) and Shara Yugur ('*ban dha hor*) as well as the Tsaidam (*tshva'i 'dam*) and Hor Gyadé (*hor rgya sde*) regions, the Tsongkha (*tsong kha*) and Rongwo (*rong po*) valleys and those of their tributaries, as well as the monastic state of Labrang. Nowadays the administrative divisions take the ethnic structure of the population into account. That is why one finds the Haibei, Huangnan, Hainan, Ngolok and Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures (AP) and the Haixi Mongol-Tibetan-Kazakh AP in Qinghai, Gannan TAP and Tianzhu (*then kru'u*, or *gling chu gser khab*) Tibetan Autonomous County (AC) in Gansu besides Ngawa (*Inga pa*, Chin. *Aba*) Tibetan-Qiang AP in Sichuan province. The Ngawa Prefecture only partly belongs to Amdo, while the bigger part, together with the Kandse TAP, is considered to make up the east of Kham.

The western part of Kham consists more or less of what is now the Chamdo district of the TAR, while northern Kham lies in Qinghai's Yushu TAP, and its southernmost part in Sichuan's Muli Tibetan

AC and Dechen TAP of the province of Yunnan. In terms of history and Tibetan tribes, Kham comprises the realm of the former Nangchen kingdom (*nang chen*) in the north, Nubhor (*nub hor*), Poyül (*spo yul*), Chamdo (*chab mdo*), Drayab ('*brag yab*), Pashö (*dpag shod*), Dzayül (*rdza yul*), Tsha(wa)röng (*tsha ba rōng*) and Markham (*smar khams*) areas in the west; centrally located are the former kingdoms of Lhatog (*lha thog*), Dege (*sde dge*), Ling (*gling*), Te Hor (*tre hor*), Ba ('*ba*') and Lithang (*li thang*) and Kyenaröng (*sKye nag rōng*); Gyethang (*rgyal thang*) and Muli (*rmi li*) lie to the south. While Lhasa Tibetans, especially authorities of the government in exile, tend to include Minyag (*mi nyag*), Gyaröng (*rgyal mo rōng*), the Qiang mountain areas of Min Shan (*byang*, in Sichuan) and the Naxi-Moso-Pumi regions around Lake Lugu and the Lijiang Naxi AP (*lho 'jang sa tham*, in Yunnan) within Kham province, the populations of those areas have their own perception of where they do or do not belong. From an anthropological point of view they live in the circumference of ethnic Tibet, i.e. they are the same Bönpo or Tantric Buddhists as the Tibetans, or at least have been influenced by Tibetan culture, but they speak their own language.¹⁰ Some of them even have their own specific script.

We have to accept that no province of Kham existed as a distinct area under a certain district government with jurisdiction over its land and population. Until the 20th century most western regions of Kham were governed by officials of the Dalai Lama. There was a subsequent change from absolutely independent little kingdoms in the north and in the heart of the region to the semi-dependent principalities further east up to the Chinese controlled areas in the bordering mountains. The concept of Kham was not a province but rather a loose federation of tribal states, kingdoms and dependant districts.¹¹ The same is true for Amdo.

Part 2. Amdo

Generally speaking, the Amdo region comprises all those areas which are situated fully within the precincts of the Ma Chu River drainage area—as the upper reaches of the Yellow river are called in Tibetan. Most of those regions belong to the present-day Chinese province of Qinghai. We may consider the watershed between Ma Chu and Dri Chu (Tibetan name of the upper reaches of the Yangtse river) to be Amdo's natural boundary in the south. To the west extend the highlands of Yarmothang and Changthang across which the Drogpa (*'brog pa*), Tibetan nomads, wander with their flocks of yaks and sheep. The Kunlun ranges make up the mountainous barrier to the deserts of the Tsaidam Basin where, ethnically, a Mongolian environment begins. Parts of the Tsaidam Basin and the vast stretches of the Changthang near the headwaters of Ma Chu and Dri Chu are almost uninhabited.¹²

On the very north of the Tibetan Plateau the mountain ranges of Nan Shan or Qilian Shan drop off to the Inner Asian desert regions. Once more we find Tibetans living in the higher areas, while in the densely populated northeast of Qinghai there is a high degree of ethnic mixing. The river valley of the Huang Shui, a Yellow River tributary, is a natural gateway to Tibet. Hence it is an ethnic patchwork of Tibetans (about one million in Amdo), Tu or Monguor (approx. 200,000 persons), Hui Muslims (0.6 million in Qinghai and approximately 0.4 million within Tibetan areas of Gansu province), Salar (90,000), Mongolians (60,000), Bao'an (12,000), Dongxiang (150,000 to 240,000) and Han-Chinese (59.7% of the Qinghai populace). The mountainous rim of the plateau's north and northwest is populated by Yugur (13,000), Kazakhs (3,000), and Uyghurs (in Xinjiang), living side by side with Hui, Mongolians, Tibetans and Han-Chinese.¹³

As is the case in all Tibetan regions, the population of Amdo is also composed of peasants and itinerant herdsmen. Most of the arable land is concentrated in the eastern part. This is where the big monastic centres of the so-called Yellow Hat sect developed: the Valley of Onions—Tsongkha, with the monastic university Kumbum Jampa Ling which recalls the

great Lamaist reformer Tsongkhapa; the monastic centres of Labrang and Chone situated in the southwestern part of Gansu province; Rongwo valley, home to the remarkable Wutun or Rebgong art. One must not forget Rgolung, the centre of the religious activities of the Tu people who spread the Tibetan form of Buddhism in both eastern Tibet and China proper.

The Tibetans share all those fertile and climatically favourable domains with other sedentary peoples: the Salar Muslims, who immigrated into the Ma Chu Canyon of Lower Amdo (around Xunhua) during the Chinese middle ages; the Hui, who started to settle on the eastern precincts in the 15th or 16th centuries; and especially the Han-Chinese, who in 121 BC founded their first military base near Xining, today's capital of Qinghai province. The mountains of the northeastern fringe of the Tibetan Plateau, i.e. the border regions of the Chinese provinces of Qinghai and Gansu, are still populated by Tibetans. Together with some dispersed and numerically few peoples—like the Old-Mongolian Monguor (Tu) in Huzhu and Datong counties, the Dongxiang (250,000 persons) and Bao'an (just about 9,000 people)—the Tibetans are a big minority, while neighbouring central Gansu is inhabited entirely by Hui and Han-Chinese.

The nomads among the Amdowas, as Amdo Tibetans call themselves, are easily outnumbered by their farming countrymen, and yet their living space extends over the largest expanse of Qinghai. South of the Kunlun Mountains, in the vast grasslands of Yarmothang and around Lake Kokonor, as well as around the holy mountain of Amnye Machen, their way of life is determined by the itinerant herdsmen. The vast steppes and the harsh climate of the highlands, not suited to agriculture or forests, offer a living to itinerant cattle-breeders only. However, there is again, as in former times, plenty of wildlife. In the vast open space hunting was difficult before the introduction of rifles;¹⁴ today certain species are protected by law. While the southern parts of Amdo undoubtedly are the incontestable realm of the Tibetan Ngolok-Seta tribes, the prairies and desert areas within and around the Tsaidam basin were taken possession of

by Mongolian tribes, starting in the 13th century. Even to the far west of the barren Changthang region and south of Rongwo, Mongolian tribes of herdsmen are still to be found. Originally all those nomadic tribes only bred sheep and yaks;¹⁵ later they also started to keep goats, cattle and, of course, horses.

2.1. Derivation of the toponym 'Amdo'

The meaning of a province named Amdo has not yet been found in any of the early Tibetan sources. After the collapse of the ancient Yarlung dynasty in 842 AD, the process of political centralization came to an end and the Tibetan Empire broke up. It was the first and last empire covering the entire Tibetan Plateau and beyond. Political fragmentation was continually resisted by the attempts at regional unification by aristocratic families and even monastic rulers. Kingdoms, tribal lands and tiny principalities co-existed in medieval Tibet up to modern times and offered a large variety of social and political structures.¹⁶ Thus there was no specific administrative divisional pattern in the Tibetan realm, much less well-defined provinces of a centralized government. Even though the government of the 5th Dalai Lama and his successors, especially the 13th Dalai Lama, tried to follow in the footsteps of the emperors of the 7th to 9th centuries, there was no administrative re-organization of Tibet.

The Dalai Lamas had created a centralized administration modelled after the Yarlung realm, and even intended to restore its territory to the former extent of this realm. Although the aims and the prototype after which the policy was modelled might be called imperial(ist),¹⁷ they did not lead to an organizational pattern adopting provincial divisions. We find districts (*rdzong*), autocratic sedentary and tribal kingdoms throughout the country's history, but no regular legal body on a subdivisional (provincial) level of a centralized government. This is why we suggest the designation 'cultural provinces' for toponyms like Ü, Tsang, Amdo and Kham. As we shall see, defining their delimitations was always rather vague, so that errors and misconceptions concerning the affiliation of smaller areas to one of these 'provinces' are quite common.¹⁸

While the designations Amdo and Kham have become widely used in modern times, it is less known that until the 19th century Tibetan sources only used the composite Tibetan term Do-Kham. As *mdo khams* it may be found in Tibetan, as *duo gansi* in

Chinese sources, starting in the Mongol-Chinese Yuan dynasty (1274-1368).¹⁹ Eastern Tibet, i.e. the region beyond the central Tibetan provinces of Ü and Tsang, is then generally referred to as Do-Kham Gang-sum (*mdo khams sgang sum*), or Do-Kham Gang-drug (*mdo khams sgang drug*): that is to say the 'three, or six, mountains [of] mDo [and] Kham'.²⁰ The term *sgang* is meant to designate the pasture grounds on the high upland between the great river systems of Salween, Mekong, Yangtse, Yalong Jiang, and their tributaries.²¹ As a toponym Do-Kham thus seems to represent a comprehensive concept of the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau or realm, as is stated in Das' *Tibetan-English Dictionary*:

[*mdo khams*] *Mdo* and *Khams*, indicates Amdo, the province of Tibet S.E. of Kökō Nor, and Kham.²²

By contrasting various sources we may discern that both terms, Amdo and Kham, or rather *mdo* and *khams*, are concurrently used to circumscribe a deficiently delineated East Tibet. Southeastern Tibet, for instance, was sometimes either called Dome (*mdo smad*) or Kham, both being 'a vague geographical term without definite political significance' (Teichman).²³ Ren and Tshe-dbang rdo-rje alike use the term Do-Kham as 'a reference to the whole Tibetan-populated area east of Kongpo and Nag-chu'.²⁴ That is to say, it includes all the regions embraced by the modern toponyms Amdo, Kham and Gyarong, plus some minor adjacent regions.

We should moreover note that in former times the designation Do-Kham Gang-sum (or -drug) was used to distinguish Lhasa-dominated areas of central Tibet from those parts of the plateau that are characterized by:

1. The river system of the Ma Chu and its tributaries that reach the stream before Gansu's capital Lanzhou.
2. That part of the Tibetan Plateau that is characterized by deep gorges cut by China's largest river, the Yangtse (Dri Chu in Tibetan) and its tributaries like Yalong Jiang (Nya Chu), as well as the Southeast Asian rivers Mekong (Dza Chu) and Salween (Nag Chu).

Within this context it is interesting to note that Lama Tsenpo in his Tibetan geography of the early 19th century distinguishes between the people of Khams and Mongolia (*sog*) and Tibetans of the Ü-

Tsang (*dbus gtsang*) region. He also speaks of the countries of Mdo-Khams and Mongolia.²⁵ The Tibetan scholar Gedün Chömpel (*dge 'dun chos 'phel*) even went as far as to interpret *khams* as 'borderland', which was and is indeed true, compared to the central Tibetan provinces.²⁶

We should, therefore, look at Amdo and Kham in the sense of being cultural or geographical provinces of Tibet, as they were not individually defined by the toponym Do-Kham alone, but rather as areas beyond Ü-Tsang.

Toponyms are often assigned according to a topographical situation or geographical features, not only in Tibet. Therefore, the meaning of a word in a specific language may hint at the significance of an area within a certain cultural complex. Ancient Tibetan scholars ordinarily made tripartite subdivisions of large cultural and geographical regions. The main areas were called upper, lower and middle parts of the country, with the core civilization as the middle part, the upper one being situated to the west and the lower one to the east.²⁷ As the Tibetan term *mdo* also refers to lower lands, namely the lower part of a valley where it merges into the plain,²⁸ it thus looks as if the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau was originally just called *mdo*.²⁹

After the military expansion of the Tubo Empire of the Yarlung dynasty (7th to 9th centuries) the Tibetan realm went even beyond regions traditionally inhabited by Tibetans. The distinction of outlying districts from the Tibetan heartland, which of course was the middle region (*dbus*),³⁰ was often made according to the categories of upper (*stod*) and lower (*smad*) areas. Consequently, the term for eastern Tibet used after the Tubo Empire was not Do-Kham but rather Do-me (*mdo smad*) and Do-tö (*mdo stod*),³¹ as it was further subdivided into a lower and an upper part. More confusion arises from the fact that some works divide Amdo in two sections, an upper (*mdo stod*) and a lower Amdo (*mdo smad*). Upper Amdo then is considered to comprise the headwaters of the river Ma Chu, its upper reaches and the grounds above and north of it, including the basin of Lake Kokonor and as far to the east as the Datong River, the valley of the Huang Shui down to its outlet into the Yellow River. Lower Amdo consequently lies to the east and southeast of the Ma Chu, between the river Tao He and the Min Shan mountain range.³²

Yet, if *mdo* in its meaning of lower part in the Tibetan cultural context also may indicate the eastern

part, the above-mentioned additional subdivision takes on another meaning: upper east (*mdo stod*) for the vast highland steppes of the northeast, and lower east (*mdo smad*) designating the deep-cut valleys and high mountain ranges in the southeast of the Tibetan Plateau. It is the latter which became known in the West by its modern name of Kham (*khams*). However, this very *khams* later became, as we have seen, part of the designation *mdo khams*.³³

The Tibetan word *khams* has a number of different meanings, of which here those of empire, realm, territory or world seem to be the most significant.³⁴ With *yul khams* interpreted as a political territory or empire,³⁵ and *rgyal khams* as a kingdom, an expression like *mdo khams* may also be taken, at least originally, as 'the lower world, the territory of the lowlands'. In a central Tibetan perspective, those lower or eastern regions were border areas, completing Ü-Tsang to form a 'Greater Tibet' (*bod chen*). Technical terms at the beginning, the words *mdo* and *khams* have only recently turned into separate toponyms.³⁶

Lama Tsenpo (*bla ma btsan po*, died in 1839) in his reference work—the only comprehensive Tibetan geography—refers to what nowadays is called Amdo by the term *Mdo-smad A-mdo*,³⁷ i.e. the lower *mDo Amdo*. The eastern part of Changthang, called Yarmothang by the Amdowas, is represented as mDo-Kham Yarmothang. The latter is regarded by Lama Tsenpo as being a section of Amdo.³⁸ Even 19th century Tibetan use of the terms Amdo and Kham does not bring us any further.

So, why should the northeast of Tibet as a geographical or cultural entity be called Amdo? According to Hermanns,³⁹ there is a steep rock on the northern slope of the Bayankara Mountains, somewhere near the headwaters of the Ma Chu. It is said that a natural formation resembling the Tibetan letter A is found on that rock. Near there, the river leaves the mountains, flowing into a wider valley, and as such a river outlet in Tibetan is called *mdo* the name of Amdo may be explained as the '[Ma Chu] river outlet near the A-shaped rock formation'.

2.2. A historical sketch of Tibet's Amdo region

As the northeastern part of the Tibetan Highland has distinct natural, ethnic and geographic features, it may be worthwhile to take a short look at the

historical development of Amdo. The Amdowas, Tibetans of Amdo, are said to consider themselves as Böchenpa (*bod chen pa*), people of 'Greater Tibet', in contrast to those of 'Little Tibet', Böchung (*bod chung*). According to Hermanns,⁴⁰ Tibetan tribes of Amdo regard themselves as the proper and eldest Bö (*bod*) while Tibetans of central and western Tibet are thought to be their descendants. This view does not seem unfounded, especially when considering early proto-Tibetan immigration. The Tibetan tribes of Amdo can be closely associated to the Qiang (Wade-Giles spelling: Ch'iang) peoples of old Chinese records. Beginning in the first millennium BC, parts of those Qiang tribes gradually migrated from Central Asia onto the Tibetan Highland. Passing through the valleys of north-eastern Tibet, they thus first spread in Amdo and gradually continued to take possession of southern and western Tibet.⁴¹

Those Qiang of course mixed with autochthonous tribes present and with peoples who subsequently invaded Tibet. Under these circumstances it can hardly be possible to trace a kind of original *bod*-people with a root common to all Tibetan tribes. Lama Tsenpo, too, who—at the beginning of the 19th century—had composed the only all-comprehensive geography of Tibet en toto, also expresses his doubts:

As for the (origin of) the people of the country of Tibet, it is difficult to make a decision, because they are explained by the Tibetans as having been produced from a monkey (...) Among the kings, ministers, and translators of Tibet in former times, there were Khu, Zo, Dpang, G-yung, Rma, and others; and there were Chinese and many famous tribes (rus) of Hor, such as Sa-ri, Gru-gu, Di-mir, Shi-ri, and others; therefore it is not certain that there was (only) one racial origin (rus dang chad khungs).⁴²

The ancient Chinese term Qiang covers all the nomads of the regions west of China and might have been derived from the old Tibetan word *Jang* (pronounced Djang). The Chinese character for Qiang carries the symbols for 'man' and 'sheep' which can easily be interpreted as 'men leading sheep to pasture', i.e. stock-farming nomads. During the early Shang period of Chinese history (2nd millennium BC) those western neighbours of old China settled in an area stretching from Shanxi in

northern China's loess highlands through Gansu to northern Sichuan. Chinese mythology has it that Qiang were involved in overthrowing the Shang dynasty and establishing the power of Zhou dynasty. The early or rather proto-Tibetans have most likely played a major role in the formation of the Chinese⁴³ civilization of antiquity.⁴⁴

After the establishment of China's first imperial dynasty—by another kingdom that had its roots in the 'Barbarian West'—the genesis of the Han-Chinese identity brought the agriculturally based Chinese Empire again into conflict with pastoral tribes at its western border, especially with the Xiongnu who virtually ruined the state by the tributes they got in exchange for peace. This was the reason why Han Emperor Wudi (140-67 BC) started his military campaigns which ended in the conquest not only of the bordering regions but of all the Tarim Basin in present-day Xinjiang. When the Qiang-Tibetans threatened the newly opened trade routes to Middle Asia, they were repelled by a well-equipped Chinese army in 62-60 BC. A first military outpost of the Han dynasty had already been established near today's Xining in 121 BC. From there the Chinese started the colonization of the area between the Yellow River and Lake Kokonor.⁴⁵

At the beginning of the Tang dynasty's rule of China, Tibetans were called Tubo, a term that seems to be derived from *tu phod* or *stod bod* (upper Tibet).⁴⁶ The archaic Tibetan dialects of Amdo have retained the articulation of the medieval Tibetan language; as such the pronunciation is *Töwöd*, as in Mongolian tongue. Thus, the term was handed down as *Tübüt* in Turkish diction, *Tibbat* in Arabic and passed on as *Tibet* in Western languages. As in Chinese annals *tu phod* or *stod bod* was represented as *Tubo*, the character reading *bo* may also be pronounced *fan* (which in the West is usually translated as 'barbarian', but actually means 'foreign'), later the Chinese pronunciation *Tufan* became generally adopted.⁴⁷ Therefore in old travelogues we can also find Chinese expressions like Sifan and Hsifan (*Xifan* in Pinyin spelling). These were interpreted as western barbarians and included the Tibetans of Amdo. Furthermore the Turko-Mongol word *Tangut* was originally used for Tibetans in general, yet specifically referred to the Amdowas, as northeastern Tibet is the area of permanent contact and exchange between all those peoples around the pivot of China, Tibet, Mongolia and the Inner Asian Silk Road.

Although Amdo had long been the realm of the proto-Tibetan Qiang, they did not fully occupy the region throughout the last two thousand years. When in central Tibet the ruler King⁴⁸ Songtsen Gampo started to build up a Greater Tibetan Empire, several other kingdoms existed in the northeastern part of the plateau, like those of Minyag, Sumpa and Tuyuhun. Chinese named dynasties like the Early Qin (351-394 AD), Late Qin (384-417) and Late Liang (386-403) obscure the fact that the ruling bodies of those principalities and kingdoms were proto-Tibetan.⁴⁹ Besides that, the fringe of the Tibetan Plateau always tended to offer retreat to ethnic populations who came under pressure from large-scale migrations of neighbouring peoples or for political reasons.

One such example is the Yugurs of the Gansu-Qinghai borderland on the northern slope of the Tibetan Highland. Beginning in the middle of the 9th century, the Central Asian Uyghurs (Chinese *Huihu*), originally inhabiting the Orkhon valley of Mongolia, increasingly came under pressure because of internal struggles for power and due to natural disasters. They therefore started to move in waves in a western direction where they set up the Uyghur kingdom of the Turpan Basin. They also settled along the oases of the Hexi-corridor in Gansu where they built up a Ganzhou Khanate. After a war against the developing Tangut Kingdom of Xi Xia in the mid-11th century, the Hexi-Uyghurs became vassals of the latter kingdom and mixed with neighbouring populations—thus finally forming a Yugur nationality. After the destruction of Xi Xia by the Mongols in 1227 and during the decline of the Yuan-Chinese Empire (1274-1368) conflicts started among the local feudal lords which finally drove the Yugurs to the mountainous region (Qilian Mts. or Nan Shan) that separates Amdo from Central Asian deserts.⁵⁰

On the eve of the Mongolian assault under Chenggis Khan's leadership, Amdo to some extent formed part of the Northern Song dynasty's empire: especially the area around Xining and the region between the Yellow River section near Gonghe (Jishi Jun) and Lower Amdo's Taozhou district. Amdo's northern part—from Lanzhou westward along the Qilian Mountain Range—belonged to the Tangut Empire of Xi Xia.⁵¹ The latter's disastrous defeat by the troops of Chenggis Khan had quickly brought the whole of Tibet under Mongolian control. The total destruction of any unyielding enemy was

too horrifying to have permitted the organization of any resistance. Present-day Tu (the so-called Monguor)⁵² and Dongxiang national minorities are said to be the last vestiges of the former population of Xi Xia, and they are supposed to have intruded into the Datong-Huzhu-Linxia area after the defeat by Chenggis Khan in 1226-1227.⁵³

The conquest of the Amdo area was started in 1226 by Subudei, one of Chinggis Khan's greatest commanders, who invaded the Tsongkha area on his way to Lanzhou. In 1275, i.e. soon after the establishment of the Yuan dynasty, another Mongol army invaded Amdo to fight the impetuous Tufan-Tibetans, whose nomad pastures extended in the Lake Kokonor area. A war raged for half a century within the Tsongkha region around Xining. Therefore the small Tibetan tribes living there had to flee the country and leave it to the invading Mongolians.⁵⁴

During the Yuan dynasty of the Mongol-Chinese Empire, Muslim tribes of Samarkand in western Turkestan migrated eastward. Under the guidance of a mullah they reached the upper reaches of the Yellow River and settled in the valleys around the present-day Xunhua area (Tib. *Dowi, rdo sbis*). Tradition has it that a legendary camel carried bags full of earth from their home which were mixed with earth around a 'Camel Spring'. There the camel turned to stone, and the tribe's long migration came to an end. Since the 14th century they occupied that small section of the Yellow River gorge around Xunhua, and the Salar, as this Muslim population is called, shared their environment with Tibetans living high up in the mountains, together with Hui Muslims and Han-Chinese. The language they speak corresponds to Chaghatai-Turkish, but not surprisingly includes a lot of Mongolian, Tibetan and Chinese loan-words.⁵⁵

Long after the end of the Mongol-Chinese Yuan dynasty (1368), political and ethnic unrest on the Inner Mongolian Ordos Plateau induced the first Mongolian groups to move further southwest. Headed by Ibulas, these tribes reached the shores of Lake Kokonor in 1509, ravaging the people living in the grassland area around it. In 1566 they were strengthened by the hordes of Setsen Gung, and in 1573 finally by Altan Khan. Reinforcements from Mongolia continued to come, as Ligdan Khan (1592-1634), since 1604 prince of the Chakhar tribes in Inner Mongolia, tried again to establish a Great Khanate modelled after the example of Chenggis

and Khubilai Khan. Because of his repressive actions, most of the Mongolian tribes rebelled against him. In 1631-32 Ligdan's last punitive expedition against the Aru Khorchin in the southeast of Inner Mongolia brought about the devastating response of the emerging Manchu Empire. After gathering the remaining followers around him Ligdan had to flee westward. A trek of 100,000 people, including women and children, moved across the Ordos into Amdo. The Mongolian tribes took possession of the Kokonor area and, strengthened by other groups of Khalkha Mongols, made their way farther south to the headwaters of the Ma Chu (Yellow River).⁵⁶

Thus arose a Mongolian kingdom in the Kokonor area that was formally established by Gushri Khan in 1633. He belonged to the Khoshot Mongols, a sub-tribe of the Oirats, and traced his origins to the younger brother of Chenggis Khan. In 1636 Gushri Khan invaded Kham, the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau, six years later he conquered central Tibet, eradicating the local kingdoms there. In 1641 he assigned the whole country to the 5th Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Gyatsho (1617-1680) and thus helped to establish the Tibetan theocracy. The support of the Mongolian princely dynasty of Amdo for the Lamaist take-over of autocratic power in Tibet was substantial.⁵⁷

Possibly in the course of the warfare between Mongolian and Chinese armies during Ming dynasty's Wanli reign (1573-1620), a Chinese army unit named 'secure the peace' (*bao'an*) was established in Amdo's Rongwo valley. Under the command of Gansu's Hezhou (today's Linxia district in Gansu) military commission a town of Bao'an developed. Its inhabitants mixed with Tibetans, Hui and Mongolians of the surrounding area and thus developed distinct features of an ethnic population of its own—the Bao'an. As both the Ming and Qing dynasties of the Chinese Empire supported the development of the Lamaist monasteries in Amdo as an effort to pacify the region, the feudal power of Rongwo's main monastery grew to an extent that during the Tongzhi reign (1862-74) of the Qing dynasty the Bao'an started to move towards the northeast. First they established themselves around Xunhua where, two centuries earlier, the Salar had stabilized their colony, and finally settled in the area of Jishi Shan. Thus they constituted a buffer between the Hui Muslims of Hezhou and the Salar Muslims and Tibetans in the Yellow River area around Xunhua (in today's Qinghai province).⁵⁸

During the Yongzheng reign (1723-35) of the Manchu-Chinese Empire Muslim immigration into Amdo started from southern Gansu's Hezhou area. Those Muslims seem to be some other descendants of the Uyghurs of the Middle Ages who had substantially participated in power during the Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907). The Hui Muslims settled in Tsongkha valley and around Hualong on the northern slopes of the Yellow River canyon. The Muslims of Datong, north of Xining, originally came from northern Gansu's Liangzhou (Wuwei).⁵⁹ As at that time these parts of Amdo were part of Gansu province, it was a matter of provincial and not of national settlement policy. In the train of the 'pacification' of the Mongol tribes during the Qianlong era of Manchu-Chinese rule, the Hui Muslims filled the political vacuum in Tibet's northeast, and encroached southwestward from Xining toward northern Kham, thus dominating the trade routes.

From 1727 until the mid-20th century, the whole of Amdo—with the exception of the vast grasslands of the pastoral Ngolok and Serta—was controlled by the Muslim Ma clan.⁶⁰ The territory that they looked upon as their family's realm was the foundation for Kokonor province of the Manchu Empire and, consequently, for the present-day Chinese province of Qinghai. Border delimitations on the boundary line with central Tibet have hardly changed. Though today Hui Muslims are found all over Amdo, the aforesaid places are still their main colonies, and generally they live in towns rather than in the country. The thoroughly Chinese character of central Tsongkha—the heartland of Lower Amdo—is last but not least produced by the presence of the Hui who are sinicized descendants of medieval Central Asian Uyghurs.⁶¹

About two centuries ago, Tibetans again started to penetrate the Kokonor and Ma Chu areas which earlier were populated by Mongolian tribes. Their migration started with the upcoming influence of Amdo's huge Labrang Monastery.⁶² Today there are only a few Mongolian families left in the area north and east of Lake Kokonor, with some more found only south of Rongwo valley. The Mongolian tribes had to withdraw into the desolate domains of the Tsaidam Basin which was more or less deserted, as the Tibetans' livestock—yaks and sheep—couldn't bear the arid climate there. The camels, horses and fat-tail sheep can endure the rough conditions in Tsaidam's deserts.⁶³

The last minority group that immigrated into Amdo were the Kazakhs who, ethnically, are more likely of Kirgiz origin. They entered the area near the western end of the Qilian Shan mountains and into northern Tsaidam in 1936.⁶⁴ They had been suffering from the bloody rule of the Xinjiang warlord Sheng Shicai and therefore they started to move eastward into those parts of Gansu and Qinghai which are considered to belong to Amdo. Actually their situation did not improve much as the Muslim regime of the Qinghai warlord Ma Bufang suppressed them as much as he did the Tibetans and Mongolians in the area.⁶⁵

The name of the province comprising most of Amdo in today's People's Republic of China, Qinghai, is the literal translation of the Mongolian word *Kokonor* [Khöke Nor] and Tsho Ngombo (*mtsho sngon po*) in Tibetan. It means 'blue lake' or 'blue sea', named after the largest lake on the entire Tibetan Plateau. The history of the province started in 1727 when the Ma family gained control over it. In 1928 Qinghai (former English spelling: Tsing hai) was re-established as a province of the Nationalists' Republic of China, its area enlarged at the expense of neighbouring Gansu. After the Chinese Red Army's victory over Chiang Kaishek's Nationalist troops, the Muslim warlord of Qinghai, Ma Bufang, succumbed to the Communists.

2.3. Highlights of Amdo culture

Being a pivot between the civilizations of Tibet, Mongolia, Inner China and the Silk Road, the cultural province of Amdo in the northeast of the Tibetan Highland shelters relics and monuments belonging to various epochs and different cultural realms. Ruins, tombs and more archaeological sites dating to prehistoric eras and pre-Buddhist pastoral societies are found, just as are vestiges of early Chinese dynasties. The Tibetan conquest of both north Tibet and neighbouring Central Asian regions in the 7th to 8th centuries, saw Mahayana Buddhism rooted there, since the proximity of Silk Road oases and Chinese Buddhism had already partially influenced the population of Amdo.

Starting with the Mongol conquest of Inner Asia and followed by a Chinese imperial policy of supporting Tibetan lamas, Amdo developed to become another religious and cultural core besides central Tibet.⁶⁶ Accordingly, there are some of the most important lamaseries, i.e. monastic centres of Tibetan Buddhism, among the numerous cultural

relics found all over Amdo. If we particularly mention Kumbum and Labrang monasteries, it is because these were most famous in the West, while other lamaseries, dating to an earlier age, had been very important focal points at their heyday. Therefore, monastic institutions and their furnishings can be considered to constitute the bulk of Amdo's cultural relics:

The monastery ... is the centre of all religious teachings of Buddha. On entering it, one is overcome with the wealth of creativity that abounds on the walls and altars of the various temples. ... The first [monastery] ... was based on a *mandala* as were those of subsequent monasteries and temples. (...) More than just a diagram, the mandala is a symbol of a consecrated region. The outer line which delineates the first layer of the mandala is the line which separates the terrestrial from the celestial. ... Just as the disciple mentally enters the spiritual realm of the diagram through concentrated meditation, he too, by physically entering the temple, arrives within a spiritual realm.⁶⁷

The lamaseries and their temple buildings were, and are again, the focus of Tibetan social activity, and as such they offer the pilgrims the possibility to worship Buddhist deities, and accumulate religious merits by donations to the monastic communities. Although it should not be forgotten that monasteries have always played an important role in Tibetan hegemonic politics, their most prominent function is education. In these monasteries monks are trained to acquire exemplary knowledge of fundamental Buddhist principles, of both exoteric and esoteric studies. For the ordinary faithful the temples submit an opulent pictorial broadsheet portraying the rich pantheon related to their everyday life. However, the statues and murals are not believed to just depict the deities, but the latter are presumed to dwell therein and hence to assist the worshipper:

The painting ... is a record of visions, mystical experiences and teachings which are laid down in texts or personally interpreted by lamas. ... The ... painted image ... means 'liberation through sight' [*mtshong grol*], implying that the person viewing the painting [in which the deity is considered to dwell] and understanding it (or for that matter entering the temple) will be liberated through his vision of the spectacle.⁶⁸

As everything—each painting, each image, decoration and feature—has a symbolic meaning, the interpretation and explanation of those artistic elaborations lie beyond the scope of this work. Numerous catalogues and iconographical works, together with introductions into the philosophical and mystical systems of Tibetan Buddhism may have already led our reader to a certain understanding of Tibetan fine arts.⁶⁹ It is necessary to specify the historical, social and political prerequisites and accompanying circumstances of the development of relics found in northeastern Tibet, in modern Amdo.

The richness in architectonic shaping and the profusion of artistic and ornamental fittings of monasteries in Amdo reflect the versatile cultural exchange relationships. Qutan Si is looked upon as one of those jewels of the olden times, as its architecture dates from the early Ming dynasty (14th to 15th centuries) and its walls carry some of the oldest murals of eastern Tibet. Similarly, Tsangwa Gompa of virtually hidden Dzamthang must be seen as a major vestige of medieval Tibetan history, although and because the order it represents, the Jonangpa, was eliminated in Tibet proper.

Yet, historically, many Amdo monasteries are also among the most significant in Tibet and China. According to a local legend, it was in northeastern Tibet that Buddhism started to recover after it had been wiped out by the Yarlung dynasty King Langdarma. Amdo monasteries other than Gelugpa are generally underestimated, as the renowned lamaserie of Kumbum and Labrang, besides other important monastic institutions of the Yellow Hats, overshadow the fact that there were important monastic institutions of all Tibetan Buddhist orders before the Gelugpas' arrival.⁷⁰ Even today, the latter are mainly represented in northern and central Amdo, while in the southern half the Nyingmapa play a similarly predominant role.⁷¹ (see map, *fig.* M4)

Tsongkhapa, founder of this most influential order of Lamaism, was born in Amdo's heartland, and the Kumbum Monastery was founded in his memory. The presumably oldest monastery of Amdo, Shyachung Gompa, is where the great reformer started his monastic career. The high density of Gelugpa monasteries distributed all over Amdo, particularly in the most populated areas, may give an idea of the importance of Tibet's northeast for the development of this Buddhist school. It was well-represented here even before the Gelugpa

overcame all resistance in central Tibet. The political importance of Lamaism is further shown by monastic centres like Labrang Tashi Khyil—one of the 'big five' of the whole of Tibet—, Rongwo Göchen, Kirti Gompa, Tagtshang Lhamo, and Ragya Gompa near holy Mt. Amnye Machen. Even among autonomous principalities like Chone and among non-Tibetan tribes like the Tu and Yugur, the influence of the Gelugpa spread quickly, and left its traces in lamaserie like Rgolung (Chin. *Youning Si*) which became the spiritual centre for the Tu-Monguor population. At the same time, the high incarnate lamas kept in touch with the Chinese Imperial court in Beijing and developed to become a significant political factor in the Chinese Empire. The importance of Amdo's spiritual leaders and therefore Tibetan influence at the imperial court should not be underestimated.

Close observation of remote and secluded valleys shows that Lamaist scholarship was not fended off, even though some of their inhabitants, like the notorious Ngolok tribes, were ill-famed for their ruthless temper. Not only did they produce monastic communities like other Tibetans, but even developed artistic expressions of their own. Nowhere else on the Tibetan Plateau can we find large-scale architectural interpretations of a 'pure land' than in the Nyingmapa realm of eastern Tibet. Monasticism has experienced an impressive revival in Amdo (and Kham), accounting for about a third of the more than 3,000 Tibetan monasteries and temples which have been rebuilt during the last two decades.⁷² Nobody should be astonished to meet with monastic institutions that did not exist before 1950, and one of these, Serthang Larung Academy, is supposedly the world's largest Buddhist institution.

Beyond that, vast expanses of Amdo offer some of the most splendid and varied landscapes of the Tibetan Plateau, reaching from the glacial world of Qilian and Kunlun Shan to the charming valleys of Tsongkha, through rugged canyons of the Yellow River to the deserts of Tsaidam Basin and the vast grasslands of the Changthang steppes. At their point of intersection the highland's biggest water body and most famous lake stretches like an unperturbable oasis of peace—the 'Blue Lake'. It is known in the West by its Mongolian name Kokonor, while the Tibetans call it Tsho Ngombo. The land throughout Amdo is full of legends; various peoples and old cultures left their traces there in many archaeological sites, thus adding even more colour to this part of the 'roof of the world'.

The Gansu Part of Amdo



Plate 1. Mural of a Buddha image from Karakhoto
(Silk Road, Xixia realm in Inner Mongolia)

1. Lamaist Temples on the Silk Road Margin

The northernmost part of the Tibetan Plateau (i.e., 'geographical Tibet'), namely Tsaidam Basin, Altyn Tagh and central sections of the Nan Shan, are not inhabited by Tibetan tribes. Nevertheless these areas are ordinarily included in what is called Greater Tibet. The region was conquered and controlled by Tibetan emperors (*btsan po*)¹ and their armies during the 7th to 9th centuries and thus has preserved traces of early Tibetan civilization—mostly in the form of manuscripts and paintings found in Buddhist grottoes on the Silk Road. These grottoes, the Silk Road and related civilizations, are subjects which fall outside the scope of this book in content and complexity.

However, the Tibetan autonomous county of Tianshu lies half way between the two ancient Silk Road trade centres of Lanzhou and Wuwei (the former Liangzhou). Called Thendru in Tibetan (or *Lingchu Serkhab*) it is part of the Tibetan Pari (*dpa' ris*) region and considered the most northerly area settled by Tibetan tribes and occupies the northeastern tip of the highland, connecting with some other mountain regions within Tibet, on the Silk Road margin. These are part of Gansu Province, mainly populated by Han-Chinese and Hui Muslims. Ten other ethnic minorities live there, with the largest among them being some 320,000 Tibetans (8 % of the Tibetan population within the bounds of the PRC). In the north-central part of Gansu, Tibetans concentrate in the multi-ethnic Thendru area. Religious activities of Lamaism were also re-instated here, but do not play a similarly important role as they do in other Tibetan Buddhist areas. An outline of Thendru's principal Lamaist monasteries therefore follows, some of which appear to have quite a long history. Regarding the Buddhist Silk Road grottoes, those will be dealt with which are in zones in immediate contact with Tibetan(ized) areas up to the present, and show features typical of Tibetan Buddhist art of the last millennium.

1.1. Monasteries in Thendru: northernmost Tibetan settlements

In May 1950 Thendru was established as the first autonomous unit at county level in the PRC (Tianshu Tibetan A.C., Tib. *dpa' ris rdzong*). Today it has a population of nearly 0.2 million with 25 % of them being Tibetans. As other nationalities, such as Mongols, Tu and Yugur, are also faithful Buddhists, Lamaism is expected to continue playing an important role in the area. Of the 14 monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism counted in 1950 a dozen were reopened by 1989.²

1.1.1. Chörten Thang

Chörten Thang Tashi Dargyeling (*mchod rten thang bkra shis dar rgyas gling*), as it is called by its full name, can be considered the leading monastery of Thendru's Tibetan Buddhists. It is located in the county's far west, 95 km from the county town in Tiantang Village. It is therefore called *Tiantang Si* in Chinese. It may also be reached via the Datong river valley either from Minhe (95 km) or Menyuan (150 km) counties in neighbouring Qinghai Province.

Local annals claim that during the Xianzong reign (806-820) of the Chinese Tang dynasty, a *Yangzhuang Si* was erected near the eastern bank of Datong river. At that time it was a monastery of Tibet's ancient Bön religion. This forerunner of Chörten Thang was destroyed about 500 years later. When at the beginning of the Yuan dynasty the Mongol emperors supported the Sakyapa order of central Tibet, the latter's patriarch Sakya Pandita travelled to Liangzhou (today's Wuwei) in 1274. He then established a Sakyapa monastery on the grounds of former Yangzhuang Si. In 1360 the 4th Karmapa Rolpe Dorje on his way to the Mongol-Chinese capital Dadu [Beijing] passed by here. At the request of the local population he erected 108 stupas (chörten) on the plain in front of the lamasery. That is why it was named Chörten Thang, the 'plain of stupas'. Moreover, the former Sakyapa monastery

was reconstituted as a Karma-Kagyüpa institution, later being destroyed in warfare. After the emergence of Tsongkhapa's Gelugpa order, Chörten Thang became the Yellow Hats' foremost and biggest monastery in the Thendru region. Its reconstruction in 1639 was later followed by several extensions under the guidance of Dogyü Gyatsho (1621-1683), the famous 4th Tongkhor Lama. Since then Chörten Thang became a branch of Tongkhor Lamasery in Tsongkha and was supervised by the subsequent Tongkhor Lamas.

Notwithstanding the earlier demolitions of Chörten Thang Monastery by fire and warfare, it developed into a monastic institution that could hardly be matched by other lamaseries in the region. By 1956 its grounds extended over an area of approximately one square kilometre, with 14 temples and 40 greater and lesser sutra halls in a mixed Han-Chinese and Tibetan architectural style, with seventeen residential buildings for incarnate lamas rising up among the 300 compounds of ordinary monks' quarters. At its heyday there were more than 800 monks studying in university-like monastic colleges. Every kind of traditional Tibetan Buddhist knowledge was taught here, hence Chörten Thang produced quite a number of learned lamas. Its fame was so great that in the last years of the Qing dynasty even two Germans came here to do research on Buddhism.

On the eve of the Chinese communist take-over the number of occupants of Chörten Thang had already decreased slightly to 540, with ten tulkus among them. Following the socialist reforms the head lama Tongkhor fled to India in 1957, where he died 26 years later. Unfortunately this important lamasery was almost totally destroyed in 1958 and during the Cultural Revolution. After being reopened in 1980, a Jowo Lhakhang and an assembly hall were rebuilt in the characteristic Amdo-style of combined Chinese and Tibetan architecture, decorated with Rebgong paintings. By the year 2000 a six-storeyed 1000-Buddha temple hall was taking shape, reminiscent of the monumental tower-like building of Heitso in southern Gansu (cp. chapter 3.1). To the east of several smaller buildings lies the Chinese-style residency of the famous Lama Dorshi, Professor of Tibetology at the Northwest Nationalities' Institute (Xibei Minzu Xueyuan) in Lanzhou. His activities help to reinstate the former glory of Chörten Thang.

1.1.2. Yarlung Thurchen Monastery

Yarlung Thurchen Monastery (*yar lung thur chen dgon*), called *Shimen Si* in Chinese, is located in Shimen Gorge, the mouth of which lies 15 km west of Tianzhu county seat. Established by Kagyüpa Lama Lobsang Tenpa Chökyi Nyima, whose title of a 'State Tutor' was bestowed upon him by the Ming emperors, this Gelugpa lamasery in 1652 was visited by the great 5th Dalai Lama during his journey to the Qing court. According to local tradition the 6th Dalai Lama, who had been abducted by the Mongol prince Lhazang Khan, stayed one year in Yarlung Thurchen. Like most of Amdo's lamaseries it was also destroyed after the Khoshot Mongol prince Lobsang Tendzin's revolt. Rebuilt from 1727 to 1743 it was named Ganden Jampa Ling Ngam Gonsar Thösam Dargyeling (*dga' ldan byams pa gling ngam dgon gsar thos bsam dar rgyas gling*). By then its 250 monks had obtained a Tibetan edition of the Tripitaka from the imperial court in Beijing.

Local records have it that Yarlung Thurchen Monastery was established by the 6th Dalai Lama Tshangyang Gyatsho in person, and that he himself officiated as the lamasery's *khempo* when it had around 500 monks. Demolitions during the 1866 Muslim rebellion reduced Yarlung Thurchen's size to two temple buildings and three lama residencies, with about 50 inhabitants by 1949. Destroyed in 1960, just a handful of monks returned after the monastery's reopening in 1981. Among the relics that are said to have survived the Cultural Revolution are an ivory statue of Avalokiteshvara, the reliquary stupa of a lama-scholar, as well as a number of thangkhas and smaller bronzes. Some ceremonial clothes and ritual instruments are said to have belonged to the 6th Dalai Lama.

1.1.3. Tawen Gompa

Tawen Gompa (*ta' ban dgon chos 'khor dar rgyas gling*), although quite a small institution, is one of the earliest foundations in Thendru. Called *Jile Si* in Chinese it is located in the western parts of the Maomao mountains, near where the railway line linking Lanzhou to Xinjiang crosses the ridge. By road it is around 50 km northwest of the county seat, near the township of Anyuan (or Yongfeng Qu).

Similar to Thendru's monastic heart, Chörten Thang, Tawen Gompa was first established by Sakya

Pandita in 1244 before it was turned into a Kagyüpa institution by the 4th Karmapa in 1360. After its reconstitution into the Gelugpa order during the early Qing dynasty (17th century), it first became a branch of Rgolong and subsequently of Chubsang Monastery in Tsongkha. With more than 500 monks at its heyday, Tawen Gompa was one of Thendru's larger monasteries. Destroyed during the 19th century's Muslim rebellions, it gradually declined, so that in 1950 there were just five monks looking after a Maitreya Temple. By 2000, three monks were taking care for an unpretentious Chinese-style temple hall with just basic fittings.

1.1.4. Taglung Monastery

Like Yarlung Thurchen Gompa, Taglung Ganden Damchöling (*stag lung dgon dga' ldan dam chos gling*, Chin. *Dalong Si*) was established by Lama Lobsang Dampa Chögyi Nyima, and again this Karma-Kagyüpa institution was later taken over by the Gelugpa order. It lies 40 km to the northeast of Tianzhu county town. When in the Kangxi period (1682-1722) the lamasery's incarnate head lama Taglung Rimpoche travelled to the Qing imperial court, he received many gifts which allowed him to enlarge his monastery, having more than 1,000 residents. After the 19th century Muslim revolts, only a bare hundred remained.

1.1.5. Tethung Dorje Changgi Lhakhang

(*te thung rdo rje 'chang gi lha khang*) with the Chinese name of *Miaoyin Si* was founded in 1441 as the principal temple of Lu Tusi, a powerful local clan in the middle reaches of the Datong river valley. The monastery is located some 50 km, as the crow flies, to the west of Tianzhu township between the river's eastern bank and Shiping mountain. During the Qing dynasty it was enlarged three times and became a pivot of the exchange between Gelugpa institutions in Mongolia and Tibet. Local records describe how the 6th Dalai Lama, in abduction from his throne in Lhasa, was brought here by Lhazang Khan and warmly welcomed by the local lord. There were two colleges here, and quite a number of separate temple buildings. The largest was dedicated to Vajradhara (Tib. *Dorje Chang*), hence this monastery became known by the name of Tethung Vajradhara Temple (*te³ thung rdo rje 'chang gi lha khang*). Although it suffered from demolitions in 1958, the structures and murals of this monastery

are said to have been essentially preserved. After 1983 there were just four monks looking after them.

1.1.6. Tethung Gönchen

(*te thung dgon chen thos bsam dar rgyas gling*) lies to the east of Tethung Dorje Changgi Lhakhang and is therefore called *Dongda Si*, 'Eastern Big Temple', in Chinese. Growing out of a former Sakyapa and Kagyüpa monastery, the Gelugpa institution was built in 1619, and within two centuries developed into a monastic institution of more than 1,000 monks. Having three study colleges (exoterics, upper and lower Tantric) and a printing establishment of its own, its importance in Thendru was second only to Chörten Thang. Together the two lamaseries were most influential in the northern part of Amdo. Here also the 6th Dalai Lama is supposed to have officiated as head lama for a while.

1.1.7. Namtethung Drag Gön

(*brag dgon nam te thung brag dgon sgrub sde mchog dga' gling*) lies high up in the mountains above the Lu clan's dominion in the Datong river valley. It is supposed to be the oldest monastery in the area, having been erected by an Indian monk, a sage, on his pilgrimage to China's holy Buddhist mountain Wutai Shan (Tib. *Riwo Tsenga*). The small temple, *Gada Si* in Chinese, was dedicated to Manjushri, as is Wutai Shan. Sakya Pandita on his way to Liangzhou re-established the gompa as a Sakyapa monastery in 1246. During the Ming dynasty it was extended into a large lamasery when a Sakyapa and a Gelugpa lama from central Tibet co-operated with Lu Tusi. On top of a centrally located peak they had a Maitreya temple built, while to the south there was a temple dedicated to Shakyamuni and his disciples, the arhats. The mountain to the west was topped by a Samantabhadra Hall, while Avalokiteshvara was revered in a structure on the northern peak, and Manjushri to the east. The Sakyapa's influence on the lamasery gradually decreased, so that by the 17th century, when the 5th and 6th Dalai Lamas are supposed to have entered these temple grounds, there were only 30 monks belonging to the Gelugpa order. For centuries untouched by fires, the socialist incursions of 1958 made reconstruction work necessary.

1.2. Mati Monastery and the Horseshoe Grottoes

The north-central part of Nan Shan or Qilian Mountain range is occupied by the autonomous county of the Yugur nationality, Sunan. On a surface that equals roughly half the area of Switzerland, the Yugur constitute approximately a third of a widely scattered population, while Tibetans account for less than a quarter of the county's 34,000 people.⁴ Thus Lamaism is an important feature of this region, although Buddhism had spread here many centuries before it set foot in Tibet. One of the most remarkable and extensive sites of the early Buddhist influence which spread along the Silk Road are the Horseshoe Grottoes (*Mati Si Shiku*).⁵ They may be reached from the city of Zhangye (the former Ganzhou) by first driving south for 38 km, turning southeast in Huazhai village and south again in Duojiashuang (13 km). This side-road leads into a rocky valley of the Qilian mountains, and after 14 km the first complex of the widely dispersed grottoes is reached.

The core of the monastic ensemble is named after two distinct horseshoe prints in the rock to the right of the temple buildings of Mati Si, Horseshoe Temple. The same meaning is given by the Tibetan name of Taje Gön, though its full religious designation is Taje Gön Nambö Gön Ganden Damchöling (*rta rjes dgon nam bod dgon dga' ldan dam chos gling*). According to tradition those prints originate from the horseshoes of King Gesar's mount. The area inhabited by the Yugur is said to have been part of the ancient kingdom of Hor, the main enemy of the Tibetan hero in the famous epic tales of Gesar.⁶ In the Yugur village of Bhataruwa, local people believe that Bhatahor hermitage, the meditation site of the protector deity of central Tibet's Samye Monastery, was located here. Furthermore, Lama Dragönpa in his *Political and Religious History of Amdo* reports of hand- and footprints of Sakya Pandita as well as of natural rock images of Green Tara and Hayagriva.⁷ Mati Si has thus become a sacred site for Tibetan Buddhism in many respects.

The actual Gelugpa monastery of Mati Si (*ma' this zi*) is said to have been founded by Chungtsha Geshe Rabten (*khyung tsha dge bshes rab brtan*) at the site of a previous Han-Chinese temple. His reincarnation, Ngawang Namgyal (*ngag dbang rnam rgyal*), is the lamasery's incarnate lama. This lama lineage built up a monastic institution consisting of a sutra hall and a Tantric college. When later the

Tuguan Khutuktu became khempo of Mati Si-Taje Gön, it became a branch of Rgolong Monastery⁸ that also supervised seven out of ten Gelugpa monasteries of the Yugur area.⁹

Mati Si was the central lamasery of quite a number of branches throughout the valley comprising seven Buddhist grotto complexes¹⁰ which were carved out of the rocks starting from the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534). They consisted of between two or three and 20 to 30 caves and grottoes, and to each of these belonged a temple or monastery of its own. Although most of them were Han-Chinese Buddhist temples, they were under supervision of Mati Si-Taje Gompa, which at its heyday is said to have accounted for a total of more than 1,000 monks. On the eve of the monastery's destruction in 1958, which also severely damaged the artwork, only some 50 monks were looking after the caves and grottoes.

The artistic value of the remaining murals and statues is high, but as they originated in a period starting from the 4th or 5th centuries, extending to the Chinese Ming dynasty (1368-1644), most of the works are not typically Tibetan Buddhist art and should rather be viewed as 'Silk Road art'. However, there are two kinds of works of art worth mentioning in the Tibetan context.

1. There are Tibetan-style paintings depicting Buddhas and Bodhisattvas such as Green Tara, gandharvas, protector deities and mandalas in the grotto-complex called Avalokiteshvara Caves (*Guanyin Dong*). They are situated some 10 km to the southeast of the formal Mati Si Temple. The best preserved murals are to be seen in the Lower Avalokiteshvara Caves (*Xia Guanyin Dong*). At first sight it is astonishing that these Tibetan-style paintings were made during the Chinese Ming dynasty. This becomes more intelligible when noting the fact that Lamaism in Amdo was particularly promoted by the Ming emperors.

2. The various Mati Si grottoes share one feature that is scarcely ever seen at all the other important cave temples on the Silk Road—Tibetan-style stupas (chörten) carved out of the hanging cliffs, often displayed in clusters. The largest such group is seen at *Qianfodong*, the Thousand Buddha Caves. As it was the central Gelugpa monastery of the area, it is easy to imagine that it attracted numerous donations. Hence this was the preferred place for the carving of stupas, as a symbol of Buddha's enlightenment and a customary method to



Plate 2. Mural of the Green Tara at the Upper Avalokiteshvara Caves of the Mati Si Grottoes

accumulate religious merit. There has not so far been a decisive dating of these rock-carved stupas. Some Chinese researchers believe that they originated during the Tangut empire of Xixia (1032-1226). Looking at the historical development of the area, another impulse may have been given at the time when Sakya Pandita and the 4th Karmapa travelled to Liangzhou, i.e. during the 14th to 15th centuries. On the whole it is more than likely that this 'Forest of Stupas' (*talın* in Chinese) was carved out of the cliffs in the first half of the second millennium.

The middle and northern parts of the Qianfodong caves particularly are characterized by several groups of Tibetan-style stupas, while there are only some single examples or small clusters of this type of rock-cutting at the Northern Horseshoe Temple (*Mati Si Bei Si*) and at the Lower Avalokiteshvara Caves (*Xia Guanyin Dong*). It would appear that the stupas were concentrated near the entrance to the cave cluster of Mati Si, where the valley opens towards the desolate stretch of land north to Qilian mountains. This place also marks where one of the main trade routes from Amdo and the Tibetan Plateau descended to the principal route of the Silk Road. It is therefore little wonder that the only other example of such a rock-hewn cave stupa is found within the highland en route to Tsongkha, at Ganglong Shiku Si of Qinghai's Menyuan county.¹¹

The relief stupas of Mati Si are of different size, though generally between two and six metres high. Each of them stands inside a man-made grotto mostly located several metres above the ground, that has been cut 10, 20 or more centimetres deep into the cliff. The larger chörten have a Buddha niche cut out of the bumpa, while the smaller ones do not. The caves of Mati Si are dispersed across an area of 30-40 square kilometres. In spite of the damage done during the 1950s and 1960s there are still a lot of murals and statues left. Until now research has neglected the Tibetan-style stupas and to my knowledge no related inscriptions have come to light which could help classify them by period. Nevertheless, they are a unique feature of both the Tibetan Plateau and the Central Asian Silk Road.

1.3. Ming dynasty Tibetan art in Bingling Si

In the middle of a triangle formed by the provincial capitals of Xining and Lanzhou and the well known Tibetan lamasery of Labrang Tashi Chil, the famous Buddhist Grottoes of Bingling Si mark another passageway from the ancient Silk Road to the Lamaist sphere of the Tibetan Plateau. They are best reached by driving from Lanzhou to Liujiaxia Dam in Yongjing county (80 km). From there tourist boats take about two to three hours to arrive at the place where the waters of the Yellow River wash

round the bizarre crags of Xiaojishi Mountain. The caves can only be reached on a day-trip during the summer season when the water level of the huge reservoir is high enough for the speedier large boats.

The origin of the extensive cave complex dates back to the 5th century, when the proto-Tibetan Western Qin dynasty (385-431) started to carve the first sculptures out of the rocks. Being one of the well-known Buddhist grotto sites on the Silk Road, the cliffs were hewn along a length of two kilometres over a period of more than a thousand years, until the late Qing dynasty. The main complex that remains up to our day extends for a length of 350 m, and is 30 m in height, comprising 183 caves and grottoes.

The 776 remaining stone and stucco sculptures are the main point of interest and of high value for research on the Silk Road art and history. Viewed from the Lamaist art perspective, we have to concentrate on that part of the 900 square metres of murals which also cover a period of more than a millennium. Similar to our Mati Si examples of Tibetan Buddhist art, Lamaist motives found their way into the caves not earlier than the Yuan dynasty, when the Mongols first met with Tibetan missionaries. That is moreover the time when the temple—which earlier was called Tangshu Ku, Longxing Si (Tang dynasty) and Lingyan Si (Song dynasty)—became a lamasery; during the Ming dynasty it was renamed Bingling Si.

‘Bingling’ is interpreted as a Chinese adapted form of the Tibetan words ‘*bum gling*,¹² meaning a ‘Monastery of a Hundred Thousand [Buddha images]’. The grottoes bearing the name Bingling Si¹³ may be divided into two or three parts: the Cave Gorge (*Donggou*), the Upper (*Shang Si*) and Lower Temple (*Xia Si*), with the latter being the one that is ordinarily visited by tourists. The Lower (also named *Nan Si*, i.e. southern) Temple and the Upper (or *Bei Si*, northern) Temple lie around three kilometres apart.

The grottoes of Bingling Si were already quite large and well known when Princess Wencheng passed by on her way to marry Tibetan Emperor Songtsen Gampo. According to tradition Princess Wencheng stayed at the upper part of the ravine on

her way to Tibet. At that time there was an image of Tara which emerged from the rocks, shaping itself spontaneously. It is most interesting therefore, how Tibetan legends explain the origin of the oldest Buddha images of the caves—especially the 27 m high Buddha Maitreya which was carved out of the red sandstone cliff during the Tang dynasty (618-907), as were the majority of Bingling Si’s artefacts. Some tales attribute the origin of the large Buddha to Songtsen Gampo’s minister Lünpo Gar. While awaiting the princess’ arrival, he is said to have hewn the huge Maitreya image into the crags. Other legends associate the grotto with Confucius (Tibetan *kong tse*), or claim that the image originally was from the Bön, depicting Tönpa Shenrab before the statue’s hair was reshaped into a bun and coil.

Tibetan Buddhist art is obviously expressed only in some murals painted during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), a period of Chinese history during which Lamaism was heavily propagated and received support from the imperial court. At that time a lamasery was established here, and a Lamaist temple, *Fomu Dian*, still exists at the Upper Bingling Temple. The present structure was erected in 1939 to 1943 and its architectural style is Han-Chinese.

Tibetan Buddhist art in Bingling Si started during the Yuan dynasty. Murals of that period, like those of the following Ming, were added to nearly all the earlier caves, yet only five out of 183 grottoes and niches are dominated by images of the Ming era—namely cave nos. 3, 82, 93, 128, and 168. Cave no.3 has Buddha’s life story in the upper part of the west wall, while on the south wall an eight-armed Avalokiteshvara is portrayed. Those murals were painted in the Yuan period, while a rather unsophisticated Yama on the north wall is attributed to the Ming period. Another eight-armed Avalokiteshvara was painted during the Ming dynasty, but well elaborated. It can be seen in cave no.168, accompanied by bodhisattvas and arhats. A lively image of a wrathful protector deity, most likely Pelden Lhamo, is noteworthy in cave no.128, while the uniqueness of no.93 lies in the expressive mandala, which is dedicated to Mahavairocana (*rNam par snang mdzad*).

2. Labrang Tashi Chil—Gelugpa Order's spiritual centre

Labrang may be seen as a pivot between Tibet, China, Mongolia and Turkestan (Xinjiang), situated as it is at the cross-roads of the Silk Road and the travel routes to Lhasa, as well as near a traditional trade route connecting Central Asia to South China. It is therefore not surprising that, despite its late foundation at the beginning of the 18th century, the lamasery quickly developed into one of the largest and most important monastic institutions in East and Inner Asia.

Labrang Tashi Chil (*bla brang bkra shis 'khyil*), or *Labuleng Si* in Chinese, means the 'dwelling site of the Lama where good luck is accumulating'. It was originally half a kilometre to the west of the former Tibetan village of Sangtawa. Today Xiahe township and the grand monastic complex have grown so much that they merge into each other. Nestled in between the slopes of a Phoenix and a Dragon Mountain and facing the river Sang Chu (*Daxia He* in Chinese), the lamasery's buildings spread on a height of around 2800 m above sea level. From Lanzhou (260 km) it is reached on a national highway that connects the provincial capital of Gansu to that of Sichuan province, Chengdu. The Hui Muslim centre in Linxia City is passed on the way, and soon afterwards (20 km) the road bifurcates with one heading towards Xining and Kumbum Monastery. 52 km further south the foothills of the Tibetan Plateau's northeastern edge are entered and a side road branches off from the main highway.¹

The monastery's abbreviated name, Labrang,² is a contraction of the words *lama phodrang*; the meaning expressed is the 'lama's residence or palace'. It came into use after the completion of the local residence of Ngawang Tsöndrü (*ngag dbang brtson 'grus*), the founder of the lamasery. Later it developed into a true monastic city and one of the six main Gelugpa lamaseries of the entire Tibetan Highland, of which the full religious designation reflects its grandeur: the 'Joyful and Flourishing Monastery of the Dharma Wheel', Ganden Shedrub Dargye

Tashi Yesu Chilwe Ling (*dga' ldan bshad sgrub dar rgyas bkra shis gyas su 'khyil ba'i gling*).

The history of Labrang goes back to the beginning of the 18th century, when the extensive area around it still belonged, like Kumbum, to the Chinese imperial Xining prefecture of Gansu Province. While the grasslands here were dominated by the clan of a Mongolian prince, the peasants in the valleys along the Song Chu (*Daxia He*), a Yellow River tributary, were mostly members of local Tibetan tribes. Half a century after the Mongols of Amdo had helped the Gelugpa Order and the 5th Dalai Lama to attain supreme power in central Tibet, again it was a Mongolian Khoshot prince, Chahan Tendzin Pönjunang (*dpon ju nang*), who initiated the establishment of a new religious centre of that very order. The prince repeatedly asked the renowned lama Jamyang Shepa to come to Amdo to build and equip a temple in his native area.

Ngawang Tsöndrü (1648-1722) was a native of the Labrang area, where the prince's family had its residence. At the age of 13 he left home to become a monk, and at the age of 21 he went to study in Lhasa. For many years he studied at Drepung Monastery's Gomang Dratshang and other places in central Tibet, and in 1674 he was ordained a fully fledged monk by the 5th Dalai Lama himself. By that time Ngawang Tsöndrü was already a famous Tibetan lama known by the name of Jamyang Shepa. A legend has it that once during an examination he gave such a clever answer that a statue of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, smiled at him. That is why he was called Jamyang Shepa Dorje (*'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje*), 'the venerable [lama] to whom Manjushri smiles'.³ His entire stay in Lhasa is associated with various miraculous happenings:

After his arrival in Lhasa he presented ceremonial scarfs to the images of Sakyamuni and the god of Wisdom. The latter received them with a smile, hence his Hjam-dbyangs-

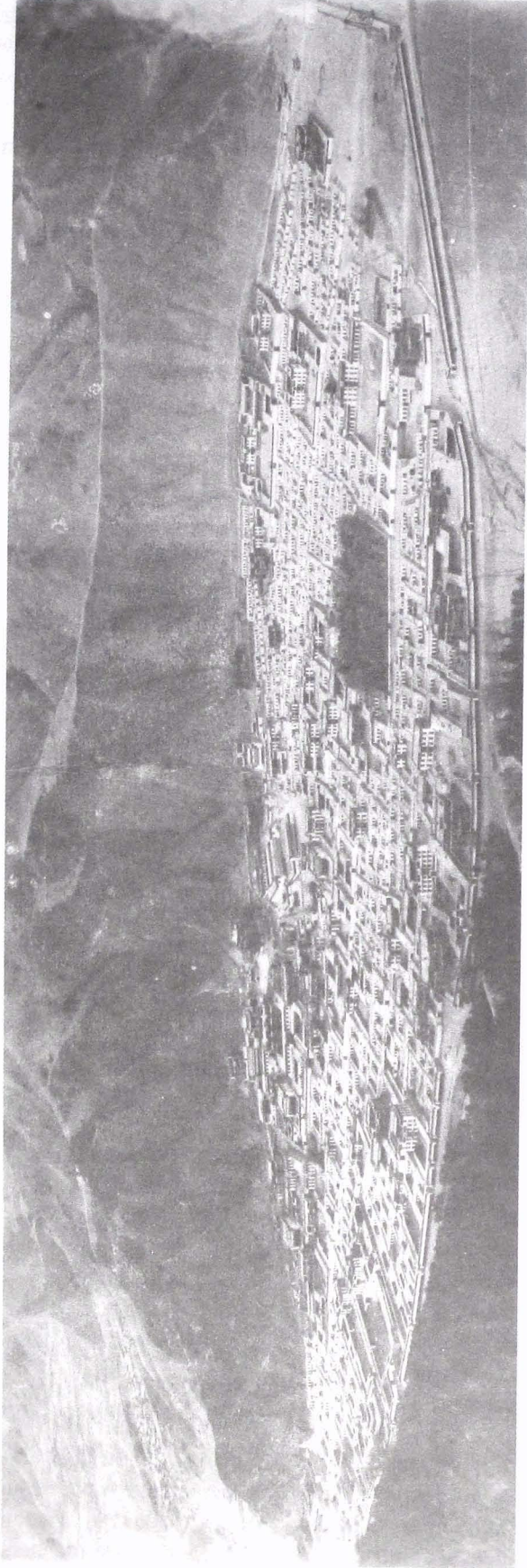


Plate 3. Labrang Monastery before 1950

bzad-pa [Jamyang Shepa], ‘Manjughosa’s smile.’ When he kowtowed to the image of Dalai I, in Lam-rim Lha-khad of Hbras-spuns [Drepung], it stretched out one hand to touch his head. The image of Tsong-kha-pa, erected by Dalai II, responded even more miraculously, when the new-comer presented himself, by speaking, ‘Come here again after your fiftieth year of age!’ At that time he did not know what was meant. But when later at the age of fifty-three he became the abbot of the Many-doored College (Sgo-man-grwa-tshan [Gomang Dratshang]) of Hbras-spuns, he began to realize that this was a prophecy.⁴

Particularly noted for his ascetic life, Jamyang Shepa had declined several offers to become the abbot of Drepung’s Gomang College until 1700, when he was appointed by the 6th Dalai Lama. He rediscovered the date of the anniversary of Tsongkhapa’s death and introduced ceremonies to commemorate that date which were then followed by many important Gelugpa monasteries. As he was enforcing the government’s rules for Gomang College, he also enforced strict monastic discipline and thus could secure many sources of support for the livelihood of the Gelugpa order. His fame gained him new supporters from afar, such as the already mentioned Mongol prince of the southern Yellow River region (Henan Qinwang) which also was the lama’s homeland:

In 1703, he received the whole set of Buddhist scriptures brought for him from his home by the Mongol prince Air-rdi-ni-ju-nan.⁵ The latter asked him to return home to propagate Buddhism. To this he replied, ‘Suppose I go back home, could you help me in building as good a monastery as Hbras-spuns [Drepung]?’ ‘It would be somewhat difficult to build one like this,’ the prince replied, ‘but I shall try my best to fulfil your wish.’⁶

From these words, one gets the impression that the extraordinary size of Labrang Monastery was planned from the beginning so as to match the size and importance of Lhasa’s Drepung Monastery. This would explain the extremely rapid growth of Amdo’s illustrious grand-lamasery.

Jamyang Shepa finally agreed to return. When he arrived in the Sang Chu valley in autumn 1709 the prince kept his promise. He donated the entire land

of Tashichil’ to him and requested that he build a lamasery later. To make it the same year of the sexagesimal cycle⁸ as the one in which Tsongkhapa had built the first Gelugpa monastery, the foundations for a new lamasery were laid on the spot. Thus, the new monastic community was established exactly five cycles or 300 years after the institution of Ganden (1409). The year after, Jamyang Shepa opened up the first exoteric college for the study of Buddhist philosophy and related studies, which was attended by some 300 monks. Their first shelter was a huge rectangular tent that could accommodate 800 people. When in 1711 the actual building of the assembly hall was begun, the first stage of construction was completed. All the expenses were met by the Mongol prince and his family.⁹ Until the end of his life the 1st Jamyang Rimpoche remained supreme abbot of the new monastic institution. In 1716 he had the Lower Tantric College built, and a year before his death in 1721, the Manchu Kangxi emperor conferred on him the title of a ‘Precious Master of the Dharma’ (*Erdeni Nomun Khan*).

The geographic situation of Labrang and the close relationship of its abbots with the Mongols, also brought about intensified ties to the Manchu-Chinese imperial court. This went so far that the former associates of the 1st Jamyang for a long time denied proper recognition to his reincarnation, the 2nd Jamyang Jigme Wangpo (1728-1791), because it was believed that the monastery’s founder and grand-lama had become reincarnated as a member of the imperial family¹⁰—Hongli, or Emperor Gaozong, who reigned with the title of Qianlong and decided the fate of China and Tibet during an extremely long reign of 60 years (1736-1795). This attempt to include the most powerful clan of the time into the Tibetan religious system of lama incarnations, reminds one of the clever move in 1592, when the 4th incarnation of the Dalai Lama was discovered among the Mongols who were about to help to establish the Gelugpa’s political power. It therefore seems likely that, with the Qing dynasty’s power at its height, the lamas of Labrang were eagerly searching for a chance to tie the imperial house closely to their own monastery.

After the state oracle in Lhasa identified Jigme Wangpo as the correct reincarnation in 1742, this 2nd Jamyang was taken at the age of sixteen to Labrang. During his time as abbot, the monastery

continued to grow rapidly. He added two more study faculties: a Kalacakra College in 1763 and a Medical College in 1784. As he gathered large funds among Mongols and even in central Tibet (1784–1786), he had the assembly hall enlarged and built the magnificent Maitreya Temple. Not only did the monastery's size grow, but also its fame as a haven for learned men. Hence Labrang could match its greatest rival in Amdo: Rgolong Monastery in Tsongkha,¹¹ which up to the 19th century was the spiritual centre of the region, not, as is often believed, the equally renowned Kumbum Monastery. When in 1878 the 4th Jamyang established the Hevajra institute, Kyeba Dorje Dratshang, the number of Labrang's study colleges exceeded that of Rgolong. After some scandals among the latter's high lamas,¹² its renown for science passed over to the now flourishing monastery of Labrang.¹³

The layout of Labrang Tashi Chil is that of a monastic city since its founder had the model of Drepung in mind. Due to the historic development there is a core temple complex at the foot of the mountain in the northwestern part of the lamasery. The original residence of the 1st Jamyang, as well as that of the Mongol prince's family, were Labrang's cradle out of which developed the largest and most important Tibetan Buddhist political centre outside central Tibet. At its heyday, nearly 4,000 monks—with about 50 incarnate lamas¹⁴ among them—lived and studied on a space of one square kilometre, with a built-up area of more than 82 hectare. Its population thus was twice as big as that of nearby Sangtawa village.¹⁵

Formerly about thirty large temples, some of them two to seven storeys high, are described.¹⁶ The red and yellow painted Tibetan-style structures were topped by Chinese gable and hip roofs, surmounting the flat living-quarters of the ordinary monks. It is generally recognized that 16 of these were considered as important enough to be seen as main temples or Lhakhang.¹⁷ Today, it seems that it may be possible once more to stroll about this monastic city by way of its roof-tops, as the large number of temples and living-quarters stand closely side by side. Having this view today it is hard to believe that only about a sixth¹⁸ of its pre-communist size was said to have survived from 1958 onwards throughout the Cultural Revolution. Actually the assembly and temple halls remained mainly intact, while monks' quarters were torn down as was the grand Kumbum

chörten, this being the biggest loss. Statistical descriptions of Labrang Monastery state that it once possessed six assembly halls, 48 big¹⁹ and small temple buildings²⁰ and 30 lama residences (*nang tren*). Eighty-four Buddha chapels or sanctuaries are enumerated, as well as a printing establishment, two courtyards for disputations, several large stupas and prayer-wheel corridors that surround the monastic city on three sides and on a length of more than 500 *jian* (bays, standardized space units).²¹

The different temple and college complexes are separately walled in, though there was never any fortification separating the monastic city from its surroundings. The pilgrims circumambulate the lamasery along simple mud walls and prayer wall corridors; the latter are about to be completed around the entire monastic complex. While most of the ordinary monks' quarters are of the adobe architecture typical for this part of Amdo, temple and lama residential buildings are constructed from solid ashlar and stones. It probably is the lack of brick buildings²² which gives Labrang its more typical appearance, while Kumbum and many other monasteries in Qinghai often seem to be dominated by Han-Chinese architectural features. Labrang is an example of the Tibetanization of Amdo architecture. While early Buddhist temples in this northeastern part of Tibet mostly had accepted a Han-Chinese building plan—as was the case in early Mongolia—the shaping of Labrang, as said, was done after the model of Lhasa's Drepung. Thus, the predominance of Tibetan features in some Amdo monasteries is a rather young development, while the mixed Sino-Tibetan architecture may be considered as typically Amdowa.²³

The colours of the buildings reflect the strict monastic hierarchy, their rank and their function: red are the walls of sanctuaries, such as temples or incarnate lama-residencies. The palaces of the highest incarnations may be painted yellow, while their roofs are topped with glazed or even gilded bronze tiles. Only black and white colours may be used by ordinary monks to embellish the walls of their houses.²⁴ Their living quarters were not generally arranged according to their regional provenance, as was ordinarily the case in grand lamaseries like Drepung and Sera. The main criteria for grouping the monks was their affiliation to the study faculties of Labrang. The number of monks²⁵ quickly grew

from the initial 300 through about 1,000 at the time of the 2nd Jamyang, 3,000 (3rd Jamyang) to 3,600 in 1955. After 1958, when most lamaseries were closed down, Labrang still had some 200 monks,²⁶ and after a short recovery in 1962 (1200 monks), it was also closed down during the Cultural Revolution. Since its reopening the number of residents is again growing rapidly, so that there are more than 2,000 monks in today's Labrang Monastery.²⁷

The Tsuglakhang [1] or main assembly hall (Chin. *dajingtang*) rises from a relatively open space in the very heart of Labrang Lamasery's temple complex. It was originally established by the 1st Jamyang Shepa in 1711 and seventy years later (1772) enlarged by his successor, but burnt down in 1985. The government funded its reconstruction, and the rebuilt assembly hall was inaugurated in July 1990.²⁸ As at the same time it serves as dukhang for the Buddhist Thösamling College [4a], which is a large entity consisting of a front hall, topped by a gabled and hipped roof of green glazed tiles, followed by a courtyard 50 m wide and surrounded by a corridor, the murals of which depict Buddha's life story. On a stone terrace, raised around two metres, stands the actual assembly hall. In between 140 pillars wrapped in brocade, 3,000 to 4,000 monks can be seated during their grand ceremonies. At the dukhang's rear is the sanctuary, a two-storied hall topped by a Chinese-style roof covered by gilded bronze tiles. The tablet above the main hall's entrance says—in Manchu, Tibetan (*Loseling*), Chinese (*Huijue Si*) and Mongolian writing—Temple of Wisdom, in the hand-writing of the Qianlong emperor. Here we may recall the reported tradition that the entourage of the deceased 1st Jamyang initially saw the Qianlong Emperor as the grand lama's reincarnation, until they finally agreed to recognize the 16 year-old Jigme Wangpo.

The roofs of the palace-like structures are decorated in typical Tibetan manner: a Wheel of the Dharma, flanked by the two deer symbolizing Buddha's first preaching of the Buddhist teachings, victory banners and various symbols of good luck. The front hall, on the upper floor of which we can find an image of the early Emperor Songtsen Gampo, serves the khempas and diverse abbots of Labrang as a kind of private box when viewing ceremonies and mask dances performed in the open space in front of it.²⁹ The inner courtyard is used for dispu-

tations by Thösamling College students, and the main images inside their assembly hall depict Shakyamuni, Tsongkhapa and Jamyang Shepa. The three posterior chapels of the sanctuary shelter the gönkhang to the right, a large gilded Maitreya statue in the centre and reliquary stupas enshrining the bodies of five former incarnations of Jamyang on the left side. The other nine chörten hold the remains of the local Mongol princes, their wives and some tulkus.

As the location of the large number of temples and assembly halls in the city-like lamasery of Labrang did not follow a strict plan, we shall describe the most important of them in an order that visitors usually follow. This is not determined by the historical development of the monastery, but rather oriented to the pilgrim's path; in a sense one might say we circumambulate the Tsuglakhang. Thus the temples to the front and left side of the main assembly hall are seen first, followed by those at its back and right sides.

The red coloured and four storied building to the left front side of the Tsuglakhang is generally known by its Chinese name of Shou'an Si [2], 'Temple of Longevity and Peace' (Tib. *zam tsha tshang*); this designation granted by the Manchu Jiaqing Emperor (1796-1820) is read on the wooden tablet above the entrance, written in four languages. In 1809 Labrang's largest Buddha image was completed, a Lion's Roar Buddha (Singhanada) of 13 m height. It is said to be a manifestation of Tsongkhapa.³⁰ On both sides of the central image are bronze statues of the eight Mahasattvas and 16 Arhats.

In 1928 a younger brother of the 5th Jamyang built the Manjushri Temple ([3], Chin. *Wenshu Dian*) that stands in front of Shou'an Si. The main image of the yellow walled-in structure is a 7.3 m high Manjushri made of gilded bronze plates. Although Labrang is relatively near Rongwo in Qinghai, this large bronze statue was not done by Rebong artists. It is a fine example of the Inner Mongolian bronze workshop of Dolonnor.³¹ The main image is flanked by a somewhat smaller statue of a White Manjushri and of Maitreya. The worship of the latter, who is expected to become the future Buddha in about 2500 years, is widely spread in Tibetan Buddhism. Yet, it seems to have been further strengthened in the 19th and 20th centuries when many large temples sheltering monumental statues were dedicated to the cult of Maitreya.³² His teachings are

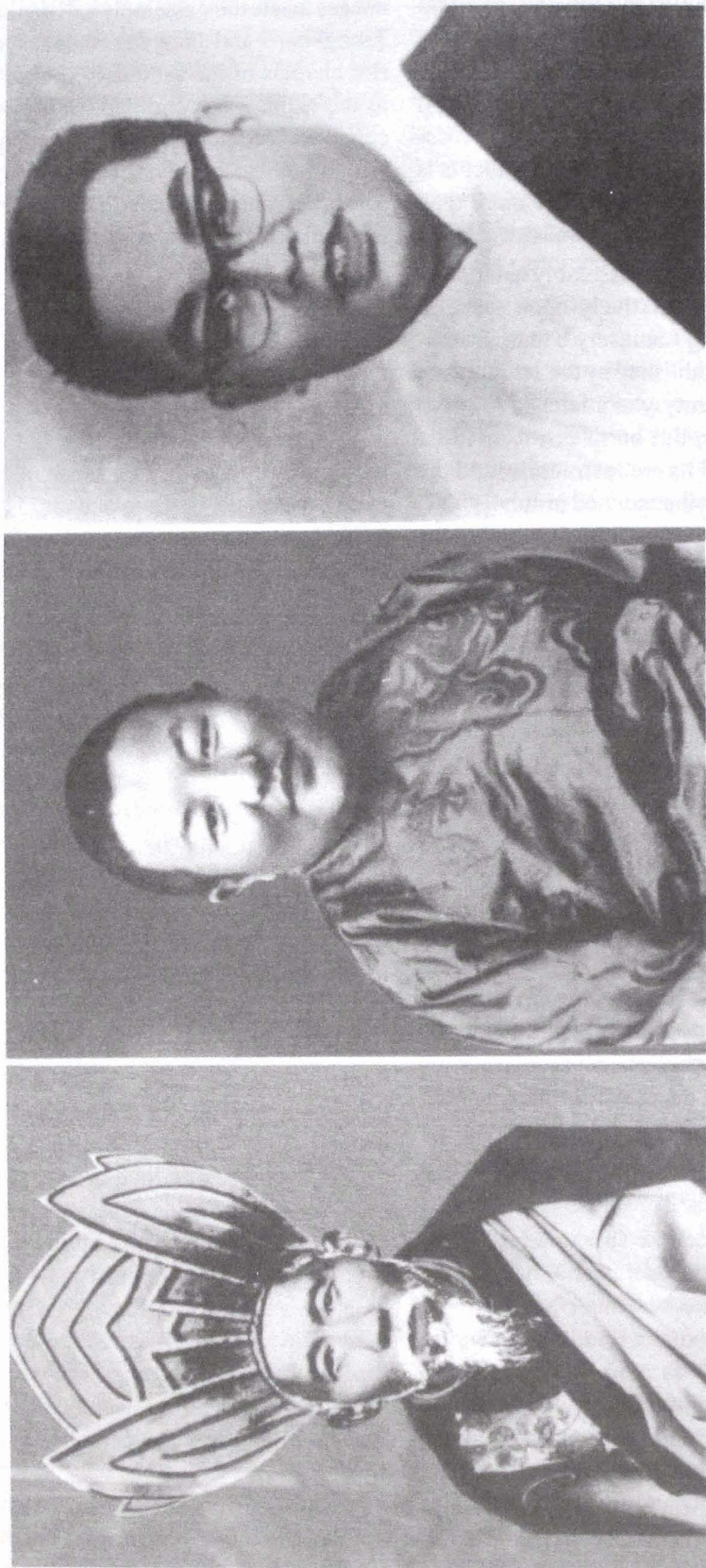


Plate 4. The 4th to 6th Jamyang Kimpoches

expected to banish the growing misery of this world and save humankind. His is a 'Joyful Heaven' called Tushita (Tib. *Ganden*) where people may be reborn in a paradise-like realm and led to redemption.

On the right and behind Shou'an Si we find the Medical College [4b] and Kalacakra College [4c]. These are two of Labrang's six Dratshang (*grva tshang*) or study faculties [4a-f]. The other colleges foster the teachings and exegesis of Buddhist philosophy, Tantras, and sciences such as astronomy and mathematics. Thösamling, the Faculty of Exoteric Buddhism [4a] or Dialectics (Chin. *Wensi Xueyuan*), was established first, in 1710 to 1711, during the founding stage of Labrang Monastery. As such, its assembly hall and temple structures are centrally located and simultaneously serve as chanting halls for the entire lamasery and main instruction centre. Accordingly Thösamling is both the most important college and—for several reasons—the one where most students are registered³³:

The monastery of Bla-bran [Labrang] in its educational aspect is a veritable university. The only difference between this Lamaic university and modern ones is that the former starts from the beginning, say from the kindergarten grade.

The relationship between the colleges shows an emphasis on liberal education as offered in the College of Exoteric Buddhism over against technical skill in the esoteric colleges. Thus, to transfer from the former to the latter is comparatively easy, while the reverse is almost impossible. For the possibilities of admission to these colleges are limited in this way: (1) either one enters into the College of Exoteric Buddhism first and joins some of the esoteric colleges later; (2) or one registers at any of the esoteric colleges without any hope of joining the College of Exoteric Buddhism at all; and (3) or one may stay put in the latter. ... the appointment of all college deans is made from among the scholars of the College of Exoteric Buddhism. The latter is also by far the largest. While all esoteric colleges have only three grades, there are thirteen in exoteric Buddhism.³⁴

An education in the College of Exoteric Buddhism was considered as the veritable gem among Lamaist studies. It is, therefore, the most enduring instruction course in the monastery. To complete the first

twelve stages of the 13 grades of this faculty, students generally study about 15 years, while there is no time limit for the last stage. It should be noted that only a few could, or can, finish their studies in such a short time (15 years!), while many remain for life in lower grades. Accordingly, only for very few of those scholars who complete their education in Thösamling, is it still feasible to continue their studies to a *geshe* degree in one of the other colleges. The latter grade, corresponding to the title of a doctor, is given after a public examination has been passed. Hence we may assume that Labrang's fame and importance was and is mainly due to the seriousness and quality of its college education,³⁵ essentially of the College of Exoteric Buddhism:

Even though the monks from Bla-bran [Labrang], like others, may go to Tibet³⁶ for advanced studies, the standard here is as high as the best there, thanks to the five incarnations of Hjam-dbyans [Jamyang] and their associates.

In 1979, all six teaching institutions and their prayer halls had undergone restoration. Though different in size, they generally have a bipartite layout: a sutra hall facing the front courtyard and a rear-chamber, which is one or two floors higher than the respective two-storeyed dukhang. Their architectural features are fully Tibetan: built of stone, crowned with a parapet that rises considerably above the flat roof. Panels of twigs and brushwood, one to one and a half metre high, are inserted between frames of timber which form a ledge below and a masonry-capped cornice above. This kind of decoration, for which early Western travellers to Tibet had tried in vain to find authentic explanations,³⁷ is typical for Tibetan sacred architecture.³⁸ The only educational institution that adds some Chinese features to its buildings is the Upper Tantric College [4e]. The rear hall of the faculty inaugurated in 1941 is topped by a gabled and hipped roof covered by green glazed tiles. Its sanctuaries shelter a large bronze image of Maitreya flanked by 16 Arhats, the Medicine Buddha and the 35 confessional Buddhas, as well as the 21 manifestations of Tara and a reliquary stupa containing the ashes of the 5th Jamyang's parents. The walls on both sides display 1,000 statues of Amitayus. Images of major deities and lamas are found in every temple of the monastery, although the main images may vary according to the func-

tion of each temple. As such the different Tantric *yidams* play an important role in the sanctuaries of the Hevajra and Kalacakra institutes.

Next to the latter, the so-called Labrang Museum [5] was set up in the building of the former Tara Temple (Dölma Lhakhang). The exhibits displayed range from gifts to the Jamyang Lamas and the monastery, devotional objects, masks, religious instruments and sacred items. In a second room, the butter-sculpture collections are worth seeing. A yellow temple built in 1940, Dölkar Lhakhang [6] is explicitly dedicated to the worship of the White Tara. It lies somewhat off the core temple complex to the left of Jamyang's residential palace.

Probably the most famous shrine of Labrang Monastery is the Jampe Lhakhang [7], or Maitreya Hall. With six floors³⁹ reaching to a height of 26.2 metres, it is the highest temple structure of the lamasery. The 2nd Jamyang Shepa had it erected in 1788 to shelter the large cross-legged Maitreya image that was created by Nepalese artists. The gilded bronze statue is 7.4 m high (10 m including the lotus throne) and is supposed to contain thousands of treatises, mantras, statues and smaller reliquaries. On both sides of Maitreya, we can see 5 m high images of the eight Mahasattvas. Another treasure of the temple kept here is a complete edition of the Kanjur, written in golden and silver letters.

The original structure built in 1788 was a flat-roofed building of four storeys; the 2nd Jamyang Shepa wanted to honour his teacher, the 6th Panchen Lama, hence it resembles one of the mausoleums in Shigatse's Tashilhünpo Monastery rather than an Amdo-style hall. The wooden tablet above the door reads 'Temple of Longevity and Happiness' (Chin. *Shouxi Si*), the imperial title bestowed upon by the Jiaqing emperor. When in 1884 Chahan Erdeni Pandita, the main incarnate lama of Choni, commonly called Karpotshang Rimpoche, restored the temple he added a gilded Chinese palace-type roof. Therefore it is often called 'Great Golden-Tiled Temple', or *Serkhang Chenmo* in Tibetan. It is said that a single piece of these gilded bronze tiles at that time equalled the value of 64 sheep.⁴⁰

Jampe Lhakhang faces an open space which serves as a ceremonial platform for disputations or other Lamaist rituals. To its southern side stands one of the oldest building complexes of the monastery, the original 'Lama Palace' (*bla ma pho brang*) the con-

struction of which was begun in 1711. It is composed of residential buildings and ceremonial halls as well as temples originally serving only the grand lama and his entourage. The Shakyamuni Temple or Jowo Lhakhang [8] is at the upper end of this structural block. The entire complex is called Deyang Phodrang, though this name is used mainly to designate the actual residential part of the Jamyang Palace to the left side of the main temple; that part, actually the upper Deyang Palace⁴¹ [12], is not accessible to the public. This is a pity as from a photo (*see colour photo no. 42*)⁴² the audience hall looks very interesting—an elongated hall, furnished in Tibetan style and illuminated by typical Chinese lamps, with glass-painting in wooden octagonal frames. Beams and joists are fitted and decorated according to the principles of Han-Chinese artistry, as is the architecture of the entire building, which carries a tile-covered gable-roof. Most famous in the palace is Jamyang Shepa's golden Nine-Dragon Throne, a bronze chair of 1.2 m height and 1.5 m lateral length. Its surface is decorated with dragon and lion motifs made of silver. Two poles stand high on both sides of the seat, with golden dragons twining around them.

As the Jowo Lhakhang, or Jokhang [8], originally was the Jamyang's private temple, its walls are painted yellow, not red as generally would be the case with temple halls. A two-storeyed hall with a flat roof was constructed in 1711, while the third floor with the two-layered gilded gabled and hipped roof (*xieshan wuding*) towering in the middle was added in 1907.⁴³ It was meant to be modelled on the Jokhang Temple, Lhasa's most holy shrine. The main image, therefore, is a Jowo Buddha image, representing Shakyamuni as the crowned prince at the age of twelve. The golden statue of around 70 cm height, taken to be identical with the one in Lhasa, is kept in the sanctuary of the second floor. Tradition has it that 108 such Buddha images were shaped during Shakyamuni's lifetime, and Labrang's is said to be one of those. Other sources assign the modelling of the 108 statues to the Indian monk Shantaraksita, who was welcomed in the 8th century to preside over Tibet's first monastery, Samye.⁴⁴ As the 1st Jamyang Shepa got one of those statues in a place named Bumtö⁴⁵ and brought it with him when returning from central Tibet, it is called Bumtö Jowo (*'bum stod jo bo*). The Jokhang's third floor houses the Jamyang's gönkhang and as such is off limits.

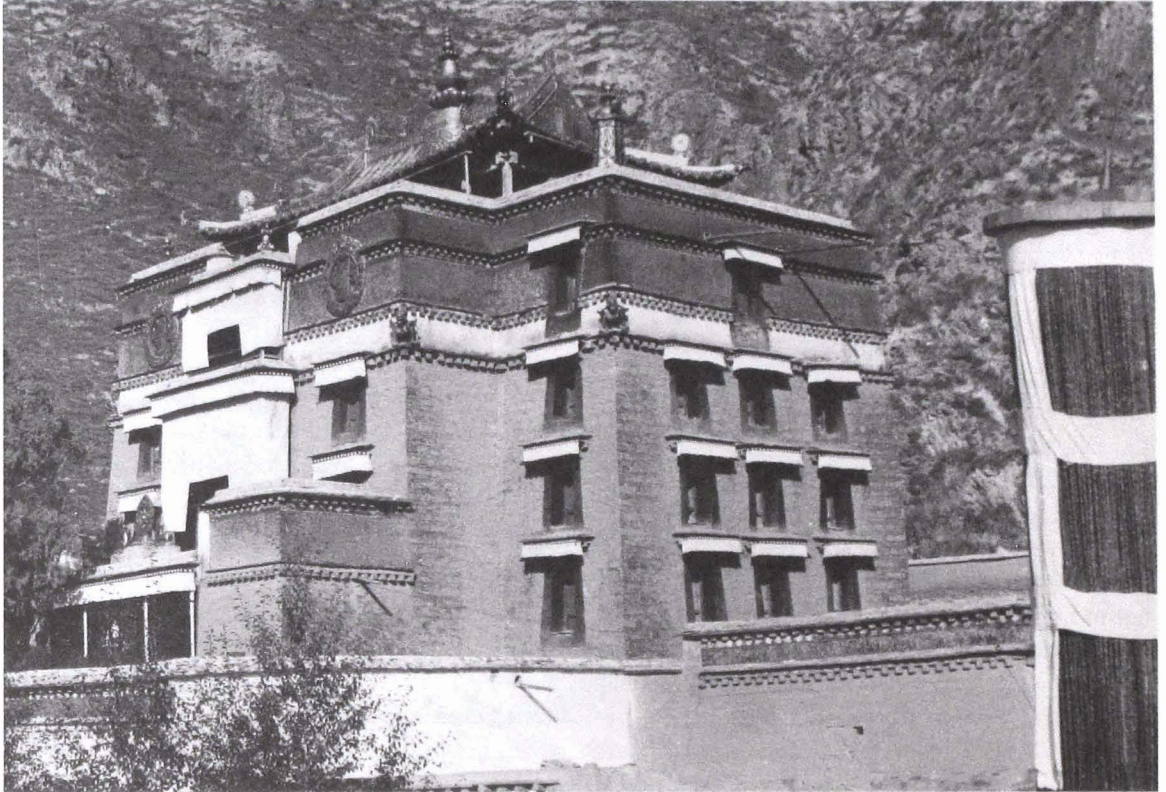


Plate 5. Labrang Maitreya temple before 1950

To the north of Labrang's core complex are some more temples erected amidst ordinary monks' quarters. Around 300 m due northeast of the Tsuglakhang, a temple is dedicated to the worship of Tsongkhapa [9]. Originally built during the time of the 2nd Jamyang, it burnt down twice. The three-storied structure of today dates from 1929 and was entirely funded by Lakho Rimpoche,⁴⁶ the teacher of the 5th Jamyang. Je Rimpoche Lhakhang shelters a 12 m high gilded bronze image of the Gelugpa's founder, flanked by his two main disciples Gedündup and Kädübje, as well as the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, Manjushri and Tara. The hall is filled with 1,000 statues of the bodhisattva of Wisdom, Manjushri.

The way back to the assembly hall passes by the large Buddhist library [10] (Chin. *cangjinglou*). Together with the printing establishment it was located in the former palace of the Mongol prince⁴⁷ who had funded Jamyang Shepa's establishing of Labrang. The main hall of the three-storeyed structure contains a Tsongkhapa image. Up to today Labrang's library still owns more than 60,000 volumes of various scriptures: sutras, works on Tibetan grammar, calendar, history, art, music, and medicine, as well as one of the four Buddhist encyclopaedias (more than 200 volumes) existing in China, not to mention the 1st Jamyang Shepa's writings. Parts of his books are so important that they have become the basic texts for Buddhist studies in many Tibetan and Mongolian monasteries. In the two upper floors, about 70,000 wooden printing blocks were counted, filling up 120 shelves.⁴⁸ Parts of them were lost when the printing establishment was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. Nowadays Labrang Monastery also owns a modern printing press with movable types.

Although somewhat far from the lamasery's nucleus, the Avalokiteshvara Temple [11] is among the most popular for Buddhist pilgrims. This is due to the unrivalled compassion that is symbolized by bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. He is here seen in his most typical Tibetan form with eleven faces and one thousand hands and eyes.⁴⁹ The sanctuary originally was the family temple of the Mongol prince Pönjunang. Another temple where most pilgrims pass by lies behind Jamyang Shepa's Deyang Phodrang [12] beyond the circumambulation road (*Lingkhör*) around the lamasery: Dukar Lhakhang [13] is dedicated to Sitatapatra (*gdugs dkar*), the

destroyer of evil spirits and protector of faithful Buddhists. There are still a number of smaller protector halls (*gönkhang*) where various tutelary deities are worshipped.

As a great number of incarnate lamas live in such a large and important monastery like Labrang, there existed 18 impressive residential and representative buildings for them, so-called nangchen (*nang tren*).⁵⁰ In 1806 a palace to accommodate the Panchen Lama when visiting, Shabten Lhakhang [14], was constructed.⁵¹ Of the resident tulkus, Gungthang and Gomang Rimpoche belong to the more renowned. Their nangchen are constructed in a Tibetan palace-like style and named Gungthang Lama Phodrang [15] and Gomang Lama Phodrang [16].

The upper and lower end of Labrang Monastery are marked by large white stupas (*chörten karmo*); a third one stands on the right side of the Tsuglakhang. The most impressive stupa structure to be visited was on the grounds of Gungthang Lama's residence [15] and therefore often called Gungthang Chörten. Its demolition during the Cultural Revolution was one of the biggest losses for the lamasery. A Chinese American devotee funded its reconstruction, and in 1992 it was consecrated by Gungthang Rimpoche.⁵²

Officially it is called Changchub Chörten (*byang chub mchod rten*), being an Enlightenment Stupa. Built like a temple hall, the edifice faces the river, is constructed in the layout of a mandala and consists of three storeys covered by green glazed tiles. The three vast square shaped basic floors turn into a cylindrical bumpa on the top and end in the indispensable spire. The latter is made of gilded copper, and on eight sides the bumpa cylinder depicts relief images of bodhisattvas. The three floors contain chapels or sanctuaries which portray, on the ground floor, Vairocana, Manjushri, Maitreya and a reclining white jade Buddha image from Burma. The main statue on the second floor is of Amitabha, surrounded by the Thousand Buddhas of the Aeons. The murals of the lower floor, showing the variety of the various Buddhist orders and lineages in Tibet, may be easily recognized from the gallery of the upper floor.

Across the river, opposite the big chörten, we see the large *gökudramsa* or thangka-wall where at certain religious festivals the huge appliqué thangkās are unrolled in the so-called Thangmoche ceremony, i.e. 'sunning the Buddha'. At the birthday of



Plate 6. Labrang's Gunthang Chörten in the 1920s [Kozlow 1925]

Shakyamuni Buddha, for instance, an image of either Amitabha, Shakyamuni or Maitreya may be unveiled, as well as on the 13th day of the first lunar month. The following day Cham dances are performed, and on the 15th day there is a butter sculpture exhibition and evening ceremony. A procession with a Maitreya image on the 16th day ends the New Year celebrations. Like Kumbum Jampa Ling, Labrang was long famous for its mystery plays. Only in Amdo were Cham dances performed on the theme of the holy mystic and poet Milarepa.⁵³

During the great religious festivals, the plain around Labrang Monastery turned into a large market area. Then, pilgrims and merchants, peasants, nomads and traders, were attracted from all over Tibet, Mongolia and the Chinese heartland. Those occasions were well-known, not only because the lamas of Labrang were famous for their scholarship and because they travelled across the entire country—from Lhasa to Beijing and Inner Mongolia—but also due to the economic and administrative importance of the lamasery. The economic foundation of Labrang was based on three principal kinds of annual revenues:

1. Rent earned on buildings and land belonging to the lamasery, ordinarily paid in grain;
2. Interest accrued to the reserve fund of the lamasery or profit derived from the tea trade and oil belonging to the lamasery;
3. Other sundry and miscellaneous income, and donations made by the people.⁵⁴

Thus, Labrang was not just a monastic institution, but a 'religious city and the highest incarnation ... [the Jamyang Shepa] is its religious leader, but wielding also political power' (Rock).⁵⁵ Labrang reigned over and imposed taxes on many nomadic tribes and village settlements, and each Jamyang incarnation served as overlord of the lamasery, its branch monasteries, and the population of the district subordinated to him. At the beginning of the 1940s, the total population under direct control of Labrang amounted to nearly 50,000 people.⁵⁶ To this, two more spheres of influence have to be added:

1. Areas where Labrang authorities directly controlled branch monasteries by appointing abbots and monk officials, and thus indirectly governed the subjects of the latter.
2. Areas where it had branch monasteries, but only exerted spiritual leadership and no political power.

The politico-religious mechanism provided for the growth of the lamasery's economic predominance and therefore its powerful position. This was controlled by the Jamyang himself and by his treasurer, who may be simultaneously seen as president of the monastic university and its provost on the one hand, and 'king or emperor and prime minister' to those people over whom they had authority on the other hand. According to Rock,⁵⁷ Tibetans of Labrang referred to Jamyang Lama as *Kyanggön (skyangs mgon)*, a most august title ordinarily used for the Dalai and Panchen Lamas only. The reverence for the spiritual and political leader of Labrang went so far that he was even known as the 'Little Dalai [Lama]'.

To handle his reign, Jamyang Shepa was in need of a considerable number of monk officials, of whom there were more than 500 circa 1950. 80 of them handled secular affairs in Labrang Monastery proper. No other Tibetan monastery, not even Tashilhünpo, was organized on such a grand scale as Amdo's Labrang.⁵⁸ This kind of politico-religious rule was quite common in Tibetan areas, and Labrang was, therefore, no special case. It was special in that its rule was not questioned even on the eve of the socialist revolution. Also it enjoyed a wide acceptance—with the exception of distant Red Hat sect regions, which Labrang tried to bring under its control in the 1860s.⁵⁹ This may be one of the reasons why the main part of Labrang's temples survived both the events of 1958 (socialization) and the Cultural Revolution. The preliminary explanation for the strength of the politico-religious system as it was carried out at Labrang we may leave to a Chinese Amdo expert of the time. Li Anche elicited from his 1938-1941 fieldwork:

Politically, the mechanism has proved the most stable in comparison with any other form of government which has been in contact with it. It may be recalled that the Tibetans have been organized in semi-independent communities, under either a chieftain or a monastery or a combination of the two. This is true not only in Hsi-kang [Kham] and A-mdo, where the Dalai Lama never had any political control, but also even in Tibet proper, where he rules indirectly through such autonomous entities supervised by his appointees. Whenever there is a conflict between the monastery and a

hereditary chief, it is always the former that comes out the better in the long run, irrespective of denominational differences.

...

In observing a monastery in operation in its influence over the people and in its competition with other agencies, one has to answer the question, 'Why is it possible for the monastery to maintain itself on an expanding basis without deteriorating like so many other political bodies?' In one sense it is true that political domination did a great deal of harm to the dominating body itself. ... But our point of interest is the contrast between monastic and non-monastic rules. To account for the strength of the former, the following factors should be considered.

On the one hand, it has some democratic features in contrast with an aristocracy, while, on the other hand, its prestige is even higher than aristocracy itself. First, leadership in the monastery is the result of free selection in the form of reincarnated Living Buddhas. Not being limited by any particular family line as in the case of hereditary chieftains, the best boy in native qualities is inevitably chosen. Once chosen, he is trained in the monastery as any other novice-monks are, without the danger of being spoiled by family interference. In his minority and even during his active rule there are the councils and assemblies to carry on routine administration, ready to check him if he goes too far in individual fancies at the expense of public welfare. In this sense, a monastery is not unlike a constitutional monarchy.

Second, a Living Buddha surpasses aristocracy in continuity, prestige and efficiency. Once recognized as such, his prestige is exceedingly high. A reincarnation is by definition the same saint or deity who was worshipped previously, and divine glory has no equal in the human world. In addition to the overwhelming belief on the part of the people, the reincarnated Lama in his very early years is able to identify himself with his previous existence by reading the accounts in biographical form. Such a spiritual identity over many generations is the best form of continuity, a source from which an aspiring personality as well as an expectant community can be easily developed. An administrator with this deep rooted self respect, while enjoying the full admiration of his people on the one hand and a responsible council and assembly on the other, cannot but be very effective. Indeed, it would be an unusual experience to have it turn out differently. In consideration of such factors, there is no wonder that a monastery is always expanding and that no other influence has ever so far been able to weaken it.⁶⁰

As such, Labrang was one of the most brilliant examples of a successful spiritual and political leadership, which seemed to have exercised a responsible rule over its subjects. Power was accompanied by economic success for the lamasery itself and the people, and further completed by prestige. The Jamyang Shepa's influence seems to be unbroken, as his actual incarnation, the 6th Jamyang Lobsang Jigme Thubten Chögyi Nyima (born in 1948), holds high political and representative positions in national, provincial and prefectural government bodies.⁶¹

3. Monasteries of Heitso, Chone and the marshes of the Ma Chu

3.1. Heitso Monastery

While Labrang is the main lamasery in Amdo and even more so in Gansu Province, the prefectural seat of the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of South Gansu (*Kanlho* in Tibetan) is located in Heitso (Chin. *Hezuo*), a township within the bounds of Xiahe county. It is situated around 2800 m above sea level in the transitional zone from the Angkor valley into the grasslands. In 1991 local monks named the main monastery in Heitso Jamkar Gompa, although Rock located a monastery of this name further to the southeast.¹ Heitso's lamasery is called Tse-Ü Gompa (*rtse dbus dgon pa*), 'Central Peak Monastery' by Rock,² while most Tibetan and Chinese sources spell it *gtsos dgon dge ldan chos gling*—Tsögön Geden Chöling.³

Looking at the present wide-spread monastic area with its scattered buildings and Chinese hutments in front of the monastery, one can easily imagine how a once large and important lamasery deteriorated by way of socialist demolition and the Cultural Revolution. Though the monastery was not totally destroyed, Tsögön's decline had started before the beginning of the 20th century. While the *Political and Religious History of Amdo* portrayed a large lamasery consisting among others of a grand assembly hall, a large temple with a gold-tiled roof, a Shakyamuni hall, a Thousand Buddha hall and a printing establishment,⁴ when European travellers such as Tafel and Rock visited (early 20th century) it seemed to be 'after all just a village settlement full of monks, with a prayer hall, the Tsuglhakang, the gönkhang and some lodgings of higher officials'.⁵ By then

it contains about 200 compounds or houses, a labrang or palace and a nine-storey building known as the dgu-thog. It harbored 993 monks. It was partly destroyed and entirely looted by Muslim soldiers during the Muslim-Tibetan war of 1925, so that on my second visit we found only 350 ... inmates.⁶

Written records have it that Tsögön Geden Chöling was founded in 1673 by a learned lama of the area, Be Sherab Chöden (*'be shes rab chos ldan*), who had studied in central Tibet to achieve the *lharampa* degree. He later was reincarnated and became this Gelugpa monastery's grand lama Serthri Rimpoche.⁷ Although the lamasery is relatively near the monastic city of Labrang, Tsögön was independent of the latter⁸ and concurrently developed into one of the largest institutions in Kanlho. Located on the edge of the Tibetan highland, within the spheres of influence of Mongol and Tibetan princes, Han-Chinese officials and, most important, large Muslim communities, Tsögön suffered destruction several times. In 1844-1846 local Tibetans had risen in rebellion against the Manchu-Chinese reign.⁹ After the warfare ended, the monastery was reconstructed, only to be demolished by Muslims:

During the Moslem uprisings of the T'ung-chih and Kuang-hsü (1862-1908) periods, half of the T'ao-hsi region was turned into a battlefield, the districts subjugated, the people dispersed; Chinese took refuge in the Tibetan districts where they were protected. ... Owing to religious differences there is no harmony between the Tibetans and Chinese on the one hand and the Moslems on the other.¹⁰

It seems that even after the looting and destruction during the Muslim-Tibetan war of 1925, the lamasery started to develop again. This may have been due to a bureaucratic change, as a new administrative border was drawn between the provinces of Gansu and Qinghai, with the Salar Muslims of Xunhua—which Labrang and Heitso had belonged to before—remaining in Qinghai, whilst the Hui Muslims remained in Gansu.

On the eve of the Chinese communist take-over Tsögön was described as a monastic complex comprising two assembly halls, ten Buddha temples, a nine-storeyed building (Chin. *jiucenglou*), and

several other structures serving as lama residences, colleges, even a school, a community hospital and police office.¹¹ The monastery's Tibetan 'skyscraper', a rarely seen tall building of nine storeys, was famous in the entire region. It is this structure that arouses our interest most.

The building in question is located at the far eastern end of Tsögön's monastic complex. Seen from the outside it appeared to have nine floors, an illusion created by rows of simulated windows, cornices and an attic. The interior was divided into five main floors only, plus the attic covered by a two-layered gabled and hipped roof. According to vertical projections given in Chinese sources,¹² a medium-sized Buddhist statue served as the main image of worship on the ground floor, while there were three-dimensional mandalas on the third and fifth storeys of the temple. Its Tibetan designation as Guthog (*dgu thog*; Chin. *Gedahe Si*), meaning 'nine roofs' or 'nine floors', reminds of the nine-storeyed Milarepa Tower of Sekhar Guthog¹³ in southern Tibet. The famous hermit saint of the Tibetans was told by Marpa to built such a tower-like structure in order to purify himself of his previous evil deeds:

... I heard the fame of Marpa, the renowned Translator(...).
For him I built many houses,
One with courtyards and nine stories,
Only after this did he accept me.¹⁴

The Guthog was originally 23 m high, reaching the top of the Chinese-style gabled and hipped roof. Though having a nearly square layout like its south Tibetan prototype, both structures show considerable architectural differences. While the 11th century prototype was meant originally to be a kind of watchtower and fortified castle for defence and refuge, Heitso's Guthog was built as a temple from the start. Therefore it also has a religious name—Thongdröl Lhaxhang (*mthong grol lha khang*)—with the term 'thongdröl' hinting at the idea of attaining *vimukti* (liberation) through the sight of holy Buddhist images.¹⁵

Whilst Heitso's Guthog actually only had five main floors and one attic, the authentic Milarepa Tower of Sekhar Guthog, on the other hand, has no specific floor-divisions visible from the outside, but inside has nine storeys—including the roof-top. At the same time, tradition has it that the final Milarepa Guthog was a square white tower nine storeys high with a

superstructure and a pinnacle, forming ten storeys.¹⁶ This is how it is depicted on murals in Samye Monastery and in the Norbulingka.¹⁷ Adding to this somewhat complex situation—and even more interesting as far as the monastery in Heitso is concerned—is that Tsögön Lamasery's Guthog has expanded, being rebuilt even higher after the damage caused by the Cultural Revolution. Including the rows of mock windows, eleven (feigned) storeys can be seen from outside, nine of which are painted in red temple-colour. The two uppermost (feigned) storeys are in white and brown, thus giving the entire building a palatial appearance. This reminds us of the construction history of Milarepa's tower, because his teacher Marpa had 'let Mila build a fourth square Tower up to the seventh story—the last storeys were completed by Marpa himself'.¹⁸

Tsögön's Guthog being topped again by a two-layered Chinese style gabled and hipped roof makes it look as though it has 13 storeys altogether. The inner structure reveals seven main floors, which with the attic and roof make nine real storeys, thereby achieving the number nine, one of the most important ritual and holy numbers. The building contains a lot of symbolism, as the tower-like structure stands for the *lamrim*, the gradual Path to Enlightenment, which the pilgrim walks by climbing storey after storey, contemplating the images. Religious teachings are embodied in the construction of the tower itself, as 'building a tower means to build a new self or to begin a new phase in one's life.'¹⁹

While in most lamaseries temple structures of the kind just portrayed would serve mostly to shelter a monumental Buddha image of either Shakyamuni, Maitreya or Tsongkhapa, this is quite different in Tsögön's Guthog or Thongdröl Lhaxhang. All the genuine storeys in the inside are separate, so that no sanctuary reaches two or more storeys high. Consequently the temple offers space to a multitude of images on each floor instead of a single giant one. This was also true for the pre-Cultural Revolution building.

Traditionally its origin is dated back to a time before the actual monastery was founded. In 1619 Marmar Rimpoche of Rongwo Monastery was asked to come to Heitso. When he came he built a meditation hall, which in 1636 was used by the holy lama Gaden Gyatsho. The latter also created a Milarepa statue that was supposed to have existed until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Probably about that time



Plate 7. Heitso Monastery in the 1930s to 1940s [Tafel 1914]

the first nine-storeyed temple was built, initially called Sekhar Guthog or Tso Sekhar Guthog. Ma²⁰ gives a list of images which filled the Thongdröl Temple: a Milarepa and a Maitreya (containing relics of Shakyamuni) made by Gaden Gyatsho, statues of Shakyamuni, Amitayus, Sitatapatra, Avalokiteshvara, of five great Tibetan gurus and five religious kings, all formed by the hands of the Jetsünpa lama from Lhasa. Also Tsongkhapa and his two main disciples, the eight Mahasattvas, Atisha and the most important teachers of the Kadampa order; Padmasambhava in all his eight manifestations, Milarepa, Rechungpa, Marpa, Tilopa, Naropa, and several Indian mahasiddhas. A Buddhist reliquary stupa made of silver and three tomb chörten are mentioned as well. The uppermost floor was said to contain an embalmed incarnate lama, covered with gilded plaster, which can be circumambulated. While at the original Milarepa Tower in south Tibet 'the more courageous visitors clamber round outside the top clinging to iron chains to circumambulate Serkhar Guthog between earth and sky as a form of meritorious pradakshina',²¹ this was not provided for at the Guthog of Tsögon.

Nowadays this temple offers a more comfortable, less spectacular *nangkhor*, in a corridor for circumambulation at ground level. Whether the 1500 smaller stupas which formerly surrounded the building, will also be rebuilt, remains to be seen within the next few years. Inside the Guthog a multitude of different Buddhist images are again on display, although small Milarepa statues give the sanctuary its ambience. Thousands of Milarepa figures are put into niches and on shelves, particularly on the third to the seventh floors. They have all been moulded recently,²² their very modest artistic quality suggesting a form of mass production. Main images on the ground floor are statues of Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya and Usnisasitatapatra, accompanied by Manjushri, Thönmi Sambhota and the three Tibetan Kings of Religion (the Emperors Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen and Tri Rälpacen). One storey higher up Atisha is surrounded by gurus of the Kadampa order, while the third floor is dedicated to Padmasambhava and his manifestations, appearing to be in line with the original concept. Main images on the fourth floor depict the bodhisattva trinity of Lokeshvara, Manjushri and Vajrapani. The next storey is entirely dedicated to Milarepa, being represented by one large and many smaller statues.

The sixth floor is reserved for Tantric deities, such as Guhyasamaja, Yamantaka and also Tara.²³

Before the Cultural Revolution²⁴ Tsögon Monastery comprised many more temples, such as sanctuaries for Jowo Shakyamuni, the Buddhas of the Three Ages, White Manjughosa, Thangtong Gyälpo, Hayagriva, Amitayus, Tara, as well as a Chörten Hall containing reliquary stupas with the remains of the five Serthri Rimpoches, a temple for protector deities (gönkhang), and several *nangchen*, i.e. residential buildings for incarnate lamas. Whether it is planned to reconstruct them was not stated during our last visit. By then only an assembly hall (Tsluglhakhang), a gönkhang, a kitchen, manikhang, the disputation courtyard and three nangchen were nearly completed, with about 200 monks and two incarnate lamas taking care of them.²⁵

3.2. Chone Lamasery

The former northeast Tibetan principedom of Chone (*co ne, co ni*) lies in the transitional area between the steppes of Lower Amdo and the Gansu loesslands. What today is a medium-sized town functioning as administrative seat of Kanlho Prefecture's Zhuoni County once was just a small village besides a mighty monastery, both lying on the green loessland terraces above the Lu Chu river's northern bank. Chone is 330 km from Lanzhou either via Kanlho's capital Heitso, which is around 100 km to the west of Chone, or travelling via Minxian (85 km southeast) which may be reached by road from Tianshui City (approx. 300 km).

The former village with its mixed Tibetan, Han-Chinese, and Hui Muslim population was once one of the most powerful regional domains in Amdo, if not the most powerful. It was the capital of a principality on the upper reaches of the river Tao He (Tib. *Lu Chu*) extending over some 10,000 km² of land. As many as 100,000 people from 48 Tibetan tribes were ruled by the Chone Wönpo (*co ne dbon po*).²⁶ According to varying local tradition, Chone was a Tibetan military establishment of the 8th to 10th centuries, or later after the end of the Mongol-Chinese Yuan empire in 1368. On the eve of the loss of his traditional power at the end of the 1920s, the Chone prince represented the 22nd generation of his family clan, though he was not of direct descent:

His ancestors, a Tibetan official family, left their own country and made their way across Szechwan [Sichuan] and the Min Shan range, in Kansu, to the Tao River, in 1404, conquering and pacifying the tribes and villages on the way. Upon informing the Imperial Court in Peking of their conquest of the territory for the Chinese Empire, they were made hereditary chiefs of Choni and the subjugated tribal lands. At the same time the Emperor, Yung-Lo, gave them a seal and the Chinese name Yang.

The ancestors of the Choni Prince inter-married with the female offspring of Ching Wang ... who ruled the territory of the Ala Shan, in Mongolia, north of Kansu.²⁷

Although legitimized by imperial decrees the Chone 'dynasty' ruled until the 20th century quasi-independently from both Beijing, Lhasa, or any other Tibetan authority. The native population was Tibetan, but mixed with Hui Muslim and Han-Chinese settlers, so the Chone princes ruled over them too. Their authority partly reached as far as the Dzöge grasslands in Sichuan, with important lamaseries such as Tagtshang Lhamo, Tartse Gompa, Kangsar and Amchog Gompa. The Chone rulers received levies both from villagers and pastoralists of the affiliated areas, and appointed supervisors to them.

The hereditary ruling clan of Chone could trace its dynasty to a Lhasa family in the 13th to 14th centuries. Their members controlled both the secular territory and the monastery, which was founded in 1295:

Under the rule of succession, if a prince has two sons, the elder succeeds him, and the second becomes grand lama in the monastery; but if there is only one son, he takes both positions concurrently. Prince Yang Chi-ching is both temporal ruler and grand lama²⁸ [until about 1928].

Hence the secular rule and religious leadership were inter-related, and Chone was basically a small-scale theocracy. There is good reason to believe that the origin of the monastery Chone Gönchen goes back to an era before the Yang clan controlled the area, because it is said that at the beginning of the 13th century there was already a Nyingmapa monastery here.²⁹ In 1269, when the Sakyapa hierarch Phagpa passed by here on his way to the imperial court of Mongol Khan Khubilai, he

considered it to be an auspicious place and therefore left behind one of his disciples, Sakya Geshe Sherab Yeshe, to propagate the Sakya doctrine. He eventually reconstituted the gompa into a Sakyapa monastery, although written records have it that he established Chone Gönchen in 1295.³⁰

When in 1459 Chöje Rinchen Lhünpopa, a younger brother of Chone's 2nd Tusi,³¹ returned from his studies in central Tibet, he converted the 1,000 monks of Chone Gönchen to the Gelugpa tradition. Rinchen Lhünpopa's birth in 1439 was linked to a prophecy of Tsongkhapa, who had died in Ganden Monastery two decades earlier,³² so Chone's monastic institution was renamed Ganden Shedrub Ling (*dga' ldan bzhad sgrub gling*). It developed quickly, especially after 1713, when the 14th Tusi of Chone, Tensung Tshering (*bstan srung tshé ring*), travelled to Beijing to pay his respects to the Kangxi emperor. On this occasion the lamasery was bestowed the imperial title of Changding Xingwang Si, the 'Thriving Monastery of Deep Meditation' (Tib. *dam ting 'dzin dar rgyas gling*). One year later the Tshennyi Dratshang was established as the first study faculty, and the Tantric college Gyüpa Dratshang followed in 1729. Thus Chone attracted many religious students, and at Changding Si's heyday the number of monks is said to have grown to between 3,000 and 3,800.³³

Furthermore the printing of canonical texts was advanced, as under the 14th Tusi a set of Kanjur woodblocks were carved. Starting from the 18th century Chone Monastery developed into one of the four most important printing centres of holy Buddhist scriptures, owning the only complete set of printing woodblocks of the Tanjur outside of Lhasa:

Choni lamasery has printing blocks of both the Kandjur and the Tandjur (...). A number of other lamaseries, such as Derge and Radja [Ragya], have blocks of the Kandjur, but rarely of the Tandjur. In fact, Choni is said to be the only monastery outside Lhasa possessing the Tandjur blocks, and the claim is made that the books printed here are without mistakes, the best edition known.³⁴

The printing of the 209-volume Tanjur edition of Chone was done in 1772, after 300 engravers had worked for 16 years. Even in the 20th century it took 45 monks three months to print the Kanjur and almost half a year to print an edition of the Tanjur.³⁵

As Chone was devastated by armies in 1912 and 1928,³⁶ by that time the number of monks had dropped to some 500 to 700, including five incarnate lamas.³⁷ Therefore, not too much may have been left of the original dimensions of the walled lamasery with its ten Chinese-style assembly halls and temple buildings and 172 residential structures. Starting from 1932 Chone Monastery was rebuilt within six years on a smaller scale, though the restored outer wall appears to enclose the original area of the lamasery.³⁸ The same area was rebuilt, more or less, since Chanding Si reopened around 1980. Some 200 monks are registered again.

The layout of Chone Gönchen is rectangular, enclosed by a wall of 2 to 3 m height and extending 120 to nearly 200 m laterally on a terrace overlooking the Tao River to the south. The architecture can be described as being of a predominantly Han-Chinese style with Tibetan decorative features. While the ordinary living quarters of the monks are constructed of mud walls, the main temple buildings are a mixture of wood and brick architecture, topped by gabled and hipped roofs covered with glazed tiles. Those are of green, grey or yellow colour, with the latter being reserved for the main assembly hall and the entrance gate. Similar to a Chinese temple, the main gate, a gate building, chanting hall and a large open space used for the monks' dialectical disputations are all sited along the central axis. Where the drum and bell towers would be expected in a Chinese temple, there are two lateral temple structures in Chone's Chanding Si.

The assembly hall used to contain main images of Manjushri and Tsongkhapa and about 200 bronzes from India, Nepal and China.³⁹ The rebuilt dukhang (sutra hall) of 1991 with its beautifully done murals and decorations shelters a central clay image of Maitreya, 5 m in height and similar to the one in Rock's 'Temple for the Recompense of Kindness'.⁴⁰ The other temples were not made accessible in 1991, so we cannot tell if they are meant to be the substitutes for any of the destroyed former temples. Of these, the most important were: Temple of the Medicine Buddha, gönkhang, Sitatapatra Temple, Shakyamuni Hall, Maitreya Hall, and the sanctuaries of the four study faculties that existed on the eve of the Chinese Revolution. During the 1940s, two more colleges were founded, though small, one for astronomy, mathematics and related studies, and one for religious dances.⁴¹

As Chone played an important political role until the 20th century, the yamen—government office and 'palace'—of the Yang clan was built within the main precincts of the lamasery. Called Phodrang Yongdü Gyalkhang (*pho brang yongs 'dus rgyal khang*) in Tibetan, it consisted of administrative and residential buildings and also contained temple halls and sanctuaries. Originally, the lamas of Chone directly administered the affairs of five other monasteries, while it still controlled 44 subordinate branch monasteries and 17 religious districts. Although these were mainly distributed among the 48 tribes on the Tusi's dominion in today's counties of Chone (Chin. *Zhuoni*), Lintan, Thewo (*Diebu*) and Drugchu (*Zhouqu*),⁴² the influence of Chone Gönchen reached as far as Mongolia and central Tibet. Especially in Lhasa's Sera Monastery, lamas from Chone played an important role, as they filled five entire khamtsen⁴³ of Sera's colleges with monks from their native land.⁴⁴

3.3. Tagtshang Lhamo

Tagtshang Lhamo may be considered the most important monastic institution near the roadside of the main traffic route between the provincial capitals Lanzhou and Chengdu, of Gansu and Sichuan respectively. Although the built-up area with monks quarters and temple buildings is extensive, matching the size of Labrang, the place named *Langmu Si* in Chinese is easily missed, as it lies around 4 km off the main road. The distance to Lanzhou amounts to 450 km, while the closest distance to Labrang comes to 190 km, if one crosses the Sangke grasslands. As Tagtshang Lhamo is situated in a small valley basin at the foot of an impressive and beautiful mountain, the view from the main road is blocked by some grass-covered hills. When coming down from the pass that marks the watershed between the Yellow River and the Yangtse systems, the provincial border between Gansu and Sichuan is reached at the bridge crossing the Bailong Jiang river headwaters. Instead of continuing to Chengdu, one branches off to the right, where a good road leads into Langmusi village.

The site of Tagtshang Lhamo actually looks like a huge monastery covering the valley floor and neighbouring hills with a small village in its heart. The mosque's minaret rising high above the roofs of the houses indicates a mixed population of Tibetans, Hui Muslims and Han-Chinese. A further

surprise is being told that the holy place has at least two names. Two monasteries exist looking like a very large one: Kirti and Serchen Gompas.⁴⁵ Each monastery belongs to another province, the first one is part of Sichuan, the latter lies inside Gansu. Although both are Gelugpa institutions, they have a different historical background, and therefore different monastic names.⁴⁶

The location of Lhamo Gumpa has been a sacred place for a long time. The mountain towering high above the gorge of Bailong Jiang river⁴⁷ is considered to be the seat of the local mountain deity. The name of Tagtshang Pelgyi Lhamo (*stag tshang dpal gyi lha mo*) was given, according to the legend, as Padmasambhava vanquished all kinds of demons at this place. A similar story is told about Bhutan's Tagtshang Monastery; the great master Guru Rimpoche rode on the back of a tiger to subdue the local evil spirits. The 2nd Tongkhör Lama Yönten Gyatsho (1557-1587) honoured the place by quoting it in his *Record of Holy Places*, thus instituting the use of the designation—the 'Tiger's nest' (*stag tshang*). Many more fabulous stories are told about other holy persons who are supposed to have dwelt here, among them the goddess Lhamo. Her name has also found its way into the monastery's appellation.⁴⁸

The first hermitage here is said to have been built in 1713⁴⁹ by Thola Ngawang Pelsang (*tho' langag dbang dpal bzang*) who was a native of Amchog, the area between Labrang and Lhamo Gumpa. When after 1731 Thola Rimpoche offered his hermitage to the learned Kirti Lama Lobsang Tenpe Gyantshen (*kirti blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*), the latter built Lhamo's first lamasery, Kirti Namgyal Dechen Ling (*kirti dgon rnam rgyal bde chen gling*). It developed into a large monastic institution comprising a sutra hall, several temples, nangchen and two colleges for Tantric and Exoteric studies. Most famous in the Kirti Labrang (i.e. Kirti Lama's residence) was an image of Shakyamuni that was described as being identical to the Jowo Buddha in Lhasa's Jokhang Temple, containing several most holy relics. The large multi-storeyed chörten of a square layout was built by a certain Kün Phagpa (*kun 'phags pa*), whose remains are kept in a reliquary stupa in the assembly hall.⁵⁰

The second Gelugpa monastery, in Gansu Province, is named Ganden Shedrub Pekar Drölwe Ling (*dga' ldan bshad sgrub pad dkar grol ba'i*

gling). It was founded by Gyantshen Sengge (*rgyal mtshan seng ge*), the 53rd Ganden Thripa (1678-1756). His birthplace was near the banks of Lu Chu river (Tao He), 50 km due north,⁵¹ an area belonging to the sphere of Tagtshang Lhamo. At the age of 27 he went to study in Lhasa and entered Drepung's Gomang College, thus fulfilling a prophesy of the 5th Panchen Lama Lobsang Yeshe. Under the guidance of ten of the most erudite lamas of the time, with the Panchen Lama and the 1st Jamyang Shepa among them, Gyantshen Sengge became a wise master of the Dharma. His teachers predicted that many protectors of the Law (Dharmapalas) would follow him where his reincarnations take place.⁵² His first career was one of a wise and increasingly influential high lama, becoming abbot of Kongpo Drugla Temple, and Umdze of Lhasa's Upper Tantric College. At the age of 55, in 1732, Gyantshen Sengge ascended the throne of a Ganden Thripa, thus becoming the formal head of the Gelugpa order.

In 1747 Tendzin Wangchug, the Mongol prince of the southern Ma Chu region (Henan Qinwang), enquired of the 7th Dalai Lama about the possibility of sending a high lama to further propagate the Doctrine in Amdo. Thus, Gyantshen Sengge was entrusted with this task and sent back to his native land. At first he stayed in Labrang, but in 1748 he met with Kirti Lama Lobsang Tenpe Gyantshen (1712-1771) who had just started to establish a monastery at Thola Rimpoche's Lhamo hermitage. So when accompanying the 2nd Jamyang on his way through the grasslands of Kanlho, Gyantshen Sengge was asked to visit the site of Tagtshang Lhamo. This marked the foundation of Lhamo's second Gelugpa monastery, popularly called Serchen Gumpa, because its abbot had been holder of the Grand Throne (*gser khri chen po*) of Ganden.

At first a Serthri Labrang, 'Throne Lama Palace', was built for him in 1748, and a courtyard for teaching and debates followed four years later. In the meanwhile he had established a Buddhist college at Heitso Monastery (1749) of which he was also abbot, and travelled around the area to recruit novices to become monks in his monastery. Four years after building an assembly hall (1752) he died at the age of 79. Of his successors, it was especially the 4th Serthri Rimpoche, Lobsang Tendzin Sengge (1877-1939), who further enlarged Tagtshang Lhamo's Serchen Gumpa by establishing a

Kalacakra College (in 1904) and a printing establishment.

Thus, Tagtshang Lhamo had grown into a monastic university. Although consisting of two separate lamaseries, it offered possibilities for nearly all kinds of studies, especially after the 5th Serthri Lama (born in 1938) set up a Medical College in a former hermitage. By 1958, when nearly 600 monks lived and studied here,⁵³ Tagtshang Lhamo was the local religious, cultural, economic and administrative centre. Unlike many other Amdo monasteries, Lhamo was not destroyed in 1958, but dismantled during the Cultural Revolution. The four study faculties of both lamaseries were quickly rebuilt after 1981, as were the large sutra hall and several temple structures.⁵⁴

The view of the reconstructed Tagtshang Lhamo is still quite unusual, as its most evident features differ from both typical central Tibetan-style and Chinese-influenced architecture. Standing atop a nearby hill one overlooks a sea of oblique gabled-roofs, rather resembling Bhutanese-style houses or Swiss chalets. These roofs, which are obviously adapted for a rather rainy local climate, are covered by wooden slats or planks and sometimes weighted down by stones. Only the main buildings, such as dukhang, temples and nangchen, carry gabled and hipped roofs, made up of yellow or green glazed tiles and only slightly inclined. The buildings of the colleges are in typical Tibetan flat-roof architecture and therefore stand out against the lamaseries' predominant house-type.

At first glance the separation line between the two monasteries is not easily made out, nor does the river separate Sichuan from Gansu. Kirti Gompa is situated on both sides of the river, while Serchen Gompa extends across the mountain slope opposite the entrance to the river's gorge, which is framed by the sacred mountain. While Kirti's dukhang and main temples face south (with the thangka wall and a smaller temple looking north), most of the important halls of Serchen look west. In between the two near the river bend—almost in the geographical centre—the presence of a mosque is surprising. All the same, the streets, shops and Muslim restaurants of the small trading village are dominated by the red robes of the monks.

Only a stone's throw from the mosque rises the large Treasure Stupa, in shape similar to the one in Labrang. The roofs here are also covered with

wooden slats, while the central part with the bumpa overlooking the roofs is constructed of stone or cement. On top of the square-shaped harmika, the eyes of the Buddha are painted on all four sides. The ground floor is surrounded by vestibules filled with large prayer-wheels for circumambulating pilgrims, while inside there is a temple-like hall and several sanctuaries.⁵⁵

Starting from the stupa and going up the main street of Kirti Gompa, the huge assembly hall is reached. Built on a platform-like elevation, it gives an impression of a Bhutanese Dzong, though this mixed fortress-monastery architecture of the Himalayan kingdom is nowhere near being the model of this dukhang. The vestibule with its wood carvings and paintings depicting the ubiquitous wheel of life and death, the four Lokapalas and Shambhala, is large enough to comprise an entire lesser temple building of smaller gompas. This massive-looking structure is used both as main sutra hall and for housing the exoteric Loseling College (*dpal ldan bkra shis blo gsal gling*). The throne seat in the main hall is meant for use by the 11th Kirti Rimpoche, the current incarnate lama who lives in exile in India.⁵⁶ In a sanctuary at the rear we find large images 5-7 m high, portraying Maitreya, Tsongkhapa and Manjushri. Appliqué thangkhas cover the walls of this chapel, while some Rebgong paintings decorate those of the assembly hall.

Near the upper end of the monastery, where we approach the entrance to the rugged gorge, prayer-wheel corridors line the river, and some lhato adorned with prayer-flags and hundreds of oversized arrows indicate the presence of a nearby gönkhang. Tagtshang Lhamo may not offer antiquities within its walls, yet its unique architecture and the beautiful location at the foot of a craggy sacred mountain, with its grassy slopes green in summer and dotted with colourful flowers, mediate the mystic atmosphere of the site. It is this atmosphere which is probably sought by the many pilgrims who come in their tens of thousands on the occasion of the great annual festivals.

3.4. Other Lamaseries of Kanlho

Gansu's portion of the Tibetan Plateau is relatively small, covering some 5.5 % of the highland, while more than 7 % of the Tibetans live within its administrative boundaries. As they have to share their fertile environment, especially in agricultural

areas, with Hui Muslims, Han-Chinese and some other ethnic groups, they constitute no more than a scant third of the population in the respective areas.⁵⁷ Western people, therefore, tend to believe that besides Labrang, Choni and a few other monasteries, religious life of Gansu Tibetans is not much centred in monastic institutions; Heitso and Tagtshang Lhamo are fairly unknown in Western countries. Other peoples like Yugur (11,000), Tu (some 13,000 in Gansu), Mongols (about 7,000) and quite a few Han also follow the teachings of the Buddhist Doctrine. Hence we should not be too surprised that a survey in the 1950s counted 369 lamaseries in Gansu. More than half of those were found in Kanlho, that is to say in today's Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. The predominance of Labrang and Choni lamaseries becomes very obvious when looking at the number of Gelugpa institutions: out of 196 monasteries 177 belonged to the order established by Tsongkhapa whereas just eight were Nyingmapa, two Sakyapa and nine Bönpo lamaseries.⁵⁸ After almost two decades of reconstruction and restoration work, nearly all the monasteries were rebuilt, either partially or even to their original size. Therefore, before concluding the Gansu chapter, we will take a look at the development of some interesting, though less important monasteries in Kanlho.

3.4.1. Shitshang Gompa

Lying about half-way between Labrang Monastery and Tagtshang Lhamo, Luchu's Shitshang Ganden Chökhör Ling (*shis tshang dga' ldan chos 'khor gling*) belongs to the larger monastic institutions of Kanlho. In order to reach it one has to turn off from the main Lanzhou-Chengdu highway at Luchu township (Chin. *Luqu Xian*) and go on beyond the latter for ten more kilometres. The present Gelugpa lamastery was established relatively late, as it evolved on the grounds of 15 smaller forerunners, either temples or monasteries. In 1839 Labrang's 3rd Dewatshang Lama Jamyang Thubten Nyima started to develop it as a branch of Labrang. Being a totally dependent outpost of the latter, Shitshang Gompa started to flourish all the same. Until the mid-20th century 500 monks were studying in six colleges—a number that is hardly matched in other branch lamaseries—and looking after 14 temples and assembly halls.

Having survived the 1958 upheaval, Shitshang Gompa did not escape destruction during the Cultural

Revolution. It was reopened in 1982, and the main assembly hall, the college for dialectics and a protectors' temple were rebuilt. By 1993 there were more than 200 monks. Except for the Chinese roof of green glazed tiles on top of the entrance to the sutra hall's courtyard, the monastery's architectural style is entirely Tibetan. The large Tshogchen Lhakhang has three throne seats for Jamyang Shepa, Dewatshang Rimpoche and Shitshang's abbot, respectively. The beautiful murals in the main hall depict the dharmapalas Pelden Lhamo, Yama, Mahakala, Yamantaka and Kubera, as well as Buddha Shakyamuni, Amitabha, Singhanada and the 35 confessional Buddhas. Main images for worship on the hall's back altar are statues of Jamyang Rimpoche, Jowo Shakyamuni, Tsongkhapa and the 1st to 7th Dewatshang. At present, the 8th Dewatshang is in charge. The lamastery's largest image can be seen in the rear sanctuary, a 5-6 m high wooden Maitreya, flanked by statues of Manjushri. Other images portray disciples of Tsongkhapa, Indian, Nepalese and Chinese incarnations, predecessors of Jamyang and Dewatshang Lamas, bodhisattvas and dharmapalas. Monks of Shitshang Gompa point out a statue of the 3rd Dewatshang who is said to have been addressed by an image of Usnisasitapatra. An edition of the Kanjur printed at the time of the Qianlong emperor survived the Cultural Revolution. It is said that statues of the 3rd Dalai Lama, the 2nd and 3rd Jamyang Shepa bowed their head to this treasure.⁵⁹

3.4.2. The White Crag Monastery

Located in a rocky and forested mountain area to the northeast of Kengya (*rkan gya*) village, Drakar Gompa (*brag dkar dgon pa*) or White Crag Monastery has developed around a cave-complex some 50 km north of Labrang-Xiahe. One of the caves on the southern slope of the 4636 m high Dalijia Shan is said to have legendary underground connections to other caves in the Rebong valley region.⁶⁰ For centuries the faithful from Amdo perceived the mysterious landscape as the palatial residence of the Tantric deity Cakrasamvara.⁶¹ The place therefore developed as an early pilgrimage site for this part of the Tibetan Plateau, with the mountain being circumambulated along a lingkhor passing by several small lakes. The Tibetan letter A, ceremonial items and Buddhist images are believed to have appeared here by themselves.⁶² A

first temple was built by the saint Gaden Gyatsho in the 17th century, and later a Buddhist college was added. When Labrang's Gungthang Lama converted it into a Tantric college managed by the 2nd Jamyang, it developed into an important Gelugpa site. The highest incarnation of Drakar is the female tulku Gungritshang, who is also abbess of the monastery.

Drakar, the Chinese name of which is *Bai shiya Si*, should not be confounded with *Bai shi'ai Si* of the Angkhor Valley,⁶³ which lies between Heitso and Chone. Named Gaden Tashi Changchub Ling (*a 'khor dga' ldan bkra shis byang chub gling*) in Tibetan, it is one of the early, yet small Gelugpa foundations in Amdo, as it was established in 1583.⁶⁴

3.4.3. Terlung Monastery

(*gter lung yid dga' chos 'dzin gling*), *Shagou Si* or *De'erlong Si* in Chinese, lies around 30 km to the east of Xiahe-Labrang. Travelling from Lanzhou or Linxia towards Labrang, it may be seen from the road across Sang Chu river. In 1725 this Gelugpa monastery was established on the premises of a former 13th century Drigung-Kagyüpa temple. It quickly developed under the guidance of an abbot of Labrang. After destruction during warfare in 1916, the former number of over 300 monks decreased to about 60 in 1949. The 3rd incarnate lama of the monastery, Setshang Rimpoche Lobsang Tashi Rabgyal (1811-1876) was famous for his teaching activities, which led him to Inner Mongolia, the Chinese Buddhist mountain Wutai Shan (Tib. Riwo Tsenga), Urga in Outer Mongolia and even Siberia. After he came back to Terlung Gomba he had a Shakyamuni Temple added to the Tibetan-style dukhang and monks' quarters. Rebuilt after 1981, some 30 monks live in here again.⁶⁵

3.4.4. Gaden Tashi Samdrub Ling

or Küntog Ling (*dga' ldan bkra shis bsam 'grub gling, kun rtogs gling*), *Chuiba Si* in Chinese, may be considered as one of Zhuoni (Chone) county's monastic institutions of higher importance. With 400 monks even today it came second only to the Grand Lamasery of Chone. Its original site being around 40 km northwest of the latter, between Heitso and Lintan⁶⁶ county, its abbot Jamyang Tenpe Chöden Nyima (1760-1797) studied in Labrang. He travelled to central Tibet, Nepal and India. The lamas of Gaden Tashi Samdrub Ling always had good

connections with many parts of central Asia, which was due to their affinity with Labrang Monastery. In the 19th century, the latter achieved religious authority over the gomba, although it was within the precincts of the Chone prince's dominions. At its heyday, several thousand monks are said to have lived in a huge monastic complex that housed a dukhang, Bodhisattva Temple, gönkhang, an Exoteric and a Tantric College. The influence reached as far as northern Turkestan, where in 1862 Gaden Tashi Samdrub Ling's Kanor Rimpoche had started to spread the Doctrine. In 1875 he established a monastery there, Chenghua Si, which became the administrative, economic and religious centre of the Altay Mountains' Oirat Mongols.⁶⁷

3.4.5. Yerwa Gomba

(*yer ba dgon bsam 'grub gling*), *Houjia Si* in Chinese, lies around 10 km from Chone Gönchen and 1 km to the north of Lintan county's Liushun village. It is one of the oldest monastic foundations in the area; one tradition dates its establishing to 1146. According to legend, Khubilai Khan wanted to honour the souls of those fallen in warfare and therefore he had 108 temples and monasteries built all the way from his capital Dadu to the border of Tibet. One of these is Yerwa Gomba. At the beginning of the 15th century the Ming emperor had chosen Hou Xian, a native of Yerwa, to be sent to Lhasa in order to invite Tsongkhapa to the imperial court in Beijing. As Tsongkhapa dispatched Sakya Yeshe, one of his main disciples, Hou Xian was entrusted to lead Yerwa Gomba. With the establishment of two colleges, Tshennyi Dratshang and Gyüpa Dratshang, in 1514, Yerwa started to flourish. Destroyed during the Muslim rebellion in the 1860s, it was gradually rebuilt until 1929, when it consisted of a large main assembly hall, the two colleges, a Milarepa Temple, Demchog Lhakhang, Amitayus Temple, Tsongkhapa Lhakhang, Avalokiteshvara Hall, and many other temple structures for the worship of the Medicine Buddha and others. After the 1966 destructions, the rebuilding of 1985 was only rudimentary, with 12 monks having returned to the site.⁶⁸

3.4.6. Pelshe Dengkha Gomba

(*dpal shes sdeng kha dgon pa*), *Baxidianga Si* in Chinese, in Thewo county is a 13th century Sakyapa monastery that later was reconstituted as

Gelugpa, as were many in Kanlho. Framed by peaks of up to more than 4,000 m high, it lies 2 km northwest of the centre of the county's Dengkha township. The monastery is recorded as having been built by one of Phagpa's four main disciples, Pelshe Rälpar, and therefore named Pelshe Dengkha Gompa. In the aftermath the site developed into two parts, an upper and a lower Dengkha Monastery with their respective tulkus. Originally there were Yuan dynasty relics kept here, such as a gold-written Kanjur endowed by Khubilai Khan and a ceremonial hat of Phagpa. His image was kept in the upper monastery, while Lower Denkha Gompa was known for its statue of a Lion's Roar Buddha.⁶⁹ After 1982 it had a dukhang with inclined roofs, rather uncommon for Tibetan areas, whereas they are seen often in the Himalayas. One tulku and 30 monks are looking after a temple hall that has very basic decorations outside, but beautiful paintings and statues within the sanctuaries. Main images depict Maitreya, Shakyamuni and Tsongkhapa.

3.4.7. Wangtshang Monastery

(*bang tshang dgon bkra shis phun tshogs gling*), *Wangcang Si* in Chinese, belongs to Maya village and is reached after 45 km when following the main road leading from Thewo to Drugchu. During the Qianlong period (1736-1795) of Qing dynasty this area was still under control of Bön believers, and therefore lamas of Chone's Nagdo Gompa⁷⁰ and Kangsho Monastery⁷¹ founded this Gelugpa institution to propagate Buddhism. At first it could hardly recruit any monks. Only when the devoted grandmother of Chone's Yang Tusi exerted political influence was an order made that one out of two brothers and two out of three brothers have to become monks, Wangtshang Gompa's precincts

were filled with some 400 residents. It thus became one of the biggest lamaseries of the Thewo region. As to information given in 1990 it grew to its original size since the demolitions of the Cultural Revolution were revoked by reconstruction works begun in 1982.⁷²

3.4.8. Marnyung Jampa Ling

(*mar snyung byans pa gling*), *Manu* or *Manao Si* in Chinese, should be mentioned here, although its decline was ceaseless after it was destroyed both during the 19th century Muslim rebellion and during the 1929 warfare of Chinese nationalist troops. Founded in 1405, it is one of the oldest monastic institutions in Amdo, established when the upcoming Ming dynasty settled the administration of the unruly Mongolian border areas. It was given the administrative power over 33 Tibetan tribes. The relationship between Marnyung lamas and the imperial court in Beijing remained a close one throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. At its heyday, this lamastery had more than 900 monks, and the monastic area comprised about a dozen temple buildings, with the sanctuaries of two study colleges among them. A Jampe Lhakhang contained a gilded bronze Maitreya statue of more than two storeys height. It was said to have fallen down from heaven at this holy place. A former Shakyamuni image that was made at the cost of more than 1,200 silver Tael, and many other treasures, were all lost during the fights between 1866 and 1929. Reconstruction did not bring back the former glory of Marnyung Monastery of which the number of monks had dropped to some 40 by 1958. Nowadays, a slightly smaller number of monks look after the humble site.⁷³

The Sichuan Part of Amdo

4. The Dzöge area in the marshes of the Ma Chu

The area of the marshes around the first great bend of the Ma Chu (Yellow River), when turning north from its eastward flow and afterwards heading west, is inhabited by Tibetan pastoral tribes called Dzöge (*mdzod dge*) or Dzo-ge.¹ Consisting of vast expanses of grasslands, their land belongs to the finest pastures of Amdo, if not of the entire Tibetan Plateau. Maybe for this reason the tribes' old name, Dzo-ge, is derived from the word for a crossbred yak and cow, *dzo*. Traditionally called Dzöge Töma (D. *stod ma*, 'Upper Dzöge')² the area comprises roughly that which is included in today's administrative counties of Maqu Xian in southern Gansu (Kanlho) and Zoige Xian (*Ruo'ergai*) in Sichuan Province.

While Maqu county lies largely within the river bend, thus embracing the eastern end of Mount Amnye Machen, Sichuan's Zoige stretches into the marshlands extending on either bank of the Yellow River's tributary Me Chu. Both the seat of Maqu Xian government and one of its main monasteries are located in Dzöge Nyima:

4.1. Deshing Gompa

Located some two kilometres north of the fairly large county town, this monastery is also called Dzöge Nyima Gompa.³ It is said to have a history of 200 years. Being one of the eight Gelugpa monasteries of Gansu-controlled northern Dzöge region, it was administered by Labrang Lamasery. At the time of the 1958 destruction there were 26 incarnate lamas among the almost 2,000 monks in the entire Maqu area. By 1997 more than a hundred resided at Deshing Gompa, being an important institution where quite a number of learned monks are guided by two tulkus. Passing by a large white *chörten* the main assembly hall is reached. It is fitted with beautiful Rebgong murals, representing Tantric deities such as Samvara, Kalacakra, and Yamantaka, as well as Vairocana, as its main images. On the hill's slope the lhakhang painted in yellow is used as

a residence for a lama from Labrang. A little bit further up the valley the visitor may be shown a rock mantra (*om mani padme hum*) which appeared naturally.

Sichuan's Dzöge (Pinyin *Zoige*) county town is situated in a high windswept marshland surrounded by low hills covered with fertile grassland. In some places this has deteriorated due to the intensive use by the local herdsmen's large yak herds. For controlling this problem a Grassland Research Institute has been established in neighbouring Mewa county (Chin. *Hongyuan Xian*), located around 140 km south of Dzöge. The excellent pastures and their intensive use have enabled the nomads to establish and rebuild a large number of smaller Gelugpa and Nyingmapa monasteries. The largest lamasery of Mewa county, Mewa Gompa (*dme ba dgon pa*), has 1,300 monks.⁴ It is located around 50 km to the northeast of the county seat. Being an institution of the Nyingmapa school, it was established here in 1938 by Do Rimpoche.⁵ The most significant ancient work of art preserved here is a gilded bronze statue of Padmasambhava, 17.5 cm high and cast during the Chinese Tang dynasty (7th to 10th centuries).⁶

Tagtsha Göndren⁷ is the administrative seat of Zoige county (*Ruo'ergai*), which, as Gyurme Dorje, a contemporary writer, says

is a classic yak-herding country: shaggy-haired nomads, dressed in little more than filthy sheepskin *chubas* edged with fur, ride in town to barter skins or shoot pool in the market square, and fights are commonplace.⁸

Treatment of wounds that may result from those fights is not what the local Tibetan hospital, *Mentsikhang*, is frequented for. Mostly it is for stomach and liver ailments, arthritis, and bronchitis. Being an institution for traditional Tibetan medicine, it has a four-year curriculum set up by Lopön Tenko, a former pupil of Labrang's Geshe Lobsang Pelden.

Interested visitors may have a guided tour through the Mentsikhang, which besides the dispensary possesses a library and rooms for grinding the medicinal herbs, in which the surrounding grassland abounds, and minerals for the compounding of Tibetan drugs. At the western end of town lies one of the bigger of the 33 monasteries of Zoige county named Tagtsha Gompa.

4.2. Tagtsha Gompa

(*stag tsha dgon pa*),⁹ from which its Chinese name *Dazha Si* is derived. Dzöge Gönsar Gaden Rabgye Ling (*mdzod dge dgon sar dga' ldan rab rgyas gling*), as it is called by its religious name, is, like most of the county's monastic institutions, a Gelugpa lamasery.¹⁰ The roots of Tagtsha Gompa have to be traced further back in history; though the site for consecration was offered in 1798 by Mewa chieftain Könchog Rabten (*dkon mchog rab brtan*), its 'Disputation Hall' was built during the period of the early Ming dynasty (14th to 15th centuries).¹¹ Its rear hall was rebuilt in 1936. The architecture combines wood and adobe, and the roof-top is made up of planks. Fourteen Qing dynasty (1644-1911) thangkas are said to be kept in the inner sanctum.

Heavily destroyed in the period between 1959 and 1968, reconstruction of the monastery began in 1982. By 1990, when there were more than 100 monks here guided by a single incarnate lama, about two dozen Han-Chinese and Hui Muslim craftsmen¹² were engaged in completing the main assembly hall. The beautiful paintings on the walls are of the Rebong type. Although one temple building is called Dünkhor Lhakhang and thus is presumably consecrated to the yidam Kalacakra, its main image is a Maitreya 5-6 m high.

Other main images of Tagtsha Gompa represent Buddha Shakyamuni and the founder of the Gelugpa Order, Tsongkhapa, both together with a Maitreya in the main assembly hall. A four-armed Mahakala dominates the interior of the protectors' temple (*gönkhang*). As Dzöge's Mentsikhang is famous, it is not totally unexpected that the monastery has an important medical college, Menba Dratshang.

4.3. Juxiang Si and other Bön centres of Dzöge

Although the marshes of the Ma Chu and its tributaries were and are under domination of the Tibetan Buddhist's Gelugpa Order, there are still a

number of Bönist centres within the county's bounds. This may be due to the relatively late arrival of the reformist order in Dzöge, besides its proximity to Ngawa and Sumpa in Gyarong, where two strongholds of this extra-Buddhist, Lamaism-influenced Tibetan religious sect still survive. The main Bön monastery of Dzöge county, which controlled seven so-called inner and eighteen outer monasteries along with 128 village and hamlet communities, is Juxiang Si*.¹³

According to its own tradition given in a local historical record named *mochamu** (*mo cham*), this Bönpo monastery is the oldest religious institution in the Dzöge area; it is supposed to have been founded almost 1800 years ago. Juxiang Si is located in Juwa* village of Qiuji* (possibly *Chöje* in Tibetan) community, around 70 km northeast of Zoige county town and near the limits of neighbouring Nanping county and Thewo in Gansu Province. Despite its political importance, the monks' population at most amounted to some 65 people, with a single incarnate lama among them. In 1958 one great assembly hall and four lesser temples are said to have housed some one thousand small bronze and about ten thousand stucco images, more than 150 thangkas, 200 wood-printing blocks and 1,500 canonical books.

Bigger than Juxiang Si was Xiangzang Si, lying around 40-50 km further west and belonging to Axirong* community. Consisting of five temple buildings it was inhabited by more than 80 monks and two tulkus. The founder of Tashi Yungdrung Ling, as it is named in Tibetan, was Je Wenbao Rinchen* who was incarnated 25 times.¹⁴ As the eastern part of Dzöge county was the latter's Bönist core region, there are more Bönpo lamaseries around here, mostly to be found in and near by Baozuo* community, which lies some 25 km south of Qiuji. The largest among Dzöge's Bönpo monasteries is Dajin Si, which was split into an upper and a lower Monastery, having had 200 monks and five high lamas altogether.

4.4. Chögyal* Monastery

Qiuji Si¹⁵ (Chin. for *Chögyal* or *Chöje Gompa*) is the principal monastery of the Sakyapa Order in Dzöge county, besides being of primary importance in the Tibetan and Qiang Ngawa nationalities' Ngawa prefecture. Belonging to Gawa of Bashi* community (30 km east of Zoige county town), it is

situated in relative proximity to Dzöge's Bön centres. It is likely that the intention of the monastery's founder, Chödrag Rangpo*, was to spread the Buddhist Doctrine and diminish the nearby Bönpo monasteries' ongoing influence. In 1498, when following a prophecy of the 13th century Sakya patriarch Phagpa, he established *Pelden Shedrub Norbu Chöphel Ling** here.

The lamasery developed well, especially after the 3rd abbot Ngawang Chödrag* had invited three

khempos of southern Tibet's Sakya Monastery to come and teach at Chögyal Gompa. In 1769, a Tantric study college (Gyüpa Dratshang) was established, and in 1783 a Tshennyi Dratshang followed for the intensifying of Buddhist philosophical teachings. In 1958 there were 298 monks living here under the guidance of the 10th incarnation of Chödrag Rangpo. They looked after five sutra halls, seven temple buildings and a printing establishment. The actual state of reconstruction is unknown to us.

5. The flourishing monastic life in Ngawa

South of that [i.e., Dzöge] and near Rgyal-(mo)-rong [Gyarong], is the district of the five *sde* of Lnga-khog [Ngawa],¹ whose land area is not small.²

These remarks by Lama Tsenpo about the region of today's area of Ngawa (Chin. *Aba*) were made as late as the mid-19th century. What seems to constitute an area devoid of religious attainments actually was and is one of the most important monastic centres of Amdo, not only due to its impressive number of lamaseries and temples, but also because of the big variety of Tibetan Buddhist orders represented here. Besides, the reformatory Bön order has a vivid religious life in Ngawa and surrounding areas, so the southeastern corner of Amdo—together with the north of Gyarong—forms one of the two main strongholds of Bön religion in today's Tibetan areas. It seems, therefore, that this part of the Tibetan cultural realm was inaccessible to foreign travellers and explorers, and apparently avoided by Tibetans, other than from the Ngawa and Ngolok-Seta tribes. This was mainly due to the rather martial attitude of that area's population. Not only had some of the few foreigners who tried to get in lost their lives,³ but their Tibetan guides and porters were usually much too afraid to approach the region, and refused to do so.

This militancy did not mean that the area constituted a Buddhist-free sphere, although some authors are certain that 'the Ngolo-Setas tribesmen belonged to that other Tibet (...) of the primitive herdsmen of the high plateaux far removed from the civilization of Lhasa and of the settlements of the valleys [where] man was the greatest enemy of man.'⁴ On the contrary, the number of Ngawa monasteries with old traditions is high; furthermore the variety of orders include sects which had long been eradicated in the Dalai Lamas' central Tibetan realm. The warlike behaviour and the fact that almost extinct religious traditions—such as Bön and

Jonangpa—had taken refuge in the greater Ngawa area, suggest reasons for an enduring religious diversity. The history of southeastern Amdo, which is quite different from both central Tibet and central Amdo, is not very well known so far.

What we are told by Tafel is that during the 1870s and 1880s

the Ngula Tharde, a tribe [living] to the north of Ngaba and being subordinate to the High Lama of Labrang and his tyrannical lamas, (...) had also tried to seize Ngaba. At that time in the valley of the river Ngaba-tschü they stormed the northernmost Ngaba principedom, named Ngaba Tsenda, burnt a monastery including its huo fo [incarnate lama] who was a brother of the prince. Only the going in between of some Chinese troops from Lanchou fu and from Se tschuan dislodged them again.⁵

At the end of the 19th and in the early 20th century, Ngawa Tsenda was ruled as an independent principedom by two chieftains who were brothers. As the chief (*gyalpo*) of Ngawa Metsang had robbed merchants from Songpan, the commander of the Chinese garrison in Songpan sent a punitive expedition to Ngawa in 1902. The troops returned unsuccessful, and thus a second, better-equipped army was detached the year after. This time they had some results through the mediation by a dignitary of the neighbouring Gyarong's Merge Gompa; peace and compensatory payments could be negotiated. Tafel reported that this agreement had only become possible because of the disunity among Ngawa Tibetans, as enmity between the tribes of Ngawa Metsang and Ngawa Tsenda had started.⁶ The

belligerent situation does not seem to have changed much afterwards, since the region stayed virtually inaccessible until the mid-20th century, when the quasi-independent time of the ferocious tribes was followed by the seclusionist period of communist China.

Ngawa today designates two different administrative units lying in the northwestern part of Sichuan Province:

1. Ngawa county (*rnga ba*, Chin. *Aba Xian*)

2. Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Chin. *Aba Zangzu Qiangzu zizhi zhou*), a larger, higher prefectural level unit, incorporating Ngawa county.

Ngawa can be reached from either Gansu Province in the north, by passing from Lanzhou via Heitso, Tagtshang Lhamo and Dzöge, or from Sichuan's capital Chengdu. Lying far to Ngawa's southeast (600 km), the Chengdu plain is crossed by going west; then the mountain valleys of Gyarong are entered near Dujiangyan City (formerly Guan Xian). Following the course of the Min [Jiang] river upstream, a side road leads northwest from Wenchuan and after the Trakar mountain pass (4110 m) one leaves the northernmost part of Gyarong and enters Ngawa county. Around 70 km north of the Barkham road junction, a side road leads to Ngawa county (100 km).

The modern prefecture embraces both the southeastern part of Amdo and the main portion of what is called the Gyarong region. The 'five *sde* of Lngakhog' Lama Tsenpo mentioned are the valley-realms (*khog*, i.e. the 'inner, inside') of five rivers and their affluents: Do Chu (*rdo chu*), Ra (or Rakhog, *rva khog*) Chu, Mar Chu (*rmar chu*), Tsha Chu, and Nga Chu (*rnga chu*).⁷ They only embrace the western part of the contemporary Aba prefecture. The latter is a highly heterogeneous area with strong and long-standing Chinese influence at the southeastern-most edge, with a large minority populace (Qiang nationality) to the south and east and a largely homogenous Tibetan population in the north of the prefecture. As only the latter is part of Amdo, we will only consider the counties of Ngawa and Dzamthang (Chin. *Rangtang Xian*) in this volume.⁸

The cultural features of the Tibetan tribes of southern Amdo differ heavily from those of central Tibet, and there are substantial variations among them as well. Tibetan Buddhism is their common feature,

though some areas tend to adhere mainly to one religious tradition, such as Dzöge and Gyarong to the Gelugpa, in Ngawa's heartland the Nyingmapa or Bönpo are slightly predominant, or the Jonangpa in Dzamthang county. Other areas, especially that of the agriculturally important valleys in Ngawa county, tend to be fairly ecumenical. This single county was said to possess at least 33 monasteries of six different religious traditions in about 1990.⁹

5.1. The Bönpo Order and its monasteries in Ngawa

5.1.1. The Bön religion

With respect to the rare occurrence of monastic institutions of the Bönpo order in Tibet, we may start with a short introduction into its origin and development, as it is well represented in this area. Since it is often written that Bön is the 'ancient, pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet' we should clarify what is to be understood by *Bönpo* in connection with monasteries on the Tibetan Plateau. Geoffrey Samuel has pointed out:

the term Bön and its derivative Bönpo have been employed by many Tibetan and Western scholars to refer variously to all sorts of allegedly pre-Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements of Tibetan religion, often including the folk-religion cults of local deities... Such usage conflates so many different things under the one label that serious analysis becomes impossible.¹⁰

The Bönpo religion as it has survived to our days and as it is to be understood here is what is called systematized Bön; the respective order should be considered a reformatory Bönpo order. These terms refer to

a religion that appeared in Tibet in the tenth and eleventh centuries, at the same time that Buddhism, introduced once again from India after a period of decline in Tibet, became dominant. This religion, which has continued as an unbroken tradition until the present day, has numerous and obvious points of similarity with Buddhism with regard to doctrine and practice, so much so that its status as a distinct religion has been doubted. Some scholars (...) have suggested that it could most adequately be described as an unorthodox form of Buddhism.¹¹

The Bönpos, followers of the reformed religion as it is still existing today, affirm that their faith is anterior to Buddhism in Tibet and

... maintain that their religion is ..., in fact, identical with the pre-Buddhist Bon religion... Tibetan Buddhists, however, also regard Bon as a distinct religion,¹² and ... this claim is justified if one emphasizes aspects such as concepts of religious authority, legitimation and history rather than rituals, metaphysical doctrine and monastic discipline.¹³

Like the Tibetan Buddhist Nyingmapa school the reformatory Bönpo order is traced back to a group of hereditary lineages of Tantric practitioners in the 10th to 12th centuries. It distinguishes itself from the former as it maintains it developed from the teachings of a prior teacher named Shenrab, who, it is claimed, lived prior to the historical Buddha.¹⁴ At the same time old folk-religious rituals still continued to be practiced by both faithful Buddhists and Bönpos, and gradually became integrated into their religious systems. Therefore, they are inappropriate to be taken as a major characteristic to distinguish the Buddhist and Bönpo orders from each other.¹⁵ Those practices

...constituted what Bönpo scholars later referred to as the Bön of Cause (*gyui bön* [*rgyu'i bon*]), as distinct from the Bön of Effect or *drebu'i bön* [*'bras bu'i bon*], which consisted of the practices of the religious order of Bön, effectively a modified form of Buddhism.¹⁶

Of course it is of great interest to enquire how it came about that a religion which views itself historically—and is looked upon by the adherents of Buddhism—as a totally different faith, more often than not is considered to be a modified form of Buddhism, especially of the Nyingmapa concepts. According to Geoffrey Samuel,

the persecution of Bön at the time of King Trigum led to the disappearance of the Bön of Effect so that only parts of the Bön of Cause existed during the subsequent period. ... The Bön of Effect reappeared through the discovery of *terma* texts from the tenth century onwards.¹⁷

Other kings of the same Yarlung dynasty of Tibet (until 842) later oppressed Buddhism to the point of

being nearly extinct. We should not believe that during the spread of Buddhism the political situation immediately turned against the Bönpos, nor that kings supporting Bön managed to wipe out Buddhism totally. Even during the most turbulent religious conflicts, at least as they are depicted in Tibetan historiography, there was a more or less normal co-existence of the two. During this time they mutually influenced each other,¹⁸ and maybe even more so as soon as one of the two faiths was actually oppressed. After the downfall of the Yarlung dynasty, there was no more *central* authority, and politico-religious disturbances decreased. Both faiths gradually recovered by forming themselves anew:

The form of Buddhism that survived and to some extent flourished was that closest to the 'shamanic' folk religion of Tibet. It was a form of Tantric Buddhism, continued by hereditary lineages of lay Tantric practitioners who provided ritual services to the surrounding population. ... these hereditary Buddhist shamans [were] the ancestors of what was to become the Nyingmapa religious order, and ... their non-Buddhist counterparts ... [were] to become the Bönpo order. Hereditary lineages of Bönpo followers, who claimed continuity from the pre-Buddhist religion, developed along with the early Buddhist hereditary shamanic lineages.¹⁹

This is to say that Bön as it exists today is neither a pre-Buddhist religion, although of course its origin can be traced back to Tibetan antiquity, nor has it become a Buddhist order as today's Bön head lama of Bachen views it.²⁰ The majority of Buddhist devotees, especially in central Tibet, hold quite a different opinion than the lama from Bachen. Ordinary believers view the Bönpos as being different and seem to be afraid, or at least suspicious of their monasteries, or rather of the deities represented there. It would be wrong to simplify the similarities between the monastic organization of the Bönpos and those of the Tibetan-Buddhist tradition as an outcome of adaptation by the former to the latter. The proximity of the Bön order to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, mainly Nyingmapa, is a clear sign for mutual rapprochement.

Religious development in Tibet since the introduction of Buddhism should not be seen merely as a struggle between Buddhism and Bön, but as a steady and serious exchange of thoughts and opinions. They

may have had arguments, even serious clashes, but developed into an approximation of values although maintaining a separate line. While Buddhism was re-shaped by the influence of the old Bön beliefs, the Bön system was canonized and later even monasticized. To the same extent as Buddhism was Tibetanized by Bönism and turned into what we call Lamaism, the religious system of the Bönpos became 'Buddhisized' as a Lamaism-designed monastic order.

The outcome of this mutual rapprochement was a convergence of systems and an approximation of values. Hence we have a situation in which the monastic traditions of Bönpos and Buddhists, especially of the Nyingmapa, are closer to each other than their proximity to the respective Tibetan folk's popular traditions, which may have maintained more of the old Bön religion's contents than the canonized, or systematized, Bönpo order itself. As Li Anche noted,

in the final analysis, the differences between Bon and Tibetan Buddhism are only formal. In addition to overt behaviors such as these as a means to influence the layity, we have already seen that the names of deities and scriptures of the two systems may be different, but their functions and ideologies correspond to one another.²¹

It is, therefore, not surprising if at first glance we have an erroneous view of Ngawa's Nangshig Gompa, since this largest Bönist lamasery has the basic appearance of any other city-like Tibetan-Buddhist monastic institution.

5.1.2. Nangshig Gompa

The predominance of Buddhist orders is similarly encountered equally in Amdo and in central Tibet, yet it is in Amdo's southeastern tip that we find one of its largest Bön lamaseries, if not the largest in all of Tibet. Here at the cross-roads between Gyarong, China, Kham and Amdo, the Bönpo order survived and developed its monastic system further. The quasi-ecumenical Rime Movement,²² which arose in eastern Tibet during the 19th century, by the exchange of thoughts with the Nyingmapa and reform traditions of the Kagyüpa and Sakyapa, gave the Bönpo order some new impulses.

Nangshig Gompa (*snang zhig dgon pa*),²³ *Langyi Si* in Chinese, is situated in Barma village

(i.e., in 'Middle Ngawa', Chin. *Warmaxiang*) in the northeastern section of Aba county town. It is said to be the oldest of the four Bönpo lamaseries in Ngawa county, having been established more than 800 years ago. A local chronicle attributes the arrival of the Bönpo order in Ngawa to a high lama from central Tibet²⁴ who came here in the mid-11th century to spread the Bön faith. His disciple Silie Galuo* practised in Ngawa for a period of nine years. When he finally accomplished his virtues, the locals called him by the name Nangshig Lodrö Gyantshen*,²⁵ and those who succeeded him were honoured by the title *nangshig*. A first monastery by the name *Jiadeng Si** was established in 1107. It was at a different location, since it was moved to the site in Barma village in 1754, and renamed Nangshig Gompa.

The lamasery is a monastic centre of remarkable extent. Framed by long prayer-wheel corridors at the bottom gate, a great number of adobe houses, the living-quarters of the monks, surround—like a large village—an impressive white *chörten*, the prayer hall and tulku residences. As Ngawa belongs to the richer agricultural areas of Amdo, beautiful murals invite contemplation and study of the Bön iconographic details. Once in the vestibule, the first impression of similarity to Buddhist paintings is quickly dispelled by viewing a large painting of Olmolungring, the square Bönpo version of a mythical earthly paradise, comparable to Shambhala in Tibetan Buddhism. Besides four heavenly guardians, hardly differing in shape from the Buddhist Lokapalas, we find a Bönpo wheel of existence. Most striking is a fourth animal in the innermost of the concentric circles, adding to three animals similar to the familiar ones—pig, cock²⁶ and snake—of the Buddhist version. As this fourth beast reproduces the three heads of the other animals, it is a kind of repetition, or rather synthesis of the theme. This distinct variation in the wheel of existence, seems, like other diversified details, to be a modern feature, starting in the 19th century.²⁷

The main image of worship in the dukhang's rear chapel is a bronze statue of Nampar Gyalwa (*nam par rgyal ba*). His right hand is raised in a characteristic personal gesture and the left is in earth witness gesture. Thus Nampar Gyalwa 'radiates the concentrated power of Shenrab, the subduer of demons' (Kvaerne).²⁸ His crown, ear-rings, necklace, all the adornments, express his supernatural provenance and the transcendental nature of his being.



Plate 8. A bronze image of Bön deity Nampar Gyalwa in Nangshig Monastery

To his side we find a deity in standing posture designed with eleven faces, a thousand arms (with ten main arms among them) and four feet: Künsang Gyalwa Gyatsho,²⁹ being the expression of the limitless activity of one of the four transcendent lords' compassion. An image recalling the Buddhist image of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom represents Mawe Sengge (*smra ba'i seng ge*), the divine bestower of eloquence. He is particularly worshipped by monks who aim at obtaining proficiency in scholastic debate.³⁰

Other images depict Nangshig Tönpa Chenpo* who is said to be the founder of Ngawa's Bönpo tradition, and abbot Thrizin Gyalpo wielding a sceptre as a sign of his secular power. There are some thangkas representing Bönpo lamas: Ngari Rinchen Gyantshen³¹ on the left and Gyarongpa Rinchen Gyantshen* set to the right of Nyame Sherab Gyantshen (*mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan*). The latter is a great Bön scholar and organizer of this order's monastic tradition. Being a contemporary of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Buddhist Gelugpa order, and representing a kind of Bönpo reformation, he is depicted in a similar way as Tsongkhapa in Gelugpa paintings. Sherab Gyantshen (1356-1415) was a native of Gyarong, south of Ngawa, who went for studies to central Tibet where in 1405 he founded the monastery of Menri, the most prestigious monastic centre of the Bönpo order.³²

During the Cultural Revolution Nangshig Gompa was levelled to the ground, and reconstruction started after 1978. With 500 monks at its heyday, the original number of monastic residents had already been reached again in 1993. By then, the Nangshig Lama was the 46th lineage holder.

Other Bönpo monasteries in Ngawa county include Thubten Gompa (*Zhuodeng Si*),³³ like Nangshig Gompa, near Barma township, *Zuluo Si** at Ankyam village and *Dongle Si** in *Luoerda** village in Lower Ngawa.

5.2. Monasteries of Buddhist sects in Ngawa Valley

Religious diversity in a geographically limited area like Ngawa valley is quite unique; the Gelugpa remain the predominant sect in Ngawa county proper, however.³⁴ Apart from the Jonangpa their order has been the most active. The main Gelugpa

monastery, Kirti Gompa, is situated on the northwestern edge of Ngawa county town and can be reckoned among the largest monastic institutions in the Tibetan highland, surrounded by an extensive wall along which long corridors with prayer-wheels lining up serve the pilgrims for circumambulation.

5.2.1. Kirti Gompa

In 1412 a first small temple named Kirti Kalari Gön Tashi Lhündrub (*kirti'i ka' la ri'i dgon bkra shis lhun grub*) is said to have been founded by Rongwa Cenakpa (*rong ba lce nag pa*), a disciple of Tsongkhapa.³⁵ The relationship of this first incarnation of Kirti Lama with the local lords, that is to say the princes of the petty kingdoms in Gyarong, was rather good, and his influence gradually increased. When in 1693 the 12-year-old 5th Kirti Rimpoche arrived in Middle Ngawa, the local *tusi* invited him to build a larger monastery here.³⁶ This is when Kirti Gompa, at that time still a branch of Tagtshang Lhamo's Kirti Gompa,³⁷ started to develop into a large monastic institution. In 1840 Kirti Lama Losang Chunli* was invited by the local ruler to expand the lamasery further, and thus it soon exceeded the mother gompa in size. It became an important study place, having three *dratshang* (colleges) offering courses in dialectics, Tantra and Kalacakra. Thösam Ngagpa* was the largest college, and about 1,000 students had registered for the study of dialectics and Buddhist philosophy. The curricula were quite severe: about 20 years being needed to pass through all five stages of studies to reach a *geshe* rank. Heavy destructions during the Cultural Revolution ended the flourishing monastic life, until the re-opening of Kirti Gompa in 1980. There are 2,000 monks now, with 20 tulku among them, which makes it one of the largest lamaseries in the entire Tibetan highland. The head lama Kirti Rimpoche, Tensing Jigme Yeshe Gyatsho, is currently residing in India. Among the four colleges of the monastery, the medical one is of great local importance.

Kirti Gompa's location is easily identified by the huge stupa on the southwestern corner of the monastic complex. It belongs to the largest *chörten* in Amdo. Furthermore the lamasery possesses a giant assembly hall, called Gomchor, for the restoration of which a single local family of traders donated 600,000 Yuan.³⁸ The restored murals, the

woodcarving and stucco statues display a high standard of craftsmanship. The main image in the rear chapel of the sutra hall is a large Maitreya, about eight metres in height. He is surrounded by two bodhisattvas and several other monumental statues 2.5-3 m high: on the left a Jowo-Buddha, then one of Losang Chunli—the lama who enlarged and re-named the monastery two centuries ago—with images of Tsongkhapa and Yamantaka following the main group.

To the left side of the large assembly hall we can find the Tantric College (behind the rear) and the Exoteric Institute, called Tshogchen Dratshang. The Esoteric Dünkhor Dratshang lies to the right behind the dukhang. The Medical college is to be found in the lamasery's southeastern corner. Across the river there is a complex clearly separated from Kirti Gompa's main body—it is the gönkhang, temple of the tutelary deities (protectors). In former times there were a number of other lhakhangs; we do not know if they will be rebuilt. Künsang Sherab had a Maitreya Temple constructed, while a Temple for the Buddhas of the Three Ages was initiated by Chökyi Sherab.³⁹

Most impressive is the monumental Dündül Chörten (*bdud 'dul mchod rten*), situated on the southwestern corner of Kirti Gompa's monastic compound and overlooking the entire complex. The main body of Dündül Chörten is about 30-40 m high. Although it has the typical form of a Tibetan-style reliquary stupa, we may climb this kind of a *kumbum chörten* from the inside, up to the height of the eyes of the Buddha. Along the base of the main stupa rows of 24 smaller *chörten* are erected.

The ground floor of the stupa is elaborated in the manner of a temple sheltering a lhakhang (sanctuary). Murals depict Indian gurus, siddhas and mahasiddhas; bookshelves hold the holy scriptures of Kanjur and Tanjur. The passageway all around abounds with small images of Shakyamuni, and *chörten* in eight rows superimposed. The main image of worship of the first floor is a thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara of 3-4 m height, accompanied by Songtsen Gampo and his two wives, the princesses Bhrikuti and Wencheng. On the opposite wall besides the entrance there are statues of the eight mahasattvas. Images of Tsongkhapa, Kubera, Dharma King Trisong Detsen, Dawa Khapa and Perwa Rimpoche all play a role in this sanctuary.

The second floor exhibits nine rows of statues, including Shakyamuni, Amitayus flanked by Usnisavijaya (*gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ma*) and a White Tara. Several more images complete the impression that this sanctuary is especially dedicated to Amitayus of whom a gilded bronze statue of 50-60 cm height is placed above his main image. Nine thangkas portray Shakyamuni, while another one depicts a four-armed Lokeshvara. On this floor it is again possible to circumambulate the sanctum through a passageway, filled with scriptures, small figures of Tsongkhapa and Shakyamuni and three images of Manjushri and a Maitreya on the far side.

The third floor of Dündül Chörten shelters a principal shrine with relatively small statues of Tsongkhapa and his disciples. Ten superimposed rows of miniature images depict various deities, such as an uncommon form of Avalokiteshvara resembling the Green Tara, Shakyamuni, four-armed Lokeshvara, Yama, Mahakala, and Kirti Rimpoche, the monastery's highest incarnate lama. Inside the stupa structure the last sanctuary is on the uppermost floor, situated within the *bumpa*. Among various images there are plenty of statues of the eleven highest incarnations Kirti Gompa had so far. The largest statue is the one of Usnisasitapatra, about two metres high.

5.2.2. Gomang Monastery

The lamasery of Gomang Gar (*sgo mang sgar*) Ganden Labsum Sungjug Dechen Ling⁴⁰ lies in Upper Ngawa, approximately 15 km far from Aba county town, and can be seen from the road leading to Jigdril in Qinghai's Ngolok Prefecture. Although of smaller extent than Kirti Gompa, Gomang Gar is also an impressive monastic institution. It houses 600 monks and eleven incarnate lamas. One of them is said to be a member of the Central Committee in the Chinese capital of Beijing.

The painting of the temple walls had made considerable progress between 1993 and 1996. In the vestibule murals show the ubiquitous Lokapalas, Wheel of Life and Death, and Shambhala, in addition a Gesar and Shakyamuni in teaching posture. The lhakhang has beautiful images of Yama, Mahakala, Pelden Lhamo, Usnisasitapatra, and Green Tara on the front wall. The side walls continue by depicting Vajrapani, Shakyamuni, White Tara, and screening a graceful statue of Maitreya

in a small shrine. The altar of the main hall contains statues of Jowo Rimpoche, 1,000-armed Avalokiteshvara, and Tsongkhapa, also images of the first to the fifth Jamyang Lamas of Labrang. The sanctuary at the sutra hall's back side shelters monumental statues 5-6 m high of Yamantaka, Maitreya, and a 1,000-armed Avalokiteshvara.

5.2.3. Amchog Tshennyi Gompa

The third one of the three main Gelugpa lamaseries of Ngawa is Amchog Tshennyi Gompa, called *Chali Si* in Chinese.⁴¹ The Tibetan name is derived from its location in Lower Ngawa's Amchog village, which originally was a main Bön site that brought forth many Bön masters and high lamas. The latter was turned into a Gelugpa monastery by a reincarnation of the monk Ngawang Lobsang, a native of Ngawa who was sent to central Tibet's Ganden Monastery to study Buddhist philosophy. When he returned home, he convinced the local *tusi* to renounce his Bön faith and convert to the Buddhist teachings of the Gelugpa order.

His reincarnation was born in 1799 as a Könchog Tenpe Gyantshen (*dkon mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*). He also went to study in Ganden and upon his return stayed in a Ngawa monastery called Amchog Garchin* Gompa. He who is seen as the 2nd Amchog Lama founded this Gelugpa institution in 1823. As he put stress on education in philosophy and the study of dialectics, the lamasery became known as 'Philosophical Monastic Institute of Amchog' (*a mchog mtshan nyid dgon*).

When it was established people found a statue of Manjushri while they laid the foundation of the temple structure. As this Bodhisattva of Wisdom is supposed to be riding on a lion, another name for the gompa is Pelden Mawe Senge Ling (*dpal ldan smra ba'i seng ge'i gling*),⁴² the 'monastery of Glorious Manjushri riding on a lion'. The 3rd Amchog

Lama further enlarged the lamasery (1911-1934), so that it finally consisted of two main structures. Besides the Tshennyi Lhakhang, there is also a Tennyi Lhakhang for the study of sutra and Tantra.

The monastic complex of Amchog Gompa consists of a hall called Gongthang Serkhang Khangmar, the labrang, the Tenkhang (Tennyi Lhakhang), a Dzogchen temple, the dukhang and several more colleges (*dratshang*). The main assembly hall, Tshogchen Dukhang, shelters a miraculous statue of Chenresi-Avalokiteshvara that became renowned all over Tibet some 200 to 300 years ago. In front of the eyes of numerous pilgrims, the statue was said to have moved its arms. On another occasion, when the contemporary Labrang Rimpoche was studying in Amchog Gompa, he held a bowl in front of the image which then gave forth some nectar.

Amchog Monastery was a religious and political centre when the Chinese communist take-over took place. Like other such institutions it was severely damaged by the ravages of the Red Guards. Rebuilding started after 1978, and now there are over 1,000 monks living here—under the occasional guidance of the 4th Amchog Rimpoche who returns regularly from his residence in exile.

Buddhist orders other than the Gelugpa also have lamaseries of significant size in Ngawa. The most renowned among the Sakyapa's is Dege Gompa with more than 500 monks (1993). It is named after the village where it is situated, some 15 km to the west of Ngawa county town, and was probably founded in 1508. The four Nyingmapa monasteries, of which the earliest dates back to 1684,⁴³ lie in Lower Ngawa, in the far southwest and far north of the county. The Jonangpa have an important institution just near the county seat of Ngawa, Ngayül Se Monastery, which will be discussed in a later chapter (see 6.2.3.).

6. Long-hidden and unexplored Dzamthang

If Ngawa constituted a part of the Tibetan cultural realm inaccessible to foreign travellers and explorers, Dzamthang ('dzam thang), the county to its west (Chin. *Rangtang Xian*), is even more a hidden land. This is the case likewise today, even though it may be reached more or less easily by driving 180 km from Ngawa Prefecture's seat, Barkham (Chin. *Ma'erkang*), in about half a day. This picturesque drive along the banks of the upper reaches of what is to become the 'Big Golden river', Da Jinchuan, and later Dadu He, in a remarkable way demonstrates the transition from the secluded gorges of Gyarong and Kham to the vaster grasslands of Amdo. No wonder that it was an important thoroughfare and pivot for pilgrims, religious teachers, traders and caravans travelling between central Amdo, the Ngolok country, Gyarong and the Kandse region of Kham. It seems though that around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century it lost its openness, presumably due to the aggressive missionary behaviour of the Gelugpas of Labrang. It may also be a relict of the old times—lasting until the mid-20th century—when monasteries and the secular rulers of Dzamthang were politically independent from both the Tibetan Lhasa and neighbouring Chinese provincial governments.¹

6.1. Buddhist Monasteries of Dzamthang

The uninspiring county seat of Dzamthang, Dzamkhog township, is situated in the forested valley of Do Chu river (*rdo khog*), while the main agricultural and pastoral area with its beautiful Tibetan villages lie across a low pass in the wider and open valleys of the river Dzi Chu and its confluents. This part of the Amdo realm surely has the most difficult access—politically and not due to traffic conditions—and one wonders what makes the state or local governments so eager to keep it concealed. This is the more difficult to understand as monastic life in Dzamthang, especially the Jonangpa community, appears to be one of the most lively and active in all Tibetan areas. Secluded as it

may seem, the lamas here are not as far and isolated as one may believe. The abbot of Dzamthang's main monastery, Tsangwa Gomba, and head lama of the Jonangpa order, is one of the most renowned teachers at the Tibetan-Buddhist Academy of China's capital, Beijing.

Before discussing the history and survival of this old sect, earlier eliminated in central Tibet proper, we will have a look at monastic institutions of the more common Buddhist sects in Dzamthang county. Whilst not a single place here, not even a monastery, was mentioned in Lama Tsenpo's synopsis of Tibet in his *Geography of the World*, Dzamthang today boasts at least 48 lamaseries.² Among them, the Nyingmapa's 33 monastic institutions by far outnumber all other sects, thus proving a certain congeniality with the neighbouring Ngolok area to the north. The earliest establishment of Nyingmapa gompas took place after the 8th century, while the 17th century brought a renewed impetus via the Kham principality of Dege.³ Although in number of gompas the Jonangpa are only second to the Nyingmapa, the importance and dominance in religious matters seem to make it clear that Dzamthang, especially Middle Dzamthang, is absolutely their realm. Interestingly, the Kagyüpa order is represented with four monasteries, with one of them founded in 1713, whereas the Gelugpa, Sakyapa and Bönpo appear to have been shut off from this part of the Tibetan realm. Not a single gomba listed in the *Records of the Tibetan and Qiang Nationalities' Autonomous Prefecture of Aba*⁴ belongs to any of these Buddhist orders. It is therefore not surprising that Lama Dragönpa and Lama Tsenpo of the Gelugpa order, do not seem to have had access to Dzamthang, which they barely mention or not at all.

6.1.1. Sirin Kar

The Kagyüpa monastery of Sirin Kar⁵ (Chin. *Zengke Si*) is the monastery in Dzamthang county most easily reached and may be visited without

difficulty. For all other lamaseries, or an ordinary visit to the rather dull county town, unpleasant meetings with local bureaucrats, Tibetans or Han-Chinese, will be the rule, even if one has official permits. Sirin Kar belongs to Wuyi village (Tib. *bug rje yul tsho*), reached from Barkham 30 km before arriving at Dzamthang. The monastery stands by the roadside, with the temple buildings and housing for monks stretching across the slope of a forested hill, interspersed between the log huts of the village folk. Between the lane and the bank of Do River a great number of multi-coloured *chörten*, as well as rows of prayer-wheels are lined up for the pilgrims circumambulating the monastery.

Sirin Kar (*si rin kar dgon pa*) is an institution of the Karma-Kagyüpa order, having more than 300 monks under one incarnate lama's guidance. Its historical development seems recent, as it is said to have been founded in 1954, that is after the Chinese communist take-over.⁶

Originally the complex consisted of a single assembly hall and a tower-like temple building.⁷ The latter's architecture, consisting of nine storeys, immediately reminds us of the description of the famous tower that Milarepa had to build on his master's Marpa's instruction in order to do penance for his evil deeds. The original structure described in the old Tibetan legends is located in southern Tibet's Lhodrag region.⁸

Sirin Kar's original tower of 1954 is described as having a square ground-space and comprising nine storeys. Each of these floors make up a small lhakhang filled with images originally moulded by the monastery's first Lama Nyisheng*. As at the original Milarepa Tower in south Tibet where iron chains outside the top floor enable one to circumambulate the building between earth and sky,⁹ the structure in Dzamthang's Sirin Kar also offers this spectacular kind of *nangkhor* for lofty circumambulations. Meanwhile, this single lamasery even offers the opportunity in triplicate, as by 1996 Sirin Kar was in possession of three such tower-like temple buildings. Amidst them we find three smaller lhakhang, one of them constituting the assembly hall, another one called Ringni Lhakhang and the pagoda-like Tsanden Hwaré.

The temple called *Ringni* Lhakhang* has a Shakyamuni as main image of worship. This central figure is made of white jade and in its style looks rather Burmese. To its sides we have statues of Vajradhara and Lokeshvara, while the side-walls are

painted with inscriptions in Lantsha writing. There are several thangkas hanging from above, depicting Padmasambhava, Vajrasattva and, as we conclude from the monastic context, the life story of a Karmapa lama.

By the side of Ringni Lhakhang stands a cube-like building topped by a tiny Chinese pagoda-style tin roof. The rim of the cube-like ground floor carries rows of small multi-coloured *chörten*. The layout is that of a mandala, and the structure is called Tsanden Hwaré in local dialect. It therefore is most likely that it is one of the architectonic interpretations of Padmasambhava's mythical paradise *Sangdog Pelri*,¹⁰ which can often be found in Nyingmapa monasteries of southern Amdo and northeastern Kham. Not unexpectedly the sanctuary has a mandala of which the main image depicts Padmasambhava, surrounded by many more smaller figures of other gurus. There are more Padmasambhava statues in niches of boards along the walls. Above the entrance images of Milarepa and other important Buddhist teachers, as well as of the early kings, are exhibited. The statues have a distinct simple rustic style, as if they were moulded by local peasants rather than by artists following the scheme given in iconographic texts.

On both sides of Tsanden Hwaré hall two of Sirin Kar's nine-storeyed towers rise high above the entire lamasery. Both are painted white with a red band on the uppermost floor, while the third tower is painted in horizontal bands of red, white, grey, yellow and blue colours. Looking from the roadside, the tower to the left of the Tsanden Hwaré, named *Jingkar*, is a bulging white tall structure. Eight of its nine storeys are provided with thangkas (often printed pictures framed by silk cloth), simple murals and Buddhist images. Thus they constitute small lhakhangs which are fitted as follows:

Ground floor: central statue: adibuddha Samantabhadra; at the left many small Vajrapani images (like very large *tshatshas*?)

2nd floor: central statue: Jowo Buddha; depictions of Vajrapani on the walls

3rd floor: central statue: Amitabha accompanied by Karmapa Lamas on both sides; Tokpo in between Marpa images at the side-walls

4th floor: central statue: Manjushri; Marpa images at the side-walls, either mantras or the Namchu Wangden symbols in spaces without images

5th floor: central statue: Milarepa surrounded by Tokpo on his right and Marpa on his left (very basic); Tokpo images on the walls, with Marpa on the right side

6th floor: central statue: Serte Rimpoche

7th floor: central statue: Marpa with a moustache; Tokpo images on the walls

8th floor: central statue: a blue figure carrying the crown of a transcendent bodhisattva, named *Dorji Sengjie Sagda**

9th floor: no fixtures and fittings

Behind the Jingkar is a small *chörten*-like temple hall filled with a multitude of Milarepa images. The three main statues portray a large central Marpa flanked by Milarepa and Tokpo.

The main assembly hall, dukhang, is situated at the southern end of the monastic complex, looking downstream. By 1996 its furnishing was not yet completed, though the walls were already painted. Again, the murals are done in a rather simple and rustic style; they seem a better quality than many of the sculptures. The central image is Shakyamuni, with a 1,000-armed Avalokiteshvara on either side. Along the walls there are images of Vajrapani, Green Tara, Karmapa lamas, eminent monks and mystics, Milarepa, Marpa, Amitabha, four-armed Lokeshvara, Shakyamuni, and Dhyani Buddha statues. The front side is decorated by a bodhisattva trinity with Manjushri and a quite uncommon Lokeshvara, accompanied by the dharmapala Hayagriva. A small rear chapel of the dukhang can be entered through a back door only; there Padmasambhava and Vajradhara statues surround a central Jowo Buddha image.

Just next to the dukhang is the original still intact tower built during the monastery's foundation in 1954. The interior of the nine storeys is again arranged in the manner of eight chapels plus a top-floor. Unlike the Jingkar tower where the different storeys are connected by wooden ladders, there is a staircase well separated from the sanctuaries. Again the uppermost floor is empty, and it is where pilgrims or monks step out onto the narrow cornice, produced by the insertion of stone slabs which protrude some 20 cm from the wall. By clinging to the iron cable fixed all around, the tower can be circumambulated from the outside of the ninth floor. While the images in the different chapels on each

floor again are predominantly Milarepa figures, the tower's fittings are different from the one described above. Although the artistic value is rather limited—which is of no significance to the ordinary Buddhist faithful—the unusual architectural layout and equipping of Sirin Kar is very interesting. A short description of the tower's inner decor is therefore given:

Ground floor: central statue: four-armed Lokeshvara flanked by Milarepa and a White Tara; walls painted with Lantsha inscriptions

2nd floor: central statue: Jowo Buddha

3rd floor: a row of eight stupas is most important; a shrine with a simple Shakyamuni image in place

4th floor: central statue: a beautiful image of Jowo Rimpoche in a small shrine, numerous tshatshas in front of it; many small statues of Shakyamuni and Milarepa

5th floor: small figures of Shakyamuni, Vajrasattva, Lokeshvara, Marpa, Milarepa, Tokpo, Karmapa, Atisha; a very fine large tshatsha depicting Yamantaka and Kalacakra

6th floor: small shrine screening Karmapa lamas

7th floor: Buddha statues, monks and yogins in the upper row, the eight Mahasattvas below; numerous exquisite tshatshas (about 15 cm high) depicting Yamantaka Kalacakra and Guhyasamaja

8th floor: central statue: a beautiful image of Padmasambhava, surrounded by King Trisong Detsen and other important personages; many tshatshas

9th floor: no fixtures and fittings.

The local incarnate lama, Rimpoche Jigme Jogchal, keeps many old printing blocks in his residence. Among the two dozen of old bronze statues he cares for are Milarepa and different bodhisattvas.

In the Dzamthang region the Kagyüpa order's only foothold is in Dokhog valley, with four lamaseries¹¹ around Kamda (*rka mda* ') and Dotö (*rdo stod*) or 'Upper Dokhog'. The Nyingmapa order on the other hand, possesses a large number of monasteries in this formerly inaccessible area, widely spread and seen in almost every Dzamthang village, except in Kathog community (*ka thog yul tsho*). Hardly anything is known about the 33 monastic institution of the Nyingmapa sect. One of the few such places about which some information can be given is Bangtuo* Monastery.¹²

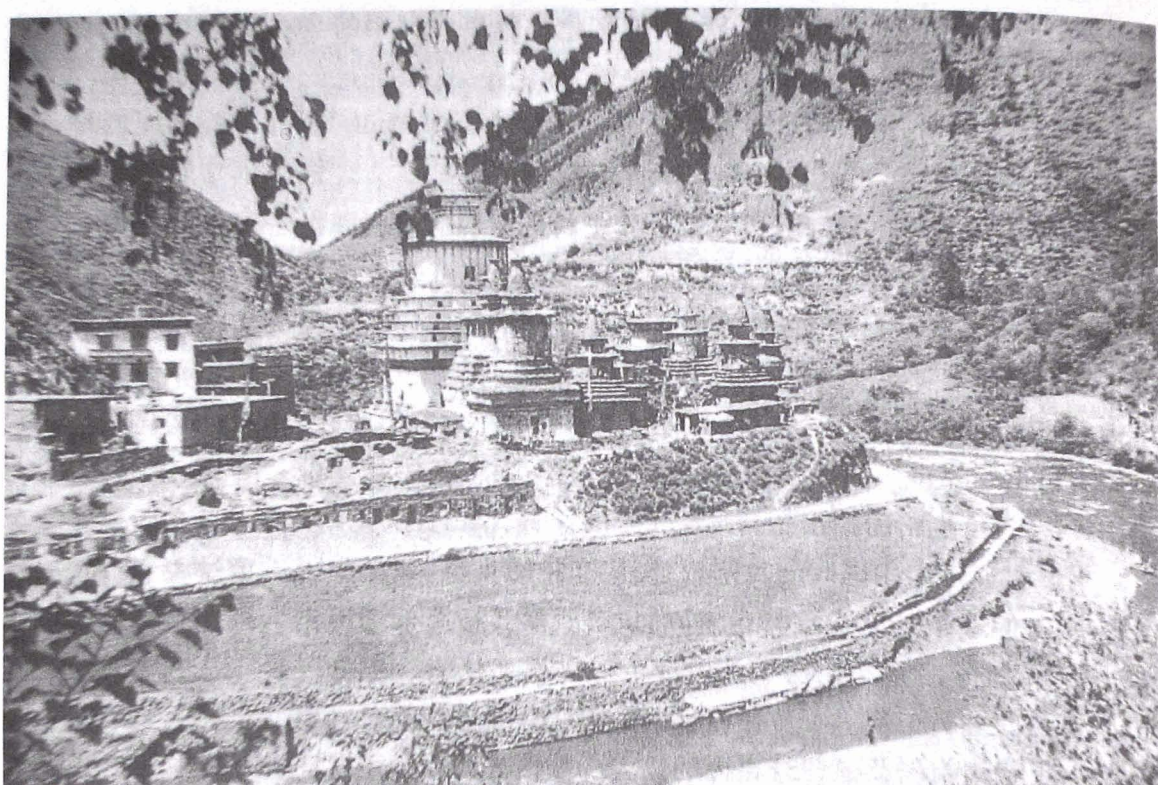


Plate 9. Throng of chörten in Dzikhog valley, Dzamthang county

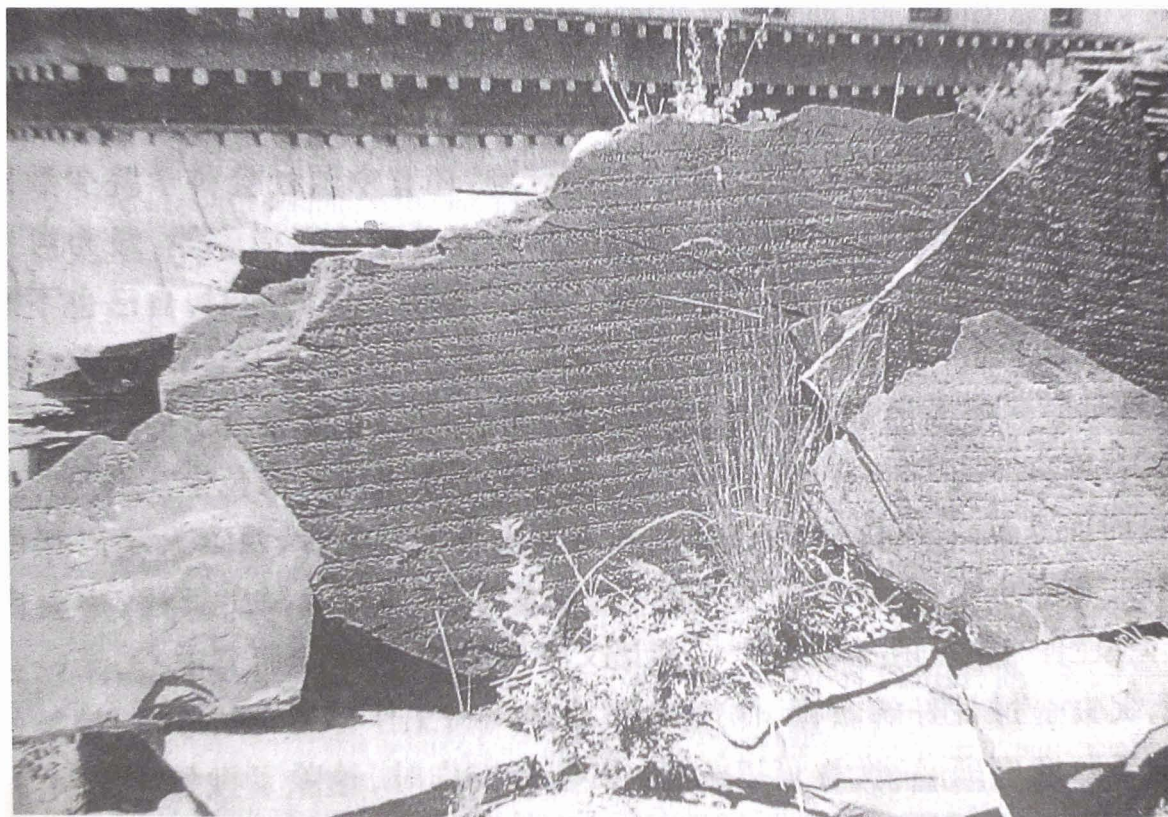


Plate 10. A part of the Bangtuo Si sutra wall

6.1.2. Bangtuo Monastery

This Nyingmapa lamasery is located in Bangtuo village of Dzongda community (*rdzong mda' yul tsho*, Chin. *Rongmuda xiang*), around 50 km north of Dzamthang county seat. The monastery was established during the Mongol Yuan reign of China (1274-1368).

Bathong Gompa or Bangtuo Si¹³ was already famous for the throngs of *chörten* built from the 17th century up to 1910. Nowadays there are five remaining *chörten* occupying an expanse 46.5 m long and 25 m wide in the middle of the monastic complex. The stupas are impressive structures built from stone and wood. Similar *chörten* stand out among the houses of many villages of Dzika (*'dzi rka*), i.e. the central Dzi Chu valley.¹⁴ Their cubiform base has an oblong layout, turning into the pyramidally rising second segment, which is terraced and called *bangrim*. With three to five steps most of the *bangrim* have a square plan, while a few may be of a circular layout. The *bumpa* is almost cylindrical, covered by a roof which is supported by more than a dozen wooden posts. On top of the *bumpa* sits the *harmika*, being the base for the massive spire. These structures look like a combination of typical Tibetan reliquary *chörten* and the famous Kumbum stupas of Tsang in central Tibet.¹⁵ These stupas' elementary structure tend to refashion a pyramid in the form of a mandala. The shape of the Dzamthang *chörten* still maintains its towering appearance—the tower like feature of the Tibetan reliquary stupa type—this being the most distinct difference from its central Tibetan counterpart. It depends on their size whether their inner part is accessible or not; some have a small reliquary chamber, while others have several chapels making them a kumbum type of *chörten* with a more elongated outline. Their massive and comparatively huge *bumpa* dominates the entire structure, especially the taller examples.

Three of the *chörten* at Bangtuo Monastery are said to exhibit murals¹⁶ of or near the time of construction. The oldest of the Bangtuo *chörten* was built in 1618 and shelters a small number of 17th century murals. It has a height of 32 m, its square base occupying an area of 90.25 m². A second *chörten* was erected one sixty year calender cycle later (1678) and has the same dimensions, while the largest of the group dates to the year 1910. With a height of 42 m and a ground

space of 484 m² it belongs to the largest examples of this architectural type in the Tibetan realm. A great number of murals depict scenes from the life of Buddha Shakyamuni. A very basic restoration in 1990 was done in an extremely simple and rustic style. Only the upper floors, which due to dilapidation and risky ladders are difficult to get to, still exhibit remains of the original paintings of the early 20th century.

The Dzamthang Bangtuo *chörten* define a specific type of Tibetan cultural monuments. Another particular Amdo feature of religious landmarks was also cultivated at this site. Surrounded by the above-mentioned *chörten* are more than 100,000 stone slabs¹⁷ bearing inscriptions of Buddhist sutras, corresponding to the text of 24 volumes of scriptures. Engraved in regular lines onto the grey or black surface of a huge number of carved stones, they are arranged in a pile which is 16.6 m long, 8 m wide and 5.8 m high. It seems that the stone slabs are still arranged in proper order, i.e. according to the sutras' sequence. The middle part holds a *Gamurong** sutra which was carved in 1438, while most parts of the Kanjur edition was done between 1910 and 1920 by Rinchen Dargye,* a monk of the local monastery. The site of the Bangtuo *chörten* may well be sheltering one of the largest *mani*-stone sutra inscription piles or walls which are rare sights on the entire Tibetan Plateau—except the Ngolok-Seta region.

Other masterpieces of similar types of Tibetan religious art may be found in several parts of virtually unknown Dzamthang county. Already within a range of five kilometres from the *chörten* described above a second site is reached, consisting of five *chörten*, the Magen Ta* stupas. Covering a space of 120 square metres, the highest rises to 9.3 m. This notable relic was constructed in the late 19th century, but had to be rebuilt in 1984.

6.2. Monasteries of the forgotten Jonangpa

Lama Tsenpo's only observation in the early 19th century on this part of Amdo including hearsay information¹⁸ was that

in 'Dzi-khog, there is a Jo-nang-pa monastery called 'Dzam-thang-dgon, and other than that one, there are no true Jo-nang-pa monasteries anywhere at the present time.¹⁹

This corresponds to a contemporary opinion. Although there are around 40 Jonangpa monasteries

in Amdo and northernmost Gyarong,²⁰ lamas of the Jonangpa order's main monastery in Middle Dzamthang, Tsangwa Gompa (*gtsang pa dgon*), maintain that the teachings of the Jonangpa are kept in their pure and genuine form only here and within their immediate sphere of influence, while those of neighbouring Ngolok could have been corrupted or adulterated by the predominance of other Tibetan Buddhist sects. Before introducing the main Jonangpa monastery, it may be useful to shed some light on the development and central thoughts of this interesting Buddhist school, often believed to be extinct.

6.2.1. The Jonangpa Order

The Jonangpa order's designation comes from the Jo(mo)nanng Monastery²¹ situated near Lhatse in the central Tibetan province of Tsang. Founded by Sherab Gyantshen (*shes rab rgyal mtshan*, 1292-1361) of Dolpo, it may be considered as a sub-sect of the Sakyapa school of Tibetan Buddhism. However, a central feature of Jonangpa teachings distinguishes them from almost every other Lamaist order. Primarily based on the Kalacakra as well as on the Tantric cycle of the *Tathagatagarbha*, they took a monist point of view, as its adherents perceive the identity of the nature (*garbha*, meaning 'seed' or 'essence') of Buddha (*tathagata*) as being one with the nature of all the creatures.²²

Fundamental to the whole *Mahayana* development was the philosophical theory of 'absolute vacuity' (Sanskrit *shunyata*, Tibetan *stong pa nyid*), sometimes interpreted by Western scholars of Buddhism as 'absolute relativity'. It taught that every entity and every component element of that entity is absolutely void of any inherent self-nature. It is the original Buddhist doctrine of 'no self' (*anatmata*) carried to its logical extreme. It was this doctrine which separated Buddhists from orthodox Indian (viz. Brahmanic) schools, who held the doctrine of a 'supreme self' (...). It was left to *Shes rab rgyal mtshan* to formulate the 'heresy', and he did it in the most innocuous terms, namely by his theory of 'vacuity elsewhere' (*gzhan stong*), thus arguing that absolute vacuity was not just typical of every entity and every element, but was a kind of absolute quality existing 'elsewhere', viz. apart from every entity while pertaining everything.²³

Thus it was Sherab Gyantshen, the great exponent of the order, who formulated the philosophical position that later was considered heretical. It particularly was this interpretation of the 'Thought Only' doctrine of Asanga,²⁴ expressing that the nature of Buddha is not void, but has been emptied of all impurities—which anyway did not appertain to its nature. Nagarjuna's *Madhyamaka* philosophy, opposing the latter view, is a dialectics of negative terms, which is to say that 'only by destroying all of our mistaken beliefs concerning the universe and ourselves through rigorous logical argument is it possible to arrive at a more authentic vision'.²⁵ While this latter view stresses the study of logic, the *Tathagatagarbha* theory offers a series of analogies with the intention of helping the adept 'to grasp the relationship between the view from the state of Enlightenment and the ordinary view of the world'.²⁶ Thus a different way of conceptualizing the process of Enlightenment²⁷ was offered:

Rather than a progress along a path or way in which the yogin attained the requisite qualities through gradual purification, the *tathagatagarbha* perspective saw the attainment of Buddhahood as the uncovering of a potential that was always there, of the revealing of the underlying structure of reality.²⁸

This clearly shows the proximity of some Jonangpa teachings to the thoughts of early mediaeval Chan Buddhism of the Chinese monk Hwashang, teaching a sudden awakening of the Enlightenment state through the absence of mental activity. Tibetan sources usually inform that during the famous Council of Samye this Chinese form of Buddhism had been transcended by adherents of the Indian Buddhist schools and thus disappeared thereafter. Since most Tibetan writers later identified themselves with the Indian tradition, there is enough reason to infer that their oversimplified account is implausible.²⁹ Hence we must not be surprised that the scriptures of the Jonangpa retell the story differently.³⁰

In the course of the centuries many Indian *siddhas* came to Tibet, and their teachings strongly influenced Taranatha (1575-1634), one of the most brilliant exponents of the Jonangpa order. This author of a well-known *History of Buddhism in India* and of important writings on the Kalacakra, was active at the end of the period during which the Jonangpa order flourished (14th to 17th centuries). In

Taranatha's works we notice to what a great extent he was influenced by the ascetics of extreme Indian Buddhism, who having crossed the Himalaya reached Tibet and met him there. These ascetics belonged to the currents of yoga where one can hardly distinguish Buddhism from Shivaism, and indeed the latter prevails; hence certain interpretations they give of the Vajrayana may have appeared to differ from the ancient tradition.³¹

Their teachings on a theoretical level had concepts in common with Hvashang's Chan tradition,³² which, together with the thoughts of the siddhas, were transmitted though with some adaptations. In doing so a further integration of Tibet's shamanic tradition might have been in view.³³ Although Tsongkhapa, the great reformer and founder of the Gelugpa, had studied the Kalacakra teachings at Jomonang, the 5th Dalai Lama was hostile to the Jonangpa sect. After the death of Taranatha he closed the order's chief seat and, like all other Jonangpa monasteries within his sphere of influence, transformed it into a Gelugpa institution. Their teachings were suppressed. It was 'the idea of Buddhahood as a positive potentiality [which later] was to provide the pretext for proscribing the Jonangpa order.'³⁴ Historiography therefore takes the heresy as the paramount reason for the Jonangpa's failure:

The parallel with orthodox Indian teachings of a 'supreme self' (*brahman*) manifest in individuals as an 'individual self' (*atman*) might not seem so obvious to us, but it was enough to create what must have been the most bitter of philosophical battles between Tibetan religious orders, resulting eventually in the destruction of *Jo-nang-pa* monasteries and the burning of their books.³⁵

It is quite likely that besides the doctrinal dispute, one reason for suppressing the order was more related to political affairs. It is an interesting aspect that the Jonangpa order declared such items as gifts to monasteries were expendable; they were not to attain Enlightenment.³⁶ These of course were an important base to the political power of several Buddhist orders, namely the Gelugpa. Furthermore the Karma Kagyüdpä and Jonangpa had been closely associated with the Shigatsé princes, the Gelugpa's main rivals for power in Central

Tibet, and they were treated less leniently by the new Gelugpa regime, as were the Bönpo.³⁷

This step is not surprising, taking into consideration that in this power-play the Jonangpa's great teacher Taranatha performed an essential role. In Inner Mongolia, Altan Khan, after his encounter with Sönam Gyatsho, the later 3rd Dalai Lama, had adopted the Gelugpa teachings in 1577 as official doctrine of the Tümen and Ordos Mongols.³⁸ As Lamaism was simultaneously adopted by Mongolia's most influential princes, they had also invited Tibetan lamas for the propagation of Buddhism. In order to extend his own sphere of influence, the prince of Tsang—rival of the rising Gelugpa power in Lhasa—sent Taranatha to Urga in Khalkha Mongolia, where he was active for two decades. Taranatha's grand reputation survived his death. In Mongolia's Urga his reincarnation was discovered in a son of the Khalkha Mongol prince Tüsiyetü Khan Gömbodorji. The child, born in 1635, was declared to be the spiritual leader of Mongolia and given the title of 'Holy Venerable Lord' (*rje btsun dam pa*).³⁹ By expressing his support and, at the same time eliminating the Jonangpa order, the 5th Dalai Lama could—with effortless ease—reap the benefit from the great Jonangpa exponent:

The Jonangpa order was closed down altogether, its head gompa converted into a Gelugpa institution, and its printing blocks placed under seal, where they remained until the mid-nineteenth century when the Rimed lamas managed to gain access to them.⁴⁰

The 5th Dalai Lama also had the wood blocks containing the Jonangpa texts confiscated and sealed. With the exception of two historical works by Taranatha, the writings of this sect became very difficult to obtain. As the Jonangpa study colleges were totally incorporated into the 'Yellow Church', there was no sign for a long time of this monastic tradition's survival.

Looking at the distribution and number of their monasteries today, the Jonangpa might be considered, by some, as of minor influence and thus a nearly extinct philosophical tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. We should not underestimate it, though, as the total number of Jonangpa monks, maybe between 4,000 and 5,000,⁴¹ is close to the number of the entire monastic population of the Tibetan refugee community.⁴² Furthermore, the Jonangpa

teachings came into their own again as the order's highest representative, the Dharmaraja (Chin. *fawang*) Tsangwa Lama, is a highly influential teacher at the Tibetan Buddhist Academy in Beijing's Yellow Temple, and Jonangpa monks do study together with exponents of other sects in the famous Buddhist Academy of Jigme Phüntshog in neighbouring Serta of Kandse Prefecture.⁴³ The 46th Tsangwa Lama's writings are also published in Beijing, as may be observed with the 1992 Tibetan print of his work *The Jonang History of Buddhism* (*jo nang chos 'byung*).

6.2.2. Dzamthang Tsangwa Monastery

Tsangwa Gompa of Dzamthang (*'dzam thang gtsang pa dgon pa*) is the main lamasery of the entire Dzamthang area and the chief institution of the Jonangpa order. It is situated in Middle Dzamthang (*'dzam thang yul tsho*), some 50 km from today's county seat of Dzamkhog. From there it is reached on a road crossing a moderately high pass into the valley of the Dzi Chu. This is the traditional heartland of the Dzamthang⁴⁴ region, which is named after a mountain near the township of Middle Dzamthang. That mountain is said to have the shape of a Buddhist protector deity who, by his Tibetan name of Dzambhala, also is the God of Wealth. The valley below its feet was therefore named the 'plain of Dzam(bhala)', i.e. Dzamthang.⁴⁵

Although it is the main Jonangpa site today, there is an older monastery than Tsangwa Gompa, with which it is closely connected, having developed from it. Together with a third gompa, the three form a monastic city which is often referred to as Great Dzamthang Lamasery, Dzamthang Chöde Chenpo (*'dzam thang chos sde chen po*, Chin. *Rangtang Da Si* or *Zhong Rangtang Si*, Middle Dzamthang Monastery). It seems that nowadays local Tibetans often use the term Tsangwa Gompa when referring to the whole monastic city.

The oldest Jonangpa monastery of the entire complex is Chöje Gompa,⁴⁶ which was established between 1378 and 1425.⁴⁷ Until then the area was still the home of the flourishing Bön faith. A Bön monastery was established at this location in 1053, but was given into the hands of the Buddhist Jonangpa order by 1307. When Drung Kashiwa Rinchen Pel (*drung dka' bzhi ba rin chen dpal*, 1350-1435), a native of the northernmost Gyarong region,⁴⁸ had studied Buddhism in central Tibet, on his return home he founded Chöje Gompa to spread

the Buddhist Doctrine. The influence of the Bönpos was still quite strong and they put up resistance against the new religious order. It is recorded that Rinchen Pel nevertheless succeeded and soon gathered more than a thousand monks around him. However, the Jonangpa's dominance may well have been related to the patronage of the newly established Ming Court of imperial China. Following the examples⁴⁹ of the Phagmodrupa in 1372, Sakyapa in 1373, Drigungpa in 1392, the 5th Karmapa Deshin Shegpa (*de bzhin gshegs pa*) in 1406-1408, and Tsongkhapa's disciple Sakya Yeshe in 1414-1416, Rinchen Pel travelled to the Ming Court in 1419, a decade after he had been given the title of a 'Meditation Master, Promoter of the Doctrine' (*hongjiao chanshi*).⁵⁰ This was to secure imperial support for the respective Buddhist teachers who wielded at home a certain measure of secular power, sometimes quite considerable.⁵¹ By procuring the imperial support Rinchen Pel may have created the pre-conditions for the later survival of the Jonangpa.

The successor of Rinchen Pel was Gyalwa Sangpo (*rgyal ba bzang po*, 1419-1493) who spread the Jonangpa's influence in neighbouring Gyarong. He is said to have founded some 100 monasteries in the Dzamthang, Barkham and Ngawa region. At the time of this 2nd Chöje Lama the Jonangpa order of Dzamthang was at its heyday. Having fixed the Jonangpa's ties with the Ming Court he received imperial seals in 1445 and 1472. Finally, in 1509, his reincarnation was conferred the title of Abhishekana Imperial Tutor (*guanding guoshi*).⁵²

It seems that until the time of Gyalwa Sengge (*rgyal ba seng ge*, 1508-1568), who was declared Gyalwa Sangpo's reincarnation in 1520, Gelugpa and Jonangpa monasteries in Amdo were still on good terms. In 1530 Tenpa Rinchen (*bstan pa rin chen*), the 2nd Kirti Lama of the important Gelugpa monastery in Ngawa, was even asked to ordain the Jonangpa lama. Soon a military conflict broke out after a Jonangpa lamasery in the 1st Kirti Lama's homeland was turned into a Gelugpa institution.⁵³ Thereafter the schism between the two orders was never healed. Gyalwa Sengge's leadership in both religious and military matters furthered the position of Dzamthang's Jonangpa monastic population, especially after 1550 when, upon Gyalwa Sengge's visit to the capital Beijing, the Jiaqing Emperor bestowed on him the title of a Dharmaraja Dashan Fawang.⁵⁴ His sphere of influence included southern

Amdo, northeastern Kham and Gyarong, even reaching Mongol princes in Amdo and the Naxi in the far south.⁵⁵ Under his guidance, Chöje Gompa developed to become the theocratic centre of the greater Ngolok-Seta region.

The 4th Chöje Lama Lhokhawa Dragpa Öser (*lho kha ba grags pa 'od zer*, 1588-1670) also did not succeed in reconciling the contradictions between his tradition and the Gelugpa. When in 1657 Taranatha's disciple Lodrö Namgyal (*blo gros nam rgyal*, 1618-1683) arrived in Dzamthang, the Jonangpa had already virtually lost their battle for survival in central Tibet. The 5th Dalai Lama had their monastic institutions incorporated into his order, thus absorbing the Jonangpas' religious centre and depriving them of any substantial base in Tibet proper.

As Dzamthang was far from the powerful 5th Dalai Lama's sphere of influence, the religious war between Jonangpa and Gelugpa sects developed differently in eastern Tibet. At the time of the 5th Chöje Lama, Go Gyalwa Lhündrub Dragpa (*go rgyal ba lhun grub grags pa*, 1674-1736), the Jonangpa's position in southern Amdo and Gyarong was strengthened. This was mainly due to the activities of Ngawang Tendzin Namgyal (*ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nam rgyal*, 1691-1738) whose uncle had been an actual student of Taranatha. Upon his return from Tsang in central Tibet, Ngawang Tendzin Namgyal, the 32nd Tsangwa Lama, journeyed to the Ngolok area where he was asked to become abbot of the deteriorated Nyingmapa monastery Achonggya Gompa.⁵⁶ In 1717, he arrived at Dzamthang where the Jonangpas of Dokhog and Markhog, 'isolated in their remote sanctuaries, ... [had] successfully survived the persecution and conversion of their mother monastery in Tsang by the Gelugpas during the 17th century.'⁵⁷

When Ngawang Tendzin Namgyal reached Dzamthang the Chöje Lama let him have his own residence, the Simkhang (*gzim khang*). Enlarging it to become a Tsang Dragtshang (*gtsang grags tshang*) was the beginning of the later Dzamthang Tsangwa Gompa. While both lamas together were engaged in the leadership of Chöje Gompa, Ngawang's Simkhang finally developed into a separate lamasery, Tsangchen Gongma Phodrang (*gtsang chen gong ma pho drang*), just called Tsangwa, indicating it is derived from Tsangwa Lama, being rooted in Tsang province.⁵⁸ The newly established monastic institution quickly developed

to a larger size with two distinct parts: an upper monastery called Tsangwa Simkhang Phodrang with the core complex of the politico-religious administration, and a lower one, the Tsangwa Gamba Yagdogar (*gtsang ba 'gab ma yag mdo'i sgar*). It soon became the largest and most renowned of the three lamaseries in what is today's Middle Dzamthang,⁵⁹ consisting of a main assembly hall, teaching yard, meditation hall, and a printing establishment. The monks were organized in eight khamtsen, while the teaching yard offered study possibilities in six sections: Indian classical logic, prajñāparamita, dictionaries (a school based on the Abhidharmakosha), Kalacakra, theory of absolute vacuity elsewhere (*dbu ma gzhan stong*),⁶⁰ and vinaya.

A brief visit to Tsangwa Monastery in 1997 found it more or less intact, at least its core complex. This accorded with information given that the lamasery still possesses four temple buildings dating from the time of the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming and Qing dynasties (14th to 19th centuries). These flat-roofed edifices are three-storeyed and based on stone walls and wooden structural elements. One temple hall called Kongma'er Miao* was built in 1386 and underwent restoration during the 17th to 18th centuries. The isolated structure covers 423 m² and has walls of 0.8 m thickness, their murals being notable relics of earlier and later periods. The 653 m² Kangsha'er* Temple dates back to the turn of the 17th to the 18th century and contains, on the lower floor, murals of that epoch.⁶¹ The main assembly hall of 1834 also survived the commotions of the modern era, being repaired in 1982. The 11.5 m high edifice covers 495 m² and is impressive for its large doorway, almost 3 m high and 2.2 m wide.

Though the Cultural Revolution left its traces on the images of the temples, Tsangwa Gompa still has a large group of bronze images of exquisite workmanship and striking shape. The main image of the large assembly hall is a Shakyamuni Buddha about 6 m in height. Two older reliquary *chörten* contain the ashes of eminent Jonangpa lamas, presumably of Drung Kashiwa Rinchen Pel, the founder of Chöje Gompa, and of the 7th Vajracarya (Chin. *jingang shangshi*), Ngawang Dorje Sangpo.⁶² A statue to the left of Shakyamuni portrays Dolpopa Sherab Gyantshen,⁶³ first great exponent of the Jonangpa order who later was reincarnated as Taranatha. Niches on both sides of the central group hold a multitude of small images

of Shakyamuni and Taranatha, framed by bookshelves with holy scriptures. 5,300 volumes of the Buddhist canon are kept in Tsangwa Gompa, with a Dege print of the Kanjur and Tanjur. The Tsangwa dukhang visited in 1997 also sheltered a beautiful old thangka showing a Kalacakra mandala, some 1.5 m in height.⁶⁴ Remains of murals are said to depict scenes from the life of Shakyamuni Buddha and Dolpopa's propagation of the Doctrine.

Leaving the main temple hall and casting a glance at the door, the Tibetan term Throm (*khrom*) can be noticed, which is placed on almost every main door. It is the name of the early kingdom ruled by the fabulous hero Gesar of Throm (later of Ling).⁶⁵ Dzamthang once may well have been a part of that legendary realm, as the countries of Throm and Ling were surely located in the southern part of Amdo.

A side door of the main hall leads to steps ascending to the depot of the printing establishment (Tib. *Parkhang*, Chin. *tangjingku*). About 15,000 wooden printing blocks are stored here, probably the only Jonangpa xylographs world-wide. As many of them were destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, those had to be substituted and a great number of blocks were newly engraved within the last two decades. They offer prints of writings of Dolpopa, Taranatha and other important teachers of the Jonangpa order. 24 volumes are works solely of Taranatha, while eight volumes originate from Dolpopa.

A short walk from the main assembly hall to the north leads into a huge courtyard, walled-in and flanked by large temple buildings. To the right side we enter a hall which shelters three-dimensional mandalas, two of which were still (in 1997) in the first stages of being set up. Dedicated to Samantabhadra and Aksobhya, they are on either side of a Kalacakra mandala in the centre; it is said to be based on a vision of one of the lamasery's high lamas who travelled to Shambhala in his dreams. On either side are large statues, one depicts the Jonangpa master Dorje Sangpo holding vajra and ghanta. The other one is of Lodrö Draga of Minyag (*mi nyag blo dros grags pa*), a disciple of Sherab Gyantshen who spread the Jonangpa teachings in the Kham area; his attributes are a sword and a book, hinting at his proficient writings of which some are still kept in the monastery. Smaller images of Dolpopa Sherab Gyantshen add to the sanctuary's fittings.

Just across the main gate of the courtyard rises a three-storeyed temple structure, sheltering both the protectors' temple and meditation hall. Flags and arrows, similar to those of the typical Amdo type of *lhato* shrines, surmount the roof of the large edifice. Its entrance is watched by a painted tiger and overlooked by a Chinese-style anterior roof.

The gönkhang, protectors' temple, is amazingly large and consists of a big ante-chamber and the actual sanctuary. The entrance hall seems to be larger than the sanctuary, mainly due to the lofty ceiling. There are no statues in this hall, which is used as an assembly hall. The walls exhibit an abundance of paintings, with beautifully restored murals at the higher positions.⁶⁶ Near the entrance the mountain deity Machen Pomra is seen as well as scenes from the epic of King Gesar—which might be expected as *khrom* is written on the door. On the upper rim of the vestibule the typical garlands of skulls indicate that we are about to enter the gönkhang. Just below them is a long painted row portraying eminent masters of the Buddhist Doctrine: starting with the mythical kings of Shambhala and ending with the 46th Jonangpa Dharmaraja. On the wall opposite to the entrance different protectors such as Mahakala guard the holy site. The most splendid murals are seen on the upper left edge of the rear wall. These paintings of Tantric yidams—Kalacakra, Samvara, Hevajra, and Guhyasamaja—probably can be dated to an early period of the monastery's history.

The present sanctuary is entered through a door in the ante-chamber's rear wall. It is a dark temple room of considerable size, where quite a great number of tutelary deities display their wrathful appearance in order to repel all evil spirits and influences. The large statues are 1.5 to 2 m high and look like a small assembly of fierce gods ready to surround any penetrator. There are three of them on both sides of the door, and seven to eight images on both the side walls and the rear altar. Mahakala keeps the central position. Some smaller statues of Green Tara are found amidst the protectors. While most of the images are painted and wrapped in cloth, at least three of them, standing in the right back corner, can be identified as older bronze statues of Mahakala and Pelden Lhamo.

The building which shelters the gönkhang also offers accommodation for monks who withdraw for meditational purposes. The chambers on the lower

levels are kept for practitioners of certain yoga exercises which seem to resemble—at least according to the monks' description—those of the Chinese Kungfu (*gongfu*) in the Chan Buddhist Shaolin monastery. The rooms on the upper right side of the structure serve those who are in a three-year seclusion. In the sanctuary on the upper floor an image of Dolpopa is enthroned in a central position, with books at his sides and a multitude of Shakyamuni statues accompanied by arhats—his disciples—in niches on the walls. On the front side of the hall we find thangkas depicting the life-story of Buddha Shakyamuni. Taranatha's saddle is shown as a major relic of the temple, as well as some older bronzes.

Novices ordinarily enter the monastery at the age of seven or eight and initially are taught to read and write by *trapas* (monks not yet graduated). As soon as they are capable of reading the fundamental canonical texts, they are accepted to participate in the regular recitations of the monastic community. From around the age of 10 to over 20 they have to pass several examinations before finally becoming a *bhikṣu*. After three more years they finally get the status of a *trapa*, an ordained monk. The Jonangpa order's procedure is renowned for being quite strict, so it is generally required that the ordained monk goes into seclusion for at least a three year meditation practice. During that time, in which he is not allowed to see anybody, family members are ordinarily responsible for his meals. After completing his retreat he will study by himself or under the guidance of a lama tutor.

Today's Tsangwa Gompa counts 2,000 Jonangpa monks under the guidance of its head lama, the Jonangpa Dharmaraja. Only about half of this number are registered in Tsangwa Gompa proper, while the rest belong to the two other lamaseries in Middle Dzamthang and to smaller branches all over the valley. Chöje Gompa, which was introduced at the beginning of this chapter, accounts for another 300 monks, while Tshebcu Monastery with its 100 monks is the smallest of the monastic triad in the township. Although modest in size, it was noted for the large Gomang Chörten within its compound. It was built by Rinchen Pel's disciple Tshebcu Ratnakirti (*tshes bcu ratna ki'rti*) on the model of the Kumbum Chörten of central Tibet's Jomonang Monastery, though different in style. The Jonangpa order also distinguished itself from other Tibetan

Buddhist schools by their energy in building stupas. Ordinarily none of their monasteries is left without at least one of this typical Tibetan architectural feature, a *chörten*.⁶⁷ A considerable number of larger examples of Tashi Gomang and Changchub Chörten—with the tallest one more than 30 m high—are built within the complex of Dzamthang's main monastic city, thus bringing forth its unique silhouette.

Although the site of Tsangwa's monastic complex makes its predominantly religious importance obvious, the socio-political perspective should not be neglected. Like all large lamaseries it also possessed a considerable degree of secular power. When the site's first Jonangpa monastery, Chöje Gompa, was established, it was in an area which was marginal to both the Bönpo sphere of influence and the domain of a secular ruler. It thus had a religious and political function right from the beginning. At the time of the 2nd Chöje Lama Gyalwa Sengge the monastery already owned 'five mountains [districts] and eight plains [valley districts]' where the head lama established the administrative units of a chief magistrate (*spyi rdzong*), divisional magistrates (*rdzong phran*), and other conventional apparatus of government. The authority lay in the hands of the lamasery's abbot, who at the same time held the position of an illustrious religious leader. Thus Chöje Gompa became a political and religious entity. Although the power that Gyalwa Sengge had grasped slowly decreased at the time of the late Chöje Lamas, the entity functioned until the beginning of the Chinese communist reforms.

Government bodies of Tsangwa Gompa and related monasteries consisted mainly of the Chöje Lama,⁶⁸ an administrator of religious matters (inner monastic concerns), a supervisor of external affairs, an Ömpo*, Nangsen*, Gekyö*, and an Umdze⁶⁹. Besides there were stewards, chieftains, headmen, village chiefs, military officials, a prison, and an army. This list already indicates the character of an institution with considerable political power, an entity representing a regime. The leading positions were held by the chief administrators and the Gekyö. The Ömpo was usually a member of his brother's family⁷⁰ and a lay representative. He held the rank of the monastery's supervisor, yet did not have specific administrative tasks. The Nangsen was an agent of the monks who went out to conduct religious services and responsible for related tasks,

such as handling the payment for such services. The low-ranked Umdze, the one giving the lead at the monks' common recitations, had to determine contents and time of public religious ceremonies, look after the discipline and order during those events and other matters related to pilgrims.

The head lama of Chöje Gompa controlled an army of more than 200 men who, in case of an armed conflict, were led by a lay administrator of the monastery and the village head. The final decision on any matter, be it the passage of arms or the marriage of a subordinate layman, formally lay in the hands of the Chöje Lama. He, landlord of 63 households of bonded servants, was the superior authority in Dzamthang. Similar to most rulers in Tibetan areas, he was a sovereign over people and their land, rather than over a specific territory; his jurisdiction ended where the supremacy of neighbouring Tshebcu and Tsangwa monasteries started. The latter's political organisation might slightly differ from that of Chöje Gompa. However, rather than competing, these Jonangpa lamaseries were complementary as far as their political influence was concerned. For Tsangwa Gompa unfolded for them the vast expanse of Ngolok herdsmen to the north, while Chöje Monastery's power had a local base as well as a strong backing in neighbouring Gyarong.

A lively religious life combined with considerable secular power, based on a native state-like dominion as well as on strong allies from nomadic tribes, indigenous sovereigns and even the imperial court, all this helps understand how the Jonangpa order was able to endure, whereas it vanished in the country of its origin. The main adversary, the Gelugpa order, intruded only very late into this part of eastern Tibet, the areas of southernmost Amdo and northern Gyarong. Where the Yellow Hats threatened the Jonangpa's realm, their leader went so far as to resort to arms to stop the Gelugpa's advance. It may be hard to understand this action by Buddhist monks. Their history in central Tibet, where the 5th Dalai Lama destroyed the order's presence, may help provide a justification. The Jonangpas' former decision to act in this way is why we cannot find a single Gelugpa monastery within Dzamthang county's boundaries even today. History all around the world shows anyway that the sanctity of religious leaders does not always, or rarely, manifest in secular affairs.

On the other hand it has to be noted that the order was always renowned for its high degree of true Buddhist practice, its eagerness to strive for virtue. Religious education in Dzamthang's Jonangpa monasteries is known for its seriousness and sobriety, which underpinned the base of support from both the local faithful as well as noble supporters from adjacent areas.⁷¹ This may have been an essential pre-condition for the sympathy of the other sects strongly represented in Amdo and Kham (Nyingmapa, Kagyüpa, Sakyapa, Bönpo), and convinced them to let the Jonangpa take part in eastern Tibet's Rime Movement. Rime lamas stood up for the overcoming of sectarian divisions among the various Tibetan-Buddhist traditions and for not rejecting any path in search of enlightenment in favour of another. It was owing to them that the sealed Jonangpa texts and printing-blocks were finally made available for the first time, since the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama. This allowed for a new thrust in the propagation of Jonangpa teachings, and explains why a number of new Jonangpa monasteries could be founded during the 19th century.⁷²

6.2.3. Ngayül Se Monastery

To be reached more easily than any of the Dzamthang Jonangpa monasteries is an institution of this order in Ngawa county town. Less than 5 km from downtown Ngawa, on the eastern edge of Barma village, we find the second largest of all Jonangpa lamaseries, Ngayül Se Gompa Thubten Chole Namgyal Ling (*bsve dgon pa thub bstan phyogs las rnam rgyal gling*), Chin. *Saige Si, Saigongba Si*.⁷³ When asked for the date of its foundation, the monks claim that Se Gompa has a history of more than one hundred years, while their main incarnate lama is in his 11th incarnation. This incongruity is explained by the circumstance that today's monastery was reconstituted between 1862 and 1880, when Droge Yönten Gyatsho (*'brog dge yon tan rgya mtsho*), together with other Jonangpa lamas, incorporated several smaller monastic institutions into a single one. The number of its affiliated monks accounts to between 600 and 800, of whom some 230 are permanently resident under the guidance of ten incarnate lamas. As it is a branch of Dzamthang's Tsangwa Gompa, many of Ngayül Se's monks go there for retreat. The head lama is Thubten Dorje Hva Rimpoche.

Se Gompa's main antecedent was established at the beginning of the 17th century by Se Ömpo Lhündrub Gyantsen* and developed quickly. About one century later, the two lamas Lawang Gyantsen* and Trinle Gyatsho* separated it into two parts, each becoming a gompa of its own. As neither of them ever fully developed into a well-functioning monastic institution, it was up to Droge Yönten Gyatsho to reunite them and even invite monks from other areas, both Gyarong and Ngolok in Amdo, to come and reside there. Thus a significant expansion took place, with Se Gompa finally consisting of a great assembly hall, protectors' temple, Demchog Lhakhang (Samvara Temple), meditation hall and 120 residential quarters. Like other large Tibetan monasteries monks of Se Gompa were also allocated to khamtsen, four in number. Unlike Tsangwa Gompa and most other monastic cities, the khamtsen here were not organized according to the geographical origin of its monks, but according to the Buddhist practice they mainly followed. Thus there were the Dünkhor Khamtsen (Kalacakra), Demchog Khamtsen (Samvara), Shinjeshe Khamtsen (Yamantaka), and Sangdü Khamtsen (Guhyasamaja).⁷⁴

Having suffered from demolitions in 1958, a substantial restoration took place after 1982. The main assembly hall was rebuilt, also the gönkhang, a meditation ground, and three temple buildings, all arranged around the main Tsuglakhang hall. Essential parts of the complex, which occupies an area of 16 ha, are surrounded by a mud-wall, lined by a multitude of big prayer-wheels. Compared to the fortress-like appearance of Dzamthang's adobe structures, the Ngawa monasteries are more a combination of Tibetan and Chinese architectural styles, in the way common to most parts of Amdo. Se Gompa's monastic background, which differs considerably from other Ngawa counterparts, thus is much less obvious. There was no prominent *chörten* in its precinct by 1996, and the temple buildings with their two-layered hip-roofs, covered with green or yellow glazed tiles, remind us of the famous Kumbum Monastery near Xining in Qinghai province.

Across a large courtyard one is led towards the main assembly hall's entrance, the Tsuglakhang. It is a massive two-storeyed Tibetan-style dukhang, a structure built up of mud-plastered stone walls and wood. Its fixture and fittings still were partially

incomplete in 1996. The hall has images of Ngawang Dorje, who is said to be the founder of the monastery, and of the Jonangpa's great exponent Taranatha.⁷⁵ The boot in the glass shrine is said to have been worn by Taranatha, and 28 volumes containing his writings are kept in the library. The Kanjur edition kept here was printed in Dege. The big *thangkas* hanging from the ceiling or fixed to the pillars are kept covered. Before 1958 the monastery possessed three sets of *thangkas* depicting Shakyamuni's life story, which appear to have been lost during the destruction.

The dukhang was restored by 1996, with murals displaying the ubiquitous Lokapalas and Shambhala in the vestibule, and protectors, yidams, Dhyanī Buddhas, bodhisattvas and the life story of Buddha Shakyamuni on the walls of the assembly hall. The back wall behind the altar depicts Taranatha in meditational posture on a lion-throne, wearing a red hat. He is holding the Dharma-wheel and the stem of a lotus in his hands. Lotus flowers at his sides shelter his emblems: book, sword and a bell. Steps lead to the sanctuary at the building's rear where a large Maitreya statue of approximately 6 m height is the central image. Flanked by a huge reliquary *chörten* there is a 4 m high Jowo Buddha to the left and another, somewhat smaller Maitreya on the right side. Several glass shrines are filled with miniature figures of Dolpopa, Padmasambhava and Maitreya. In the middle of the assembly hall rises a *chörten* 3 to 3.5 m high, which is the burial stupa of Vajracarya Jamyang Künga Gyatsho*, one of the eminent leaders of the Yogacara school.

The central image of the gönkhang is a Mahakala in the tiger-riding form, Takkiraja. A Jokhang sanctuary in the lama's residence has fine images, *thangkas* and books, with one *thangka* portraying Taranatha surrounded by the Rinjung Gyatsha deities.⁷⁶ In some of Se Gompa's lhakhangs we also may see paintings or statues of Tsongkhapa and deities which are typical for the practice of the Gelugpa Doctrine—such as Usnisasitatapatra. This shows the mighty influence of the order of the Yellow Hats in Ngawa which for a long period was in much closer contacts to the Gelugpa centres in Amdo than to Dzamthang. This is why the five Jonangpa lameries⁷⁷ here have to share the Ngawa realm with 17 Gelugpa monasteries and several institutions of other sects. However, with a monk population of more than 1,000, the Jonangpa of Ngawa are the second largest such community all over the Tibetan

Plateau. That is to say that among the other gompas, there are some of considerable size—such as Tsinang Gön (*rtsi nang dgon dpal mi 'gyur nges don bde chen gling*) in Upper Ngawa (100 monks) and Droge Gön (*'brog dge dgon nges don bsam grub gling*, 240 monks) in Lota (*lo rta*) village.

7. Serta and the world's largest Buddhist Academy

If there is a Tibetan area virtually non-existent in the eyes of both old Tibetan sources and today's general Western public, this has to be Serta or Serthar (*gser thar*).¹ It does not show up in Lama Tsenpo's geography² nor is it mentioned in any other Tibetan source which has been available to me until now. Even the 2,738 pages of Marshall & Cooke's study of 'Tibet Outside the TAR. Control, Exploitation and Assimilation' (CD-ROM 1997) is restricted to naming the place and including it in some tables of official data on Sichuan's Tibetan areas. Being an exclusively pastoral region, it may be well understood that Serta had never been a centre of cultural history in eastern Tibet. Furthermore, it was part of the realm of the ill-famed Ngolok-Seta tribes,³ and thus probably never visited by foreign enquirers before the dawn of China's socialist revolution. Still it is astounding that the above mentioned authors failed to visit here, where one is received much more sincerely than in neighbouring Dzamthang—although the area officially is also not open to foreigners.⁴ It is astounding because within this county's bounds, currently is found the largest Lamaist monastic institution in the entire world—the Serthang Buddhist Academy of the Five Higher Sciences (Chin. *Seda Larong Wuming Foxueyuan*).

The leading figure of this institution, Jigme Phüntso, mostly referred to as Khempo Jigphün, is renowned throughout Tibet, especially in Amdo and Kham. The fame of his academy has come to the knowledge of the Dalai Lama and his entourage in Dharamsala.⁵ Therefore it is all the more amazing that the rest of the world, including Tibetans in exile as well as Tibet support groups in the West, seem to ignore totally the importance of the academy and of the work of its foremost lama.⁶

7.1. The Buddhist Academy of Serthang Larung Ngarig Nangten Lobling (Larung Gar)

Serta county is situated in the northern part of Kandse Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and is the only county of Kandse considered to be a part of Amdo. Its administrative seat, Serkhog (Chin. *Seke*), may be reached from Drango (Chin. *Luhuo Xian*), 150 km where a road branches off from the Chengdu-Lhasa Highway (northern route, circa 650 km from Chengdu) and leads northward into the valley of the river Ser Chu. This is a tributary of the Do Chu, which is why Serkhog may also be reached from either Dzamthang (160 km) or Ngawa's prefectural seat of Barkham (270 km). The monastic institution of Serthang Larung Ngarig Nangten Lobling (*gser thang bla rung lnga rig nang bstan slob gling*) lies some 25 km to the southeast of Serta's county seat, i.e. before it is reached. Although the monastic institution is not visible from the main road, the side-track leading to the academy (2.5 km) is easily noticed. A dozen white *chörten* lead up to the start of Larung valley, where a brick gate structure marks the entrance into the sacred circuit.

The institute was founded where Khempo Jigphün once had 'built a personal hermitage at the site, though no community or institution ever developed there' (Germano),⁷ the Hermitage of Freedom within the Great Esoteric Light Body (*gsang chen 'od skur grol ba'i dben khrod*). According to information given on site, a small gumpa existed here about a century ago, being inhabited by some 30 to 40 monks, at the most 100 monks at its heyday.⁸ However that may be, the existence of the academy and its remarkable size is unique and has no equivalent in Tibet's modern history. The reason for the academy's rapid growth is likely to have its root in the feeling of many monks that it is still very difficult to gain a decent religious education in Tibet today.⁹ As Khempo Jigphün is famed for being a teacher who

is unusually proficient in the Great Perfection (Dzogchen) tradition of Tantric Buddhism and a prolific tertön,¹⁰ the educational institution he founded attracted large numbers of students:

Here the sacred landscape of Tibet was being revived in the radical way that only Ter can, and religious energy thus appeared centripetal in marked contrast to the alienated state in which institutionalized Buddhism finds itself in many parts of Tibet. Khempo Jigphun has created a significant countermovement reestablishing the centre of gravity within Tibet herself. ... Not only has he created an academic environment that in some ways surpasses what is available in refugee monasteries, but he has also managed to project an intellectual, mythic, and charismatic presence capable of competing with any of the Great Nyingma lamas now living or recently deceased in exile.¹¹

Hence, the charisma of Jigme Phüntshog can only be compared to that of the most famous Tibetan lamas in exile, as it effects Chinese and Europeans besides the Tibetan faithful. Added to this is the miraculous nature of many of the stories told about him and his life. The details of his birth in 1933 are described by extraordinary events which remind one of Buddha Shakyamuni's birth:

It is said that he was born with consummate ease with his feet first and head unbent, with the placenta sac draped around his left shoulder like a monastic robe. He then sat up by his own power, opened his eyes, and said Mañjuśrī's personal mantra, *Om a ra pa tsa na dhih*, seven or eight times.¹²

He was soon recognized as the reincarnation of the famous treasure-finder Lerab Lingpa (*las rab gling pa*), Tertön Sogyal,¹³ who was an important proponent of the 19th century Rime Movement. Khempo Jigphün therefore is not only seen as a manifestation of the bodhisattva Manjushri, but also represents one of three current incarnation lines of Lerab Lingpa, another one being the founder of the Rigpa Fellowship, Sogyal Rimpoche.¹⁴ Already in his early years Khempo Jigphün became well known for his psychic powers and his intellectual realization. During the wicked period of the Cultural Revolution he escaped imprisonment and torture, constantly carrying on his religious activities, partly by

remaining in isolated places throughout the political and social turmoil. Relying on contemplative involvements to the warrior-hero King Gesar and on his assistance, Khempo Jigphün continued to give empowerments, teach texts and transmit practices to a limited circle of students. Trusting in this group of disciples, he put into action his plans for a monastic institution as soon as the period of liberalization followed the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1980 he started with some 30 pupils. Khempo Jigphün's explicit purpose of reviving Buddhist scholarship and meditation was sanctioned by a state decree in 1982, and in 1985 the establishment of the academy was officially authorized. Two years later followed the official inauguration by the Panchen Lama.¹⁵

The place where Khempo Jigphün founded his monastic institution was chosen according to a prophecy of Dodrub Künsang Shenphen (1745-1821), the root-lama of a famous line of Nyingmapa reincarnations in the Ngolok-Seta realm. The latter predicted an emanation of the glorious Padma-sambhava named Jigme to foster the exoteric and Tantric teachings 'in the *La* valley by the *Ser nga dam* deity'. Thus, Khempo established his academy in *Serta* county, located in a valley nestled in between the two sacred mountains of *Ngalataktse* and *Damchen*: the valley therefore was predestined to be suitable (*rung*) for spiritual masters (*lama*): *La(ma)rung*.¹⁶

When entering the Larung valley, there are some houses looking like a village, amidst them a small pagoda-like lhakhang surrounded by two manikhang. The temple structure's outer appearance is three-layered and has the feature of a miniature Tsanden Hwaré Temple (Sangdog Pelri).¹⁷ In the inside a corridor of prayer-wheels goes around, thus showing its plan to offer pilgrims a circumambulation circuit. This part of the valley especially serves the lay population of the area. It is the place where formerly a Tibetan mortician (who carried out the Tibetan sky burial) lived with his family.¹⁸

The actual monastic city starts one and a half kilometres further up, where the houses of nuns and monks gradually fill the bottom and slopes of the valley. The hills, which during the summer abound in good grass and a rich variety of flowers, are considered sacred and called *Riwo Tsenga* (*ri bo rtse lnga*). This is the Tibetan name of China's holy Buddhist mountain, Wutai Shan, of the bodhisattva

Manjushri, who is closely associated with wisdom, scholarship and accordingly, with monastic learning. Therefore Manjushri is most appropriate to bridge the distance between Tibetan and Han-Chinese cultures. Jigme Phüntshog's pilgrimage to Wutai Shan in North China may be seen as another symbol of this kind. Furthermore, the worship of this bodhisattva helps to stress Khempo's ecumenical orientation (Rime), since his teaching is mainly based on the writings of Longchenpa (1308-1363), Sakya Pandita (1182-1251), and Tsongkhapa (1357-1419).¹⁹ These masters are widely seen as the three main manifestations of Manjushri, so that the use of their authoritative corpuses and the related cult of the bodhisattva brings about 'an important factor in transcending monastic sectarian boundaries' (Germano).²⁰

Serthang Ling is more often called Larung Gar by common people, thus avoiding the notion of a religious centre that is explicitly monastic in constitution. On the whole it is quite obvious that it is not just a lamasery, as individuals are free to come and go without any formal membership process, as long as they adhered to the monastic behavioural norms that Khempo insisted on.²¹ For classifying the academy as a mountain hermitage (*ri khrod*) rather than a lamasery, Khempo's reasons may be both of a political nature and from his ecumenical orientation. Instead of establishing his own distinctive tradition he thus tries to overcome the characteristic Tibetan emphasis on sectarian continuity and lineage (*brgyud pa*).²²

The lower half of Larung Gar makes up a nunnery which was established and especially furthered by Khempo Jigphün, while the upper half consists of the main teaching complex and the living quarters of the monks. Since Khempo argues that nuns have only a few possibilities to get higher religious training, he felt the need to establish this nunnery, which is headed by his young niece, Ani Müntsho. Four older tulkus were assigned to teach the nuns only. Initially the nuns received Khempo's empowerments, but only seldom received his teachings. In 1991 he had a large assembly hall constructed. There both nuns and monks are equally entitled to listen, simultaneously, to his instructions.

The whole Larung valley thus has developed into a huge monastic university of which the population by far exceeds the number of inhabitants in the ad-

ministrative centre of the county (Serkhog). The growth of Serthang Ling within a decade is absolutely unheard of and still has not come to an end. As Khempo Jigphün started with a handful of students in 1985, one could imagine that the peak would have been reached after 1990 when approximately 3,000 monks and nuns were living there.²³ Yet by 1997 the number of students had already doubled.²⁴ However, a great many of the monks are not registered in Serta as they reside there only during the time of their studies at Larung Gar:

Individuals thus come to the academy for an indefinite period without changing previous monastic affiliations or continually travel back and forth between their home monasteries and Larung. Generally the population is divided among all the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism, though a majority are affiliated with the Nyingma sect. Roughly 65 percent of the resident population are Nyingma, 20 percent Kagyü, 10 percent Sakya, 5 percent Geluk, with a few from the Bon and Jonang lineages. During major initiatory rituals representatives of all sects tend to congregate temporarily in great numbers. The centre has thus functioned to inculcate a sense of the ecumenical movement, since in addition to Khempo's eclectic teachings drawing from all Buddhist sectarian traditions, monks from different areas, traditions, and sects spend lengthy periods together in a shared environment.²⁵

According to the institute's own information leaflet²⁶ its educational system generally provides for a six year curriculum, but in a few instances also for one of twelve years. At the successful completion of the rigorous academic syllabus the graduate is granted a khempo degree, being analogous to the Gelugpa's geshe degree and to a Western doctorate. The explicit use of the term khempo (*mkhan po*)²⁷ somehow demonstrates the academy's claim and concern for creating a fresh monastic elite in Tibet. Traditionally abbots in Amdo were invited to take the most honourable khempo position because of their extraordinary scholarship and blameless high repute. Deemed to be the spiritual leaders of their monasteries, the khempos were believed 'to possess the power to reform the behaviour of the lamas [monks] and to urge even stricter observance of the rules' (Schram).²⁸ This is exactly Khempo Jigphün's

prime objective, since monastic discipline (which is to include celibacy) and serious study of classic Buddhist texts figure prominently in his vision of a revived Buddhist tradition in modern Tibet.²⁹ Graduates of Larung Gar return to their home monasteries where they teach and take on the duty to promote monastic discipline. Some of them may also remain at Khempo Jigphün's academy to become teachers and support his work. By 1993, 170 disciples had graduated at a high level and some 300 at a middle level, most of whom were monks aged around 25 to 35.

The curriculum at the Larung Academy covers an extensive educational framework, including departments for Tibetan culture in general, for Buddhist philosophy and related subjects (dialectics), Tantric studies and a special teaching department for the Buddhist instruction of Han-Chinese.³⁰ The programme involves systematic study of a large body of texts in many genres, critical analysis and evaluative procedures. Tibetan monks are expected to train their skills in painting, medicine, grammar, poetry, history, astrology and knowledge of calendars, language and translation, epistemology, as well as knowledge of the philosophical systems of Madhyamaka and Cittamatra, the classic Tantras, and the Great Perfection (Dzogchen).³¹

Khempo Jigphün did not want his institution to become a monastery, or accept annual subsidies from the government. He therefore keeps himself largely independent from engaging in political lectures, whilst upholding a mainly religious atmosphere with few political overtones. This secures Larung Gar a position with a very limited number of restrictions. Although it was said some tensions existed between Khempo and certain authorities, Jigme Phüntshog can hold mid-level official political positions. As in traditional Tibet (and traditional China), he could perform a role as a mediator in political disputes.³² Still Larung Gar has become a true monastic city, with separate living quarters for monks (upper half) and nuns (lower part of the valley). While most of the monks, as observed above, are not permanent residents, the nuns generally are.

The nunnery has an assembly hall of its own, located in the middle part of its upper end. It was named Nyimtsho Rimpoche Gompa.³³ From afar its dukhang can easily be recognized by a square mandala-like layout. The wide structure rises pyra-

midally to a tiny third floor covered by a small yellow pavilion-roof. In 1997 the fittings were still very basic with a central image of Padmasambhava and some Chinese paintings decorating the walls. Several idols are in glass shrines on both sides of the altar, one depicting the 'White Old Man', Gampo Karpo (*sgam* or *rgan po dkar po*), who is quite a popular protector deity among Tibetan and Mongolian faithful.³⁴

A little bit further up from the nunnery's assembly hall, we find a complex which serves both temporary visitors and the Chinese-speaking community of the faithful. Han-Chinese monks and nuns as well as lay disciples reside here while staying in Larung Gar. In 1996 the number of Han disciples staying at the academy amounted to 300. Four Tibetan tulkus took them under their special care, translating Khempo's teachings into Chinese and instructing them in Chinese. The Han-Chinese are also studying Tibetan language in order to read the scriptures in the authoritative Tibetan form. Their large assembly hall with an orange-coloured tiled roof is well fitted, although it has no murals yet. The wooden beams are painted properly, and beautiful fabrics adorn the walls. Along the side and back walls numerous porcelain statues in eight rows above each other depict Marpa Rimpoche, an important teacher who was active in the area almost a century ago. A few bronze images are set up in front of a central Padmasambhava; there is also an older one of Shakyamuni.

The undoubted core of Larung Gar is a huge and massive stone structure which from the outside looks like a fortress, reflecting the popular designation—*gar* (*sgar*)—is well founded.³⁵ Only the second floor of the front side has windows and the compact form of the building is emphasized by the residential quarters towering above. After passing through the tall gate, above which a long signboard gives the name of the academy—*Seda Larong Wuming Foxueyuan*—in white Chinese characters, one enters a spacious courtyard area with an atmosphere of openness due to the verandas overlooking it. This is the place where Khempo Jigphün teaches his followers. Though men and women students attend at the same time, they are separated by assigning them to the two opposite halves of the courtyard with their respective verandas and balconies. It is said that every day at four o'clock in the morning, Larung's head lama starts his lectures which are attended by—hard to imag-

ine—some 5,000 people. The Khempo, in his status as Tertön Sogyal's reincarnation, stands for the ecumenical Rime concept of a non-partisan intellectual trend of all Lamaist sects, with the exception of the Gelugpa, to whose predominance Rime was a reaction. Thus, to overcome the sectarian divisions among those Tibetan Buddhist traditions, forming an academy open to all was a more significant step than establishing a monastery for his specific order (Nyingmapa). Students of all traditions, even including Gelugpa monks, are therefore found in Larung Gar listening to Khempo's teachings.

Above and adjacent to the main teaching court a new assembly hall was built in 1996-1997. It is a large two-storeyed complex painted in red, with two rows of windows. It is topped by a third floor sanctuary carrying a massive Chinese gabled and hipped roof (Chin. *xieshan wuding*) covered with glazed yellow tiles. This building is already part of the upper section and therefore serves the monks for their religious services. All the main temple halls are situated at the bottom of the valley just facing a small stream, not in itself a water supply for the needs of such a large community. They are surrounded by an ocean of ordinary residential buildings constructed of wood, mostly simple log huts, stones or mud being used only occasionally. There is one exceptional temple building situated on the ridge on the northern upper end of the monastic complex. It is a concrete structure shaped like a *chörten*, the base of which is an octagonal first floor with 48 doors and windows. It is constantly being circumambulated by pilgrims on the outside only, as the doors open into separate inner chambers³⁶ rather than a corridor. The mandala layout of the temple is obvious. There appear to be Buddhist sculptures on the colourful first roof, while the three tiled roofs of the upper and inner segment of the mandala are covered with a gilded Dharma wheel, gazelle figures, gyaltschen, and topped by a golden ganjira, meant to symbolize the mandala's palace. Similar buildings of other monasteries in the Ngolok-Seta region would suggest that it is another one of the popular architectural interpretations of Padmasambhava's Sangdog Pelri paradise.³⁷

The building of the above-mentioned temple marks a new step in the development of Larung Gar. Until then developing the propagation of the Doctrine only was stressed. Monastic education was strengthened while the fittings of temple buildings and assembly halls were of rather minor significance. In the mean-

time the teaching of the Doctrine developed to an amazingly high degree, due to the extraordinary reputation of Khempo Jigme Phüntso. This fame is based on his stressing both monastic discipline and scholarship, especially among monks and nuns. However, for the Tibetan faithful in general his celebrity is probably due to his being a modern tertön, 'since no contemporary Tertön is more renowned than Khempo Jikphun' (Germano).³⁸ This tradition of miraculous treasure-finding is particularly related to the Nyingmapa tradition, which has the richest Terma tradition. Having started in the 11th century it has developed into a major feature of the Nyingmapa tradition's teaching and practice.

The order of the Nyingmapa and other Red sects are represented most heavily in the eastern part of the Tibetan Highland, as a result of the historical discrimination by the Gelugpa in central Tibet. Beginning in the 17th century tertön therefore mostly found their treasures in Amdo and Kham. The Terma tradition had become largely obsolete when Buddhism was suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, also among refugee Tibetans who were deprived of their sacred land. However, many Tibetans hid scriptures, paintings, statues, and ritual instruments when monasteries were closed down and destroyed starting in 1958-1959 and during the Cultural Revolution. The unearthing of these objects has helped revive the old tradition of the tertön, treasure-finders. Since a certain degree of liberalization has allowed the revival of Tibetan folk religion and Buddhist monasticism and teaching, the Nyingmapa—formerly well-established in eastern Tibet—are again wide-spread in southern Amdo and east-central Kham. Due to these pre-conditions 'in eastern Tibet the treasure movement revealing sacred scriptures and material items from the seemingly distant imperial past has been dramatically revitalized' (Germano).³⁹

By re-establishing the Terma tradition Jigme Phüntso secured one of several principal means for a renewal of the Nyingmapa tradition. Emphasizing scholarship, monastic discipline and the ecumenical concept, he was capable of transmitting the impulse also to other sects. His personal work has proved highly proficient, grounded in extensive miraculous discoveries, securing a multitude of philosophical treatises, poetry, manuals of contemplation, besides ritual cycles of undeniable eloquence, precision and power. Therefore it is not only his fame that spreads

far, but also the influence of his institutional network which goes beyond the Larung Academy. Initially Khempo Jigphün's work included the foundation of branch institutions in the counties of Nyarong (Chin. *Xinlong Xian*) and Dawu (*Daofu Xian*) in Kham as well as the establishment of scholastic or meditation colleges in several lamaseries. After having travelled abroad twice, with visits in Europe and North America, his celebrity has led to the foundation of an educational centre in the USA, the Larung Centre of Tantric Buddhism in New York.⁴⁰

7.2. Dündül Chörten

Whilst Larung Buddhist Academy is a leading educational institution in the Tibetan Buddhist realm, the rather prosaic county town of Serta also possesses an architectural landmark of outstanding proportions with a history of almost a century, the large 'Stupa for Subduing the Demon(s)' (*bdud 'dul mchod rten*). Standing on the edge of a river terrace at the county town's southern entrance, it overlooks the meandering river and the surrounding plain; hence formerly the locality was called Chörtenthang—the plain of the stupa. Across the street there is a small Nyingmapa monastery, Tashi Gompa, connected to the large Buddhist monument. Its mandala-like main hall has also been built after the Tsanden Hwaré model (Sangdog Pelri). The structure seems to be the original one, yet newly fitted with a main Padmasambhava image and with printed pictures decorating the walls. Within this gompa (not in the shrines) the 30 monks⁴¹ proudly keep three older bronzes, one being a reliquary *chörten* and two depicting Shakyamuni Buddha.

Chörtenthang or Dündül Chörten in Serta is near the pass where in 1940, one of the few foreign expeditions ever to have penetrated Ngolok-Seta territory was attacked and the French explorer Louis Victor Liotard killed in a fight with some bandits. His mission visited this far-off place (1940) when it was already adorned by the massive structure:

We see to our astonishment, in this apparently waste expanse, a gigantic edifice, a chortain bulbed like a muscovite steeple and high as a cathedral. Its presence in these solitudes is as unlikely as the presence of a ship in the desert. (...) This chortain [was] the biggest I ever saw in Tibetan territory. ...

In this lonely spot, more than 13,000 feet

above sea level, it is really an astounding construction. Bedded in a square socket, each side forty-five feet long, the bulbed tower with its gilded copper shaft rises a hundred feet above the ground. Why did the builders choose this site?⁴²

After the end of the Cultural Revolution the site needed to be restored. As little was known of Serta, the history of the site's foundation still lies in the dark. An extensive place, side by side with Tashi Gompa, it appears to be of the quality of a century-old place of worship. It is scattered with *chörten* or *chörten*-like structures, three-storeyed *lhotos*, flagpoles and prayer-flags arranged in many different ways. Two of these are typical features of Amdo's south and never seen in other parts of Tibet, with prayer-flags hung up like a pyramid and looking like a *chörten*, or suspended all along the entire height of a pole, thus giving the impression of a tower. The latter are often found at sky burial grounds in the Ngolok-Seta realm, though this site in Serta is not used for such a purpose. Furthermore, a multitude of small shelters (*tshakhang*) constructed of mud and wood are set amid these various structures. They are filled with an incredible quantity of *tshatshas* depicting many different Buddhist deities, such as the Green Tara, Vajrapani, or Padmasambhava. People of Serta are still adding new shrines of this kind up to the present. The author has never seen the amassing of *tshatshas* in one place on such a large scale. There is sufficient reason to believe, therefore, that the site was once an important one for a *genius loci* before it was incorporated into the Buddhist system.

Comparing old photographs⁴³ to the current structure of Dündül Chörten, one can see that the architectural framework is still the same as the old one erected in 1914.⁴⁴ It is of the classical Tibetan *chörten* type, based on a square platform. This part of the structure shelters a walkway lined with prayer-wheels. A ladder leads onto the roof of this basement, the rim of which is framed by more than 100 white and yellow stupas of a smaller size. The basement's circumference is 100 m, while the *chörten* rises up to 50 m height. It is supposed to be the highest stupa in Sichuan province.

The actual *chörten* structure, built of bricks, may be divided into five distinct sections, the first floor being of a square layout and a cubiform block that has three large doors on either side. These open into

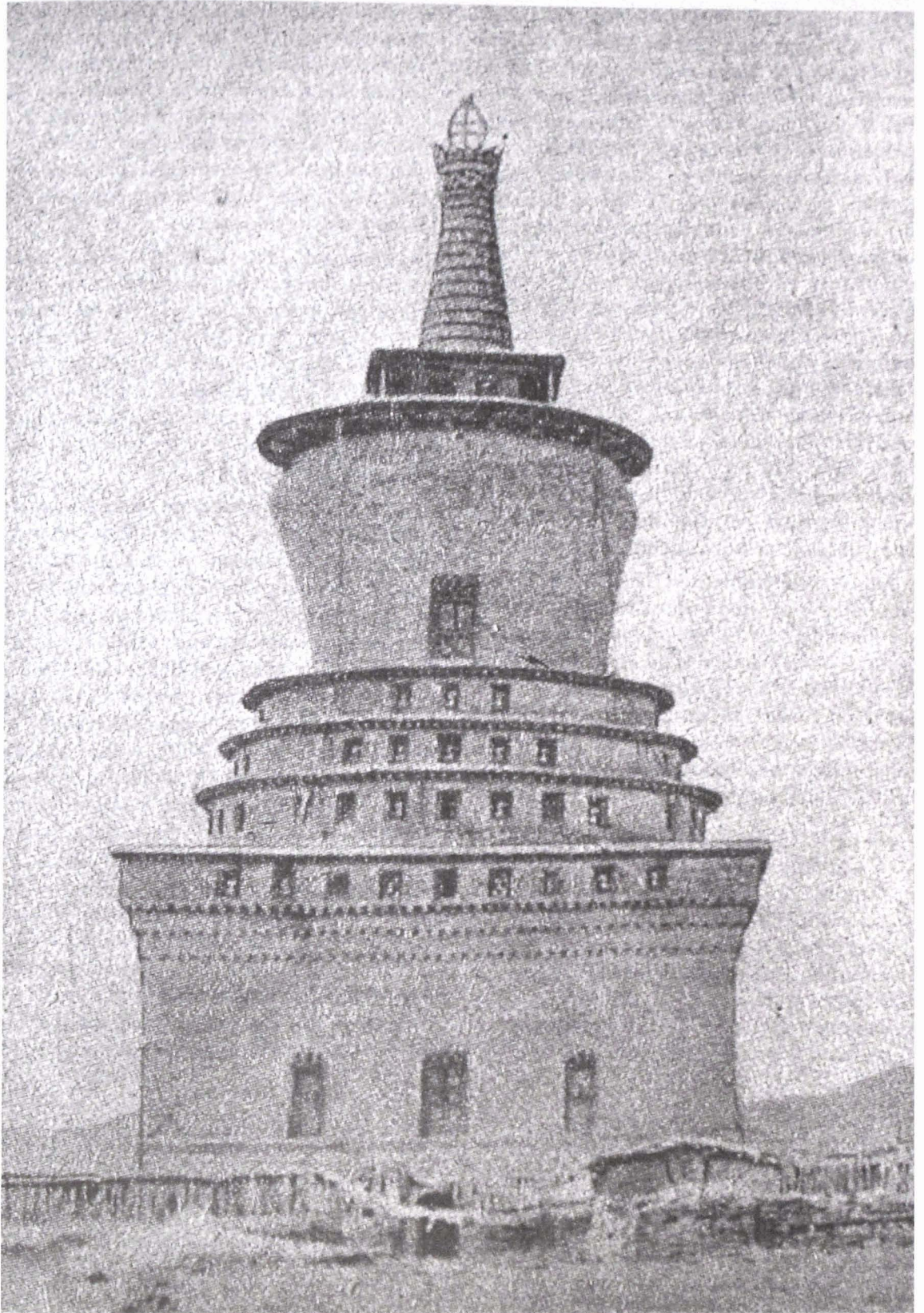


Plate 11. Chörtenthang (Dündül Chörten) in 1940 [Guibaut 1987]

small temple rooms which contain central images of Jowo Rimpoché (facing south), Buddha Shakyamuni (towards the riverside), Padmasambhava (north), and Phurba (east). This massive first floor is followed by a section arranged in three circular steps all of which have doors probably leading into smaller sanctuaries. The edifice is therefore like a *kumbum chörten*, a stupa of a hundred thousand images, illustrating the sacred path that leads to enlightenment. The underlying type of stupa differs from the central Tibetan type of *kumbum chörten*, as the deity for whom the mandala is composed in its entire structure could be a Nyingmapa design unlike those in Gyantse, Riwoche or Jonang.⁴⁵ A bell-shaped overhanging bumpa protrudes from the three terraces, with a door facing each cardinal direction. A square harmika concludes the sections containing sanctuaries, of which each is protected by a separate roof covered with glazed reddish tiles. Like with every *chörten* the top is made up by the spire, consisting of thirteen yellow loops.

Although the main part of Serta county itself is pastoral, it is not void of monasteries. First of all, the lower Ser Chu valley is a country of wealthy peasants who have built huge, fortress-like farmhouses which reflect the region's abundance in stone and wood. André Guibaut, the companion of Louis Victor Liotard, gives a description of the impressive farmhouses in the lower Ser Chu valley. His report of 1947 is still accurate today:

The houses, grouped in hamlets or small villages, are of stone and square-shaped, of fortress-like dimensions, with low doors and occasional slit windows pierced only in the upper floors to guard against attacks. ... The houses here are enormous. But their fortress-like construction gives an impression of insecurity and belies the outwardly serene appearance of this land of milk and honey.

Probably attacks here are as frequent as thunderstorms. The houses are usually perched on high eminences, easy to defend, and their thick, stone walls are pierced here and there with narrow slit windows, like loopholes. They have either two or three floors, with wooden overhanging balconies, and are topped by enormous open lofts used to store and dry the corn.⁴⁶

In between and within these picturesque rural settlements, six or seven lamaseries can be seen while driving on the main road from the Dzamthang border to Serkhog.⁴⁷ Most of these are branches of the famous Nyingmapa lamasery of Peyül in Kham, like Horshe Gön (40 km from Serkhog), Gyirngo Gompa (65 km), or Ser Lhatse Sangak Tenpe Ling, the latter already lying in the direction of Dzamthang.

The mountain range to the south marks the borderline to the Gelugpa realm of Drango in Kham, although monasteries in the northern part of Kham are predominantly adherents of the Nyingmapa order.⁴⁸ The same can be said of the grasslands to the north and west of Serkhog, where the newly rebuilt monastery of Dungkar (*dung gkar*) with 300 residents can be reached easily from the county seat. In the vast hilly grasslands, another dozen Nyingmapa lamaseries—with reportedly up to 1,000 monks at the largest of them—are either branches of Kham's Kathog or Peyül Gompas. The northwestern edge of Serta county gradually leads into Kham, by first touching Kandse and heading into Sershül counties. The latter, also named Dzachuka, is still mainly characterized by extensive pastureland. As in the southwest it is framed by the Yangtse river (Tib. *Dri Chu*, Chin. *Jinsha Jiang*) and as it touches one of the typical gorges of Kham, it is considered to be part of it.⁴⁹ Therefore, we shall consider it together with the cultural relics and monasteries in a separate volume.⁵⁰

Amdo and Tibet: common cultural features and differences

1. Tibet and its periphery

As we have seen, Amdo is in many respects, as far as ethnicity, political, economic and social organisation are concerned, a highly heterogeneous region. A distinct part of the Tibetan cultural realm, Amdo has some specific cultural features that it does not share with central Tibet or with adjacent Kham. Even Tibetan Buddhism, which is a common feature shared with Mongolians, Yugur and other nationalities bordering on Tibet, is not as universally spread across Amdo as one might assume. With the exception of the southwestern parts, the mosques of Muslim communities are spread throughout Amdo, including the central area dominated by the Gelugpa. This is due not only to the proximity of the old Silk Road caravan routes of which some branches passed through Amdo,¹ but also to the presence of a particularly strong community of several Muslim ethnic groups, namely the Hui, Salar, Dongxiang and Bao'an. Besides their influence—and of several other non-Tibetan ethnic populations—Tibetan tribes in Amdo do differ greatly from those in central Tibet, as far as their legendary, historical and material background is concerned.

Cultural differences between Amdo and central Tibet are often far more significant than those, for instance, between central Tibet and Tawang in northeastern India (Arunachal Pradesh), Tsang and Mustang in northern Nepal, or Ngari and Ladakh in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Nevertheless, the Tibetan government in exile accepts the separate geopolitical delineation of the above-mentioned Tibetan areas, while confidently maintaining that Amdo (and Kham) quite 'naturally' are an integral part of Tibet (*bod yul*).²

The world community adopted this political viewpoint without undertaking an analysis of the history of northeastern Tibet. No wonder many foreign visitors to Amdo, especially once they visit remote areas off the main roads, are astonished at being confronted with cultural peculiarities they never met in central Tibet, or which are of a different nature there. From this one may have reason to infer

that Tibetans in Amdo had undergone a stronger sinicizing than their compatriots of Ü and Tsang. It becomes obvious to many that Tibetan monasteries in northeastern Tibet have often incorporated numerous Chinese architectural features. Some of our examples (for instance in Qutan Monastery or Kumbum Jampa Ling) show that the earliest monastic foundations in Amdo followed a Chinese plan of building, with Tibetan elements integrated sooner or later. With the growing predominance of politico-religious institutions the influence of Tibetan architectural characteristics increased as well.

A second period of construction, i.e. mainly re-establishing of monasteries, was during the 19th century, when warfare between different ethnic groups as well as uprisings against the Chinese imperial power occurred frequently. It would appear that since that time, various architectural traits were appreciated and incorporated depending on the proximity to—or distance from—certain cultural centres and the abilities of the artisans undertaking the construction and decoration of the monasteries. In these circumstances both Han-Chinese crafts and even Hui Muslim wood- and stone-carving, found their way into Lamaist monasteries such as Labrang Tashi Chil. On the other hand, Amdo was also developed their craftsmanship and more than once gave birth to a synthesis of different artistic skills. Most renowned of these is the Rebgong art in the Rongwo Valley, which influenced the ornamental fittings, especially the murals, all over eastern Tibet. Rebgong-style thangkas can be found as far away as Ladakh and Spiti in Tibet's far west.

Besides this fusion of styles and cultural traits, Tibetans of Amdo upheld their own traditions and developed adaptations with special local features of so-called typically Tibetan styles not found anywhere else, or at least not in the same manner or dimension. The Amdowas' self-perception is definitely aware of their uniqueness in relation to the people of central Tibet, without doubting a strong

coherence in religious affairs. However, so long as cultural or economic matters are concerned—rather than political ones—people from Amdo usually stick to their ethnic identity and cultural singularity. That is to say Amdowas may openly state, if asked, that they are Amdowas rather than Böpas (central Tibetans). This self-confidence and consciousness

of a cultural autonomy certainly enables them to maintain the distinctiveness of their own culture—both in the face of Chinese influence and Lhasa pervasiveness.

We shall therefore conclude our appraisal of cultural monuments in northeastern Tibet with a short overview of some of these significant features.

2. Amdo: aspects of popular religion - prayer-flags, lhatos and chörten

Variations in monastic architecture are found mainly within an environment blending both Tibetan cultural traits and Amdo's ethnic variety. The monuments of popular Tibetan religion, though, express a distinctive self-perception that is still very different from that of central Tibet and other monastic core areas. This is particularly true for pastoral areas and sedentary populations in (formerly) secluded or unfrequented valleys. It seems that the religious liberalization after the end of the Cultural Revolution stressed the revival of Buddhist monasticism to such an extent that manifestations of popular beliefs were long neglected, at least in central Tibet.³ Amdo displays a rich variety of the popular prayer-flags, stone cairns and chörten, in such profusion that it appears popular religion remains more deeply rooted here than in Tibet proper. It is especially the nomadic tribes and the semi-pastoral sedentary population of Amdo's southern half who have refined and further developed the traditional symbols of nature-related popular religion, as well as the Buddhist beliefs of the populace.

Let us begin with the prayer-flag, one of the most common emblems of Tibetan Buddhist popular religion. One of its main designs shows the so-called wind-horse, *lungta* (*rlung rta*), so flags hoisted on the roofs of houses or on flagpoles in courtyards and in the steppe are often called by the same name.⁴ Erecting a *lungta*, representing good fortune, is seen as presenting an auspicious object to the local deities or spirits. Like the rebuilding of stone cairns, altars, and *chörten*, they contribute to recreating Tibet's sacred landscape. By thus honouring its spirits, gods, demons or semi-demons, the Tibetan realm is endowed with its own unequivocal character.

The *gyodar*,⁵ a special pattern of prayer-flag arrangement, is characteristic of southern Amdo. From afar it looks a little bit like a small *chörten*, or resembles a pyramid. Coming closer, one realizes that the object consists entirely of prayer-flags, hung up on strings or wires fixed to a central wooden flag-pole (*dar chen*). The prayer-flags are attached on ropes or cables radiating from the flagpole, so that smaller flags hang near the upper end and large, long bands of prayer-flags constitute the bottom line of the *gyodar*. This Meru-like composition of prayer-flags is peculiar to the grasslands of the Ngolok and the greater Ngawa region, rarely being found anywhere else.⁶

Another specific way of draping prayer-flags is found in the Ngolok prefecture of Qinghai province. Besides the ordinary ways of attaching prayer-flags (*dar*) at bridges, on branches and to brushwood set up at *lhatses*, the Ngolok also attach the prayer-flags on long strings stretched in a single line, thus giving them the appearance of a *mani-wall*⁷ (which may actually be found nearby). There are also tall flag-poles—appearing like towers—to be seen in Ngolok. With a platform fixed at about ten or more metres in height, topped by a *gyaltshen* in the centre and having smaller flagpoles in each corner, the structures are totally covered by prayer-flags, suspended all along the entire height. The impression of a tower is intensified by the square space on the ground and the decoration at the top which, besides the *gyaltshen* and the flag-poles, includes multicoloured drapery as found above entrances and windows of temple buildings. This kind of prayer-flag tower is often found at sky burial sites (*dur khrod*) in the Ngolok-Seta realm.⁸

A huge field of prayer-flags, covering an area of more than five hectares,⁹ may be the most renowned sky burial site in northeastern Tibet, as it appears in a Chinese-Tibetan movie called 'The Horse Robber'.¹⁰ This most impressive charnel ground is located on a grassy hill above Thraling Monastery in Qinghai's Darlag county. At the lower end of the large field of hoisted flags we find a raised platform overlooking the circular stones. This is where the bodies of the dead are dismembered and fed to vultures.¹¹ Paintings at the platform's rear wall depict a multitude of peaceful and wrathful deities, who are supposed to appear to the deceased during the Bardo, the intermediate state of 49 days between death and rebirth. Other obvious sky burial grounds in Amdo can be seen between Cagri Monastery and Pema county town, being an immense area covered with prayer-flags, *chörten*, *lhatse*, *tshakhang* and an altar, near Shana village of Xinghai county, and Shanglanjiao village southeast of Guide town in Thrikha.

The burial ground on a slope to the west of Rebgong's Rongwo Gönchen¹² is said to have a continual history of about one thousand years. It consists of two charnel grounds for public and monastic use, with a length of 50 and 150 m respectively, and is 50 to 100 m wide. There is a separate fire burial ground near Tongren, situated about half way between the monasteries Rongwo Gönchen and Wutun Si,¹³ which is of slightly smaller dimensions. Shana sky burial ground consists of a 200 m² platform on which rise six square heaps of piled up rocks and stone slabs. Some of the latter are inscribed with Tibetan writings. Besides, there are eight mounds filled with miniature reliefs in clay (*tsha tsha*).

Wherever roads or trails lead across mountain passes, the traveller comes upon the *lhatse* (*lha btsas*),¹⁴ rough heaps of mostly white stones to which sticks or brushwood are added. *Lungta* also flutter in the wind. Horns and skulls of yak, wild sheep, or ibex are often placed there as offerings to the local spirits. This custom is found all over Tibet, and Mongolians, Himalayan and other ethnic groups in Central Asia do this as well. As R.A. Stein¹⁵ noted, wooden replicas of weapons, especially arrows and spears, are normally found as additions to Tibetan cairns. While this has become unusual in central Tibet or Kham, it is still a typical feature of Amdo, although these weapon cairns mostly are of

a more regular type built of stone, mud, or bricks—the *lhatos*. *Lhatos*, like *lhatses* and the so-called ghost-traps,¹⁶ are for worshipping the local deities, using all means to prevent them from doing evil. The people's purpose has been plainly stated as 'restraining and imprisoning the deities' (Hummel):

The Buddhist symbols involved in the cairns (...) are implicitly directed to this end. The cairns are called the castles of gods, but the gods are expected to stay there and give no trouble in return for being provided with a home and regular offerings.¹⁷

In northeast Tibet, *lhatos* as votive cairns are sometimes large square-built altars, surmounted by substantial bundles of brushwood, the thin sticks of the brushwood being covered with offerings of coloured flags printed with mantras (*lungta*). Some imposing examples of such *lhatos* can be seen near Tongren in Qinghai's Rongwo valley.

Hermanns¹⁸ mentioned a comprehensive term specifically tied to the situation in Amdo, *lha tho yor*. It corresponds to a flat stage for sacrifices and to stone altars, especially if they were combined with a tree or column. Larger structures were erected as a 'ghosts' castle' or 'fortress of the ghosts' (*dpa mkhar*), for instance in reverence for the mountain god Amnye Machen (Machen Pomra). Being a powerful warrior-god, it was especially the nomadic tribes, like the Ngolok, who had to sacrifice weapons to him (and formerly horses as well). The deep-rooted belief in Amnye Machen as their ancestor and the close attachment to the saga of heroic King Gesar, both traditions full of martial traits, have kept alive the warrior background of many Amdowas. Therefore we can still see many *lhatses* and *lhatos* with plentiful arrows and spears persisting on the round-shaped obos, as the offering sites are called in areas of Mongolian settlement or influence.¹⁹

Examples of these arrow-*lhatos* and obos can be found all over Amdo, be it in Qinghai, Gansu or northernmost Sichuan (both in Tagtshang Lhamo and Ngawa's Kirti Gompa, for instance). Chinese Tibetologist Li Anche also described offering ceremonies in the sedentary Labrang region of southern Gansu:

Apart from the offering of arrows (*lab-tse*) to the mountain god, Grandfather Niangchen, ... which is an occasion for most of the people in the district of Bla-bran [Labrang], the

people of “the thirteen villages” [under Labrang jurisdiction] have a more local god, to whose quiver they add arrows on the eleventh day of the fourth moon. All the able-bodied men of these villages make a pilgrimage on that day to this local mountain god together with the representatives of the “eighteen residences of Living Buddhas”, of the residence of Hjam-dbyans [Jamyang Lama], of the monastery and the six colleges, and the particular officers such as the monastery treasurer, the steward of the Mongol prince, the Dean of Studies, the Dean of Disciple, the Chanting Conductor, and the elder of the Executive Council.²⁰

This description dating from the first half of the 20th century demonstrates that the belief in the old local deities was also taken very seriously by the high lamas of Buddhist monasteries.²¹ Corresponding to the abundance of local spirits and mountain gods and the deep-rooted faith of the populace, their symbols are still very apparent in the sacred landscape of Amdo in Tibet’s northeast. The annual offering of arrows had to be carried out regularly, with time differing according to the mythical local traditions. Depending on the composition of the inhabited natural realm, each tribe could have its own mountain god, or several tribes shared a more important one. For all of them the ceremony, still held today, consists of making sharpened poles in bright colours, which can be several metres long. Affixed with yak-hair cords, along with prayer-flags and tufts of wool symbolizing luck and longevity, these are planted in a heap of stones, a *lhato* or obo, on the top of the respective mountain—or other sacred places.²²

Both the ceremony and the arrow (*mda’ rgod*) have their symbolism. The ritual has a socio-mythical background, an expression of the participants placing themselves under the mountain deity’s protection and also integrally within the tribal community. The symbolism of the arrow as a magical tool has been thoroughly discussed by Hummel.²³ It is seen as an emblem of virility, a possessor of cosmic powers which bring fertility and wealth, prayed for when planting the arrows into the mountain cairns.

The most impressive collection of arrows, prayer-flags and cairns the author has ever seen was at the roadside between Dogongma Monastery and Pema county town in Ngolok Prefecture. From the foot of a grassy slope a dozen or so of such cairns

line up, ascending the steep hill. All of these *lhatses* or *lhatos* are carefully put together with stone slabs, looking like carefully laid bricks. White stones are placed on the rim, while the core of the rectangular cairns holds a multitude of colourful arrows. It surely is a major site for sacred Nyenpo Yutse (*gnyan po g.yu rtse*), the holy Ngolok mountain.

Another sacred site of obscure origin is passed when heading north from Hongyuan (Mewa county), reached after 20 km near Amo Khelkhug (*a mo mkhal khug*) village. In the middle of the flat grassland there are 64 white *chörten* of about six metres height, all of them arranged in eight parallel rows. Pastoralists classified the site as a *chösden*,²⁴ a designation that apparently marks the place as a religious (*chos*) area. Flanking the 64 *chörten* on one side is a large field with numerous gyodar (pyramidally shaped or tent-like prayer-flag arrangements) and *mani*-walls. The front side of the section is marked by a large low cairn of grey and white gravel, topped by some flagstones bearing the ubiquitous mantra *om mani padme hum*. Although *chörten* are a very common sight in Tibet, and can be seen in plenty all over Amdo, this *chösden*, a throng of 64 stupas, has been the only such site heard of and seen so far. Remarkably it is not adjacent to any monastery, though the presence of a prayer-flag and *mani*-stone field of similar dimension suggests a traditional *dokha* to be the origin of the site.

Dokha (*rdo kha*) ordinarily designates a vein in a stone and can mean an actual stone side or face.²⁵ In Amdo this term is often used to refer to ritually significant spots of popular belief, be it sites relating to mountain deities, places where lamas have taught, or shamans have performed ceremonies to conjure rain or exorcize evil. These places were and are marked by placing stones at the particular spots, with the passage of time forming a massed heap, named *dokha*. Adding brushwood and prayer-flags, *lhatses* and *lhatos* come into being, while at other places altars may be erected, *chörten* or *mani*-stones and walls are added. Thus the *dokha* can expand to become a religious site of a remarkable size, sometimes eventually leading to the formation of monastic institutions, ordinarily beginning as tent camp monasteries. We have presented such examples in Amdo’s Ngolok region where this kind of development has occurred in the near past: Tshowar Karche *Dokha*, situated on the western

shore of Lake Ngoring, and Donggyü *Dokha* Gön in Gande county both still bear the appellation of a *dokha* in their name.²⁶

Due to the complexity of the sites' features they are not easily classified. The various types of cairns, architectural structures like *lhatos* and *chörten* mix with patterns of prayer-flags, *mani*-walls (*mendong*), *manikhang*, *lhakhang* and sometimes even monasteries. This distinctive blend is something seemingly typical for Amdo, and therefore gives the northeastern region of Tibet some special characteristics.

This is also true for *mani*-walls, *mendong*, some of which do not simply resemble their central Tibetan or Ladakhi counterparts—long, regular heaps of engraved *mani* stones—but are distinct 'sutra walls'. Again they are a feature mainly appearing within the realm of the Ngolok pastoralists, the northernmost being found in the western tip of Rebgong's Malho Prefecture (Hainan Zhou, above Hor Gumpa), others in Gande and Pema counties (Donggyü *Dokha* Gön, Jagri Gön) in Ngolok, and some examples in Dzikhog of Ngawa's Dzamthang county (at Bangtuo Monastery).²⁷

The rich religious culture of Amdo thus embraces all stages of religious rites and sites originating from pre-Buddhist faiths, beginning with simple cairns through *lhatos*, *dokhas*, *chörten*, hermitages, monasteries up to huge lamaseries which retained both spiritual leadership and political control. Although being rooted in central Tibetan monastic traditions, these monastic institutions often developed their own Amdo characteristics. Although many cultural monuments—in the Tibetan realm principally monasteries and temples—did not survive the arduous transition from old Tibetan society into the modern world, on the one hand some did survive all the same, and on the other hand, Tibetans in Amdo have found a most interesting and attractive way to revive and

revitalize their religious culture. Hence, in this situation, there are older cultural relics still to be (re-) discovered, whilst the opportunity exists to observe the restructuring and reshaping of a traditionally oriented though modernizing Tibetan civilization, creating cultural monuments in its own right.

The same happened to the smaller sacred sites which once in a while offer an Amdo variation of the central Tibetan theme. We experienced this when discovering the peculiar structures of the Milarepa towers in Pema (Qinghai), Serta, and Dzamthang, producing a somehow standardized architectural form which until recently was believed to exist at the original site in southern Tibet's Serkhar Guthog only, and when observing the big diversity in building stupas (*chörten*), both in size, arrangement and appearance. While only three of old Tibet's famous Kumbum *chörten* survived the Cultural Revolution to the present, we find an energetic Amdo population reviving this architectural tradition. Of course, the economic development of the post-1978 period was an important pre-condition, as it could set free both large monetary funds and the possibility of a voluntary labour force offered to the monastic communities. Now we have to revise our former image of a Kumbum *chörten*, i.e. temple-sized stupas which physically represent the concept of the path to enlightenment. Those in central Tibet have their typical form and those in Amdo have their own. Again, with examples of the 'stupas of a hundred thousand images' in Labrang, Tagtshang Lhamo, Ngawa, and Serta, we have to acknowledge that the people of Amdo have in no way stopped providing fresh cultural impulses to the overall expression of Tibetan culture, albeit on their own terms. This is not only true for Amdo, but also for other parts of eastern Tibet, as will be shown in a separate volume on the cultural monuments of Kham.

Concluding Remarks

The introductory notes mention that in modern sources dealing with Tibet's history people from Amdo are sometimes mistaken for Khampas. We have to admit that there are certain regions in eastern Tibet where it is rather unclear who they should be placed with. One major region where we had such difficulties is Sungchu (*zung chu*), also sometimes called Amdo Sharkhog, generally identified with the Chinese administrative unit of modern Songpan county.¹ The problem we are faced with now is, that Kham reaches further north on the inner part of the plateau than in the east, whereas Amdo occupies some areas in northern Sichuan province—as said in the chapter 'Introduction to Tibet's Cultural Provinces Amdo and Kham'.

Historical reasons may play a key role in the distinction of what is a part of Amdo and what belongs to Kham, but they do not necessarily make decisive delineations. For general purposes we looked at the river systems which dominate the two areas, defining Amdo as belonging to the river system of the Ma Chu and surrounding high plateau steppes and Kham as occupying that part of the Tibetan Plateau that is characterized by deep gorges cut by China's largest river—Chang Jiang (Yangtze; Dri Chu in Tibetan)—and its tributaries.

However, the populations of those areas have their own perception of where they do or do not belong. At the fringes and in the circumference of ethnic Tibet the delineation is often not very clear. We have therefore included in this volume all parts of Kanlho (South Gannan), although people in its southeasternmost areas, especially Drugchu and Thewo, when we asked them about this, mostly saw themselves as Khampas and not as Amdowas. Strange as it is, the above-mentioned Sungchu—extending to the south of that Khampa area—is also called Amdo Sharkhog in Tibetan, thus demonstrating its affiliation with Tibet's northeastern cultural province.

In the introduction we already discussed the difficulties delineating Amdo and Kham from each other. Some old written sources divided Amdo into an upper—*mdo stod*—and a lower Amdo—*mdo smad*—with upper Amdo taken to comprise the headwaters of the river Ma Chu, and lower Amdo to lie to the east and southeast of the Ma Chu, between the river Tao He and the Min Shan mountain range. With other sources using *mdo smad* for Kham it can be easily understood that the border zones between nowadays what is considered as Amdo and what as Kham may be (mis-)taken as belonging to either region. (Cp. Map 2) In the light of the old designation Do-kham (*mdo khams*) this differentiation is not that important. Still, we have to set linear boundaries for our project, since it is published in several volumes.

With two volumes on the cultural monuments of Amdo completed, including certain southern Amdo areas where some people designate themselves as Khampas, the valley region of Sharkhog rather fits in to the next volume on Kham and Gyarong, for it lies even further south and has very close ties to the affiliated rugged realm of Gyarong. This is a classic transitional zone, both in terms of geography and ethnic composition, where trade relations and economic activities of nomads and farmers have created a region with its own distinctive features. With upper Sharkhog—being the classic pastureland of the nomadic tribes in the high-lying grasslands to the west and northwest of Songpan—included in this volume,² we have decided to deal with lower Sharkhog (Songpan town proper and neighbouring mountain valleys) together with Gyarong—to which it is directly connected by way of the Min River valley—and eastern Kham.³ This decision may arouse objections, but for a variety of reasons we considered it to be essential.

We sincerely hope our readers may excuse inconveniences arising from this somewhat controversial delineation of Amdo from Kham, as

well as any errors and inaccuracies which may be present in a voluminous work of this kind. Our objective and hope was to produce a synoptical work that provides a general introduction to Amdo and Kham, besides a deeper insight into the culture of its people, and a foundation for future research and study of the historical monuments and cultures of east Tibetans.

Photographs

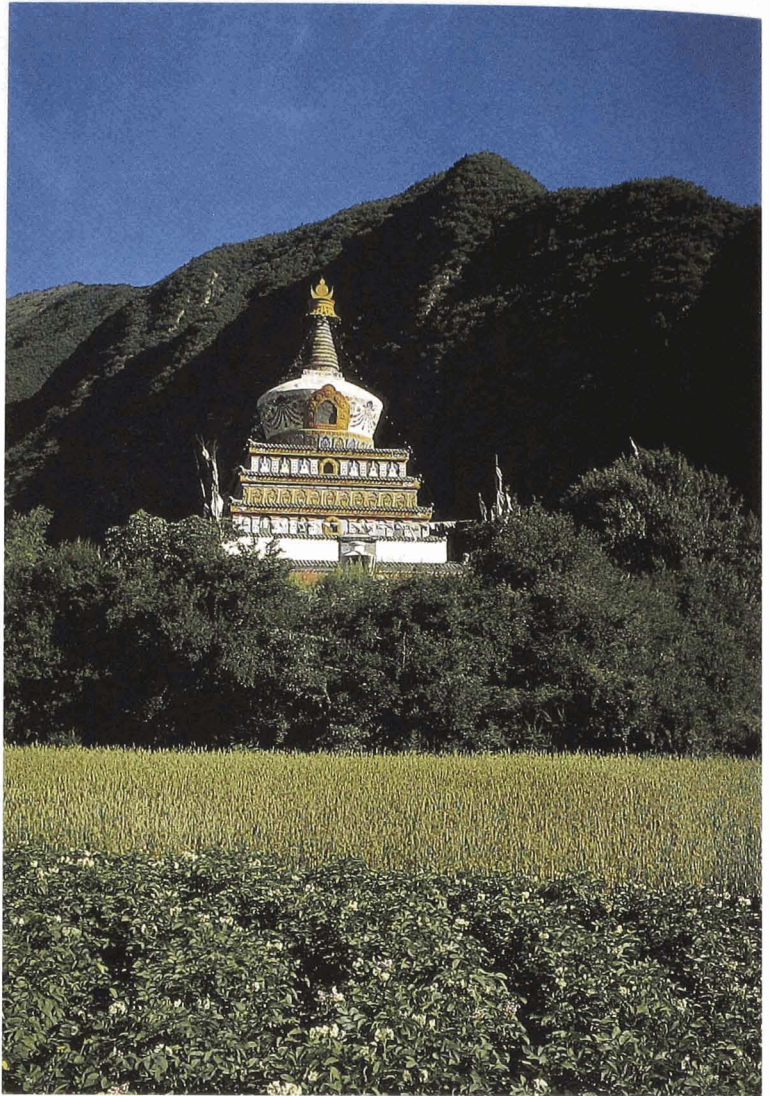


1. Old written sources divide northeast Tibet into an upper and a lower Amdo with lower Amdo considered to lie to the east and southeast of the Ma Chu (Yellow River). Typical of Lower Amdo are fertile hills—here near the village Hongya Cun in the south of Qinghai's Ping'an county.



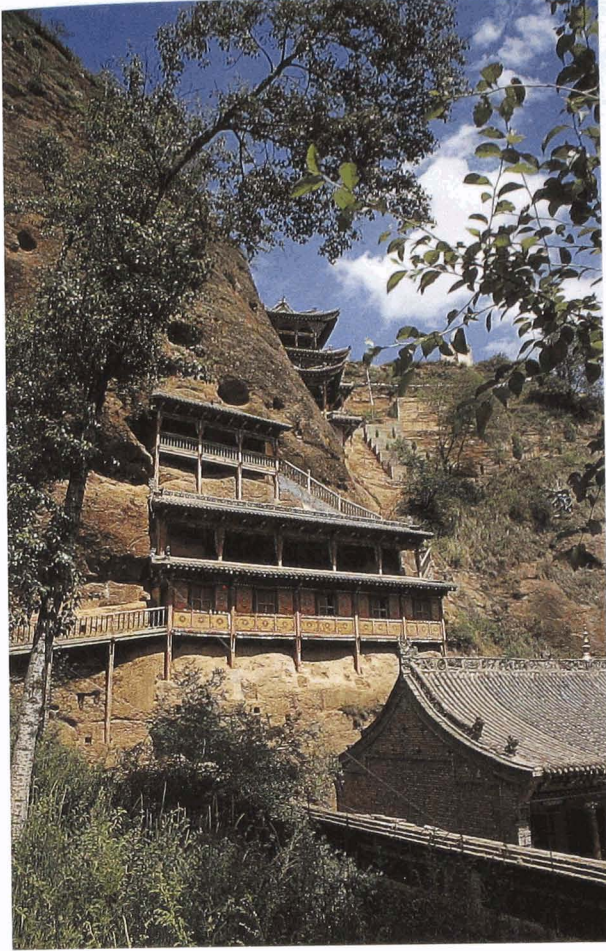
2. The eastern parts of Amdo show the widespread influence of Chinese culture seen in various aspects of Tibetan society. The 14th Dalai Lama's birthplace in Taktser (Chin. *Hongya Cun*), for example, is a typical house of a landlord family in old China.

3. The main landmark on the way between the Hui Muslim Linxia district to Labrang in the Tibetan Kanlho Prefecture is a big white *stupa*, Chörten Karpo.



4. Pastureland up the valley from Xiahe-Labrang.



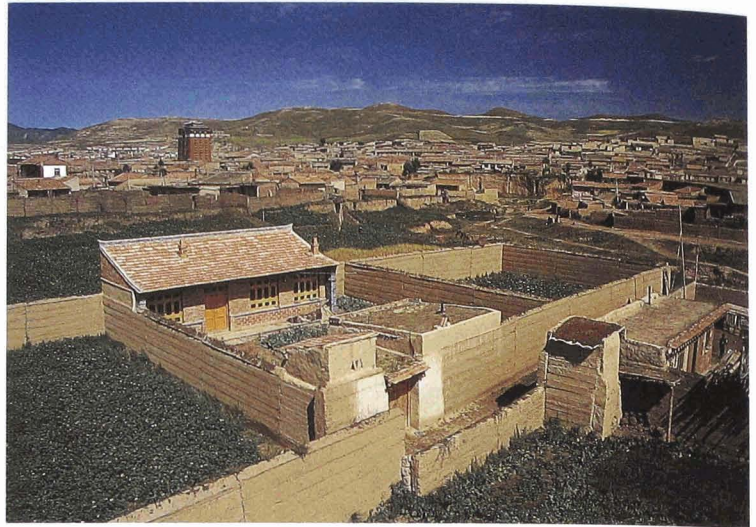


5. Shadong Ritro (Chin. *Xiajun Si*), one of the typical Chinese-style lamaseries in central Amdo, is the place where the 4th Karmapa received the *upasaka* vows of a three-year-old novice who later became known as Tsongkhapa.



6. Remains of murals in the monastery of Shadong Ritro.

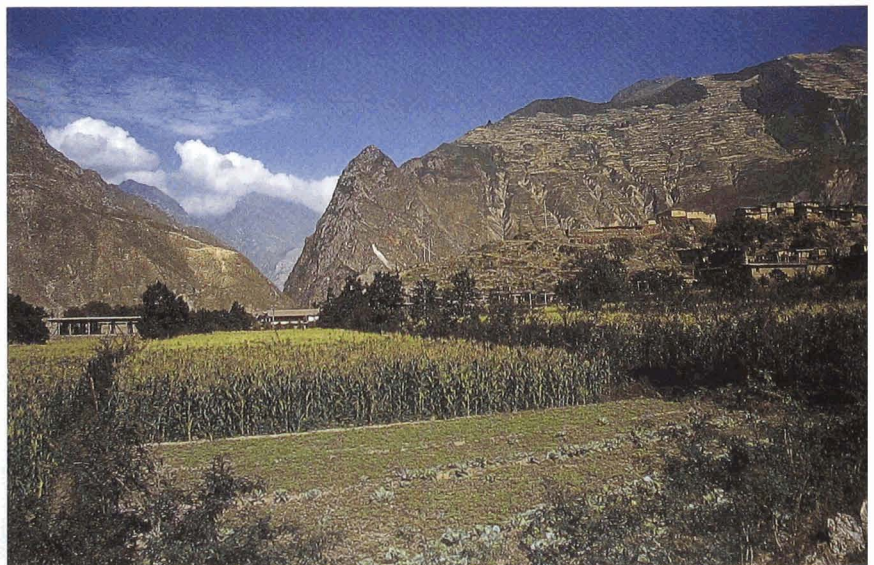
7. The old part of Heitso, capital of Kanlho Prefecture in south Gansu, consists of adobe houses as found typically in China's northwest and lower Amdo.



8. Fertile valleys north and east of Heitso offer Tibetan farmers a good basis of life.

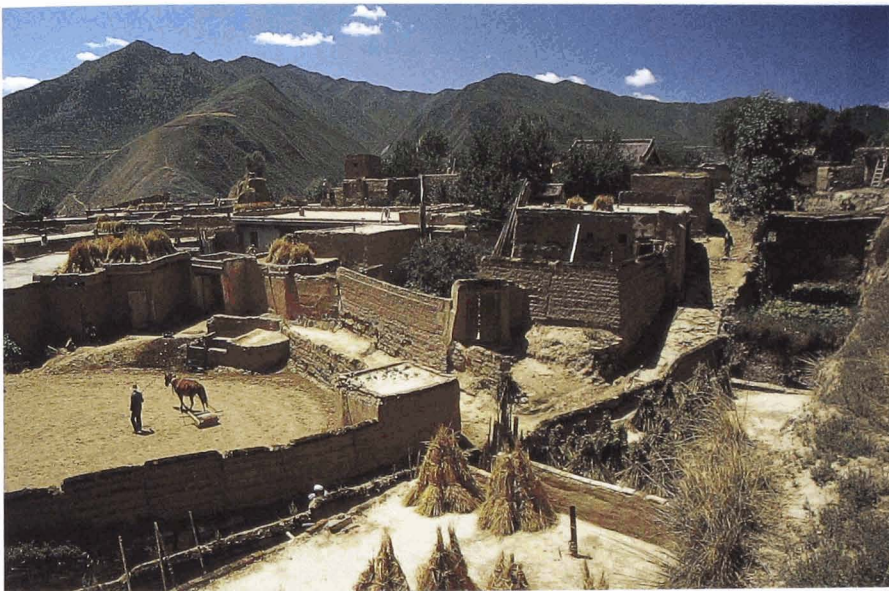


9. The lower valley of the river Drug Chu (Chin. *Bailong Jiang*) makes up the transitional zone between Tibetan and Chinese farmers in Amdo's far east.



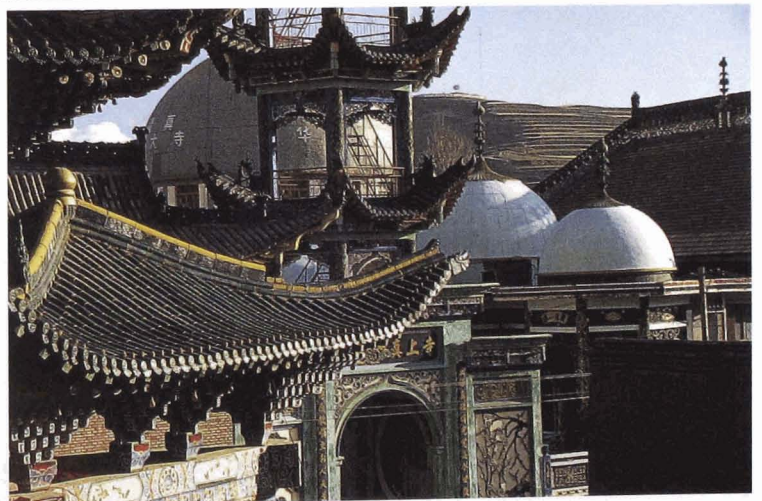


10. High-lying fields between Heitso and Chone, an area extending between the steppes of Lower Amdo and the Gansu loesslands.

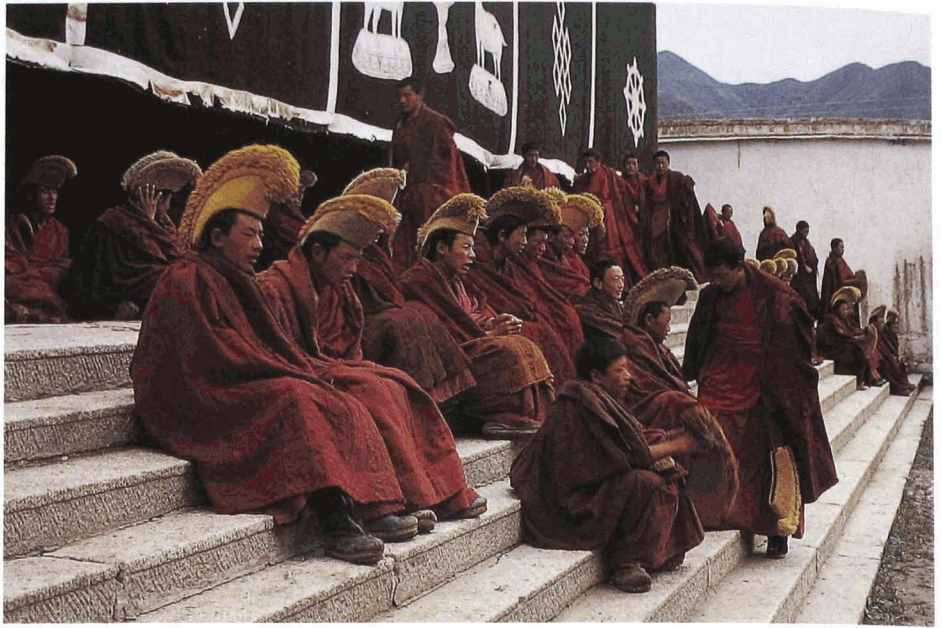


11. Parts of the old city of Chone.

12. Main mosque in Lintan, a county totally surrounded by a Tibetan environment, which has a Han and Hui majority. This reflects its history, since the township emerged from the old Chinese garrison and prefecture of Taozhou.



13. Monks in the Gelugpa monastery Shitshang Gompa near Luchu.



14. Novices of Kirti Gompa in Ngawa. Tibetan boys are chosen by their parents, often at the age of seven or eight, to become a monk.



15. A Buddhist devotee doing circumambulation of Ngawa's Kirti monastery.

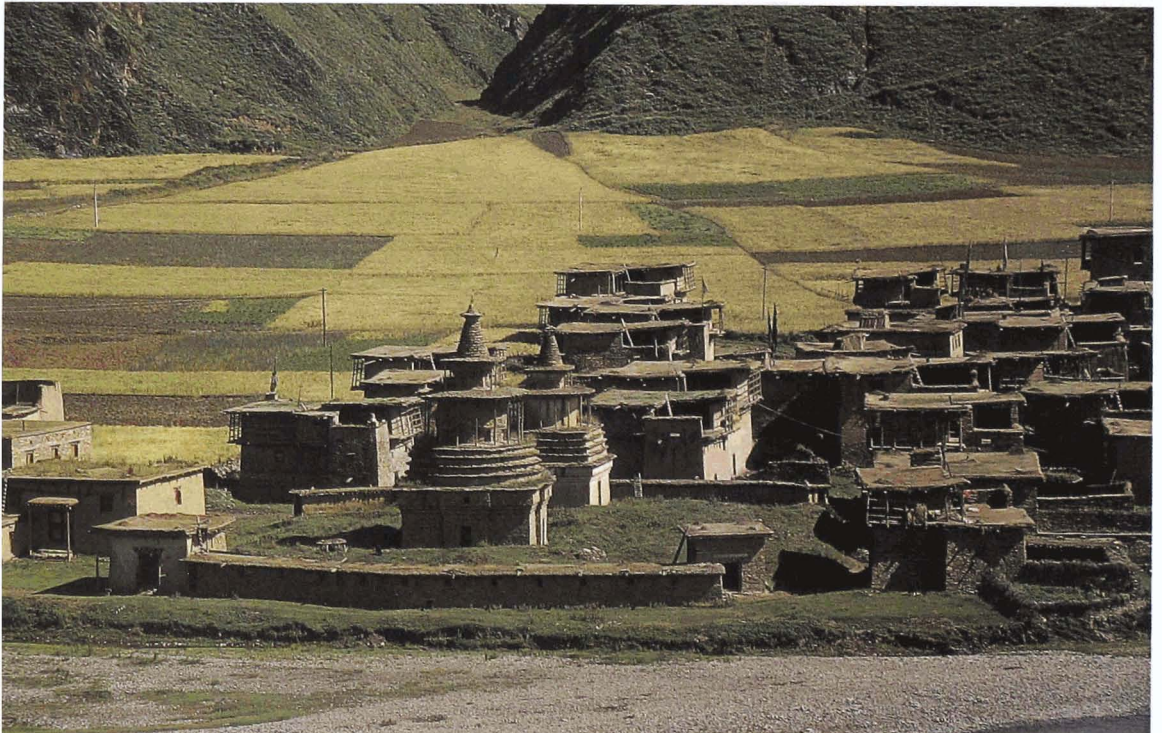


16. Nomads in Ngawa prefecture collect milk to be delivered to Mewa county town (Chin. *Hongyuan*).

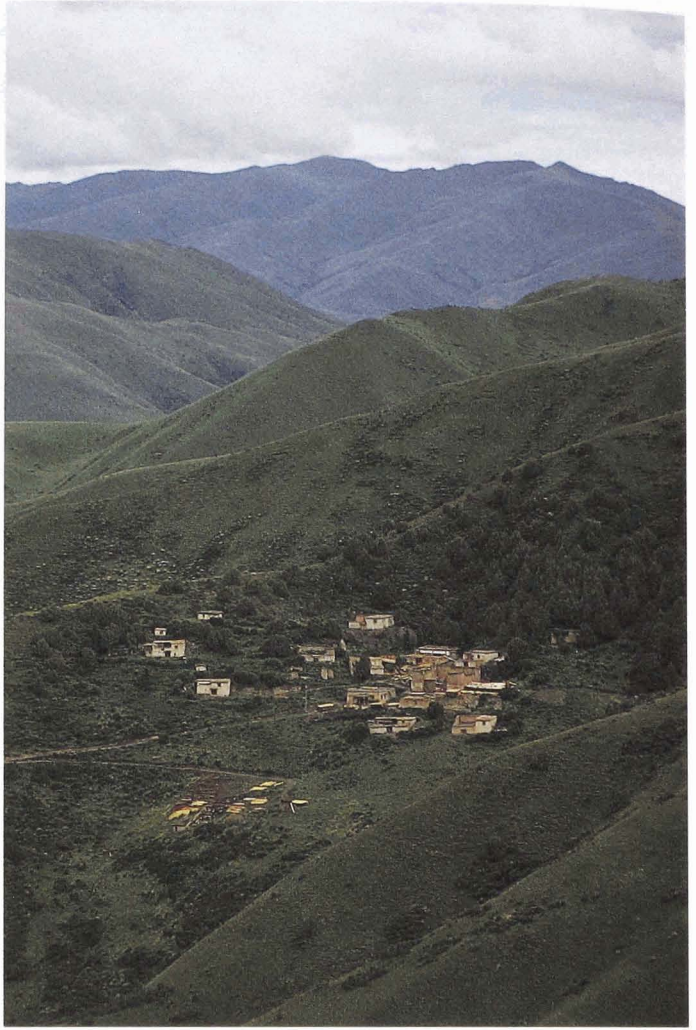
17. The natural features of Dzamthang county demonstrate the transition from the secluded gorges of Gyarong and Kham to the vaster grasslands of Amdo.



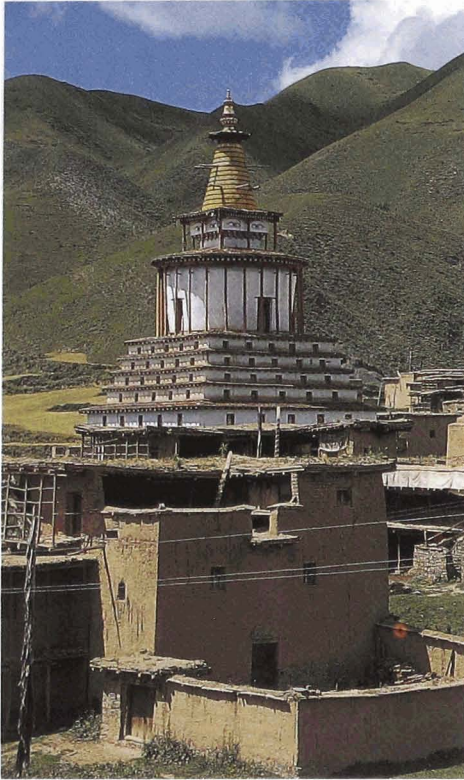
18. Village in the valley of the river Dzi Chu in Middle Dzamthang.



19. A lamasery in the mountains south of Ngawa county.

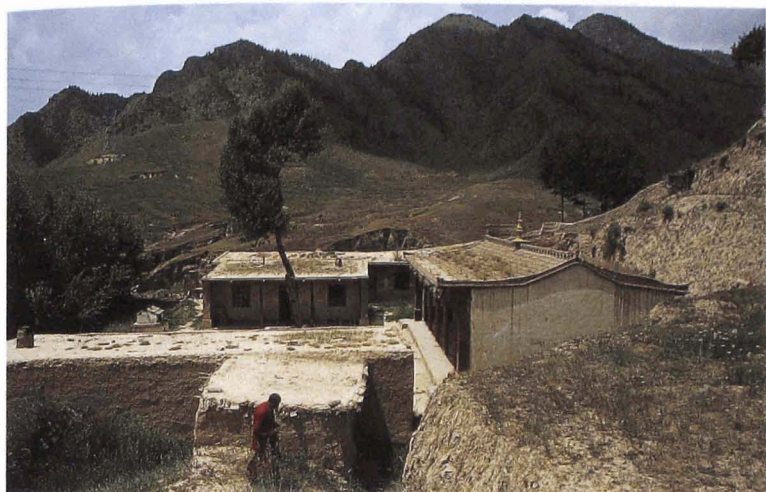


20. The large Tashi Gomang Chörten of Dzamthang's Tshebcu Gompa.

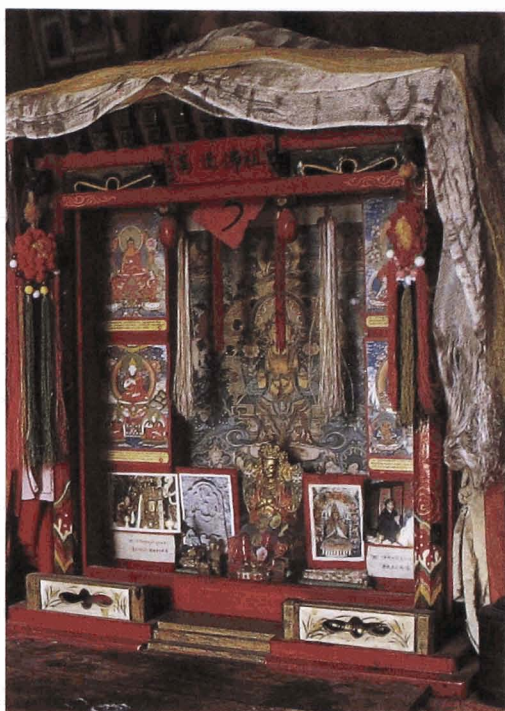


21. Thendru (Chin. *Tianzhu*) is part of the Tibetan Pari region and considered the most northerly area settled by Tibetan tribes. Many remains of the ancient Great Wall of China are to be found in this north-eastern tip of the Tibetan highlands.





22. Yarlung Thurchen Monastery
(Chin. *Shimen Si*).



23. A shrine in Yarlung
Thurchen's assembly hall.

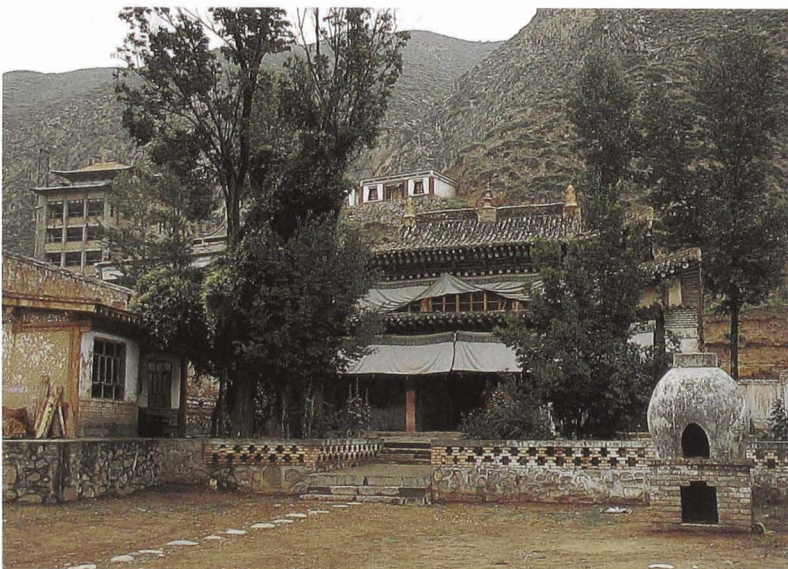
24. In modern Chinese Tianzhu county town,
the old Lamaist temple Huazang Si (Tib. *rab
rgyas dgon*), dating back to the early Ming
dynasty, has been rebuilt.



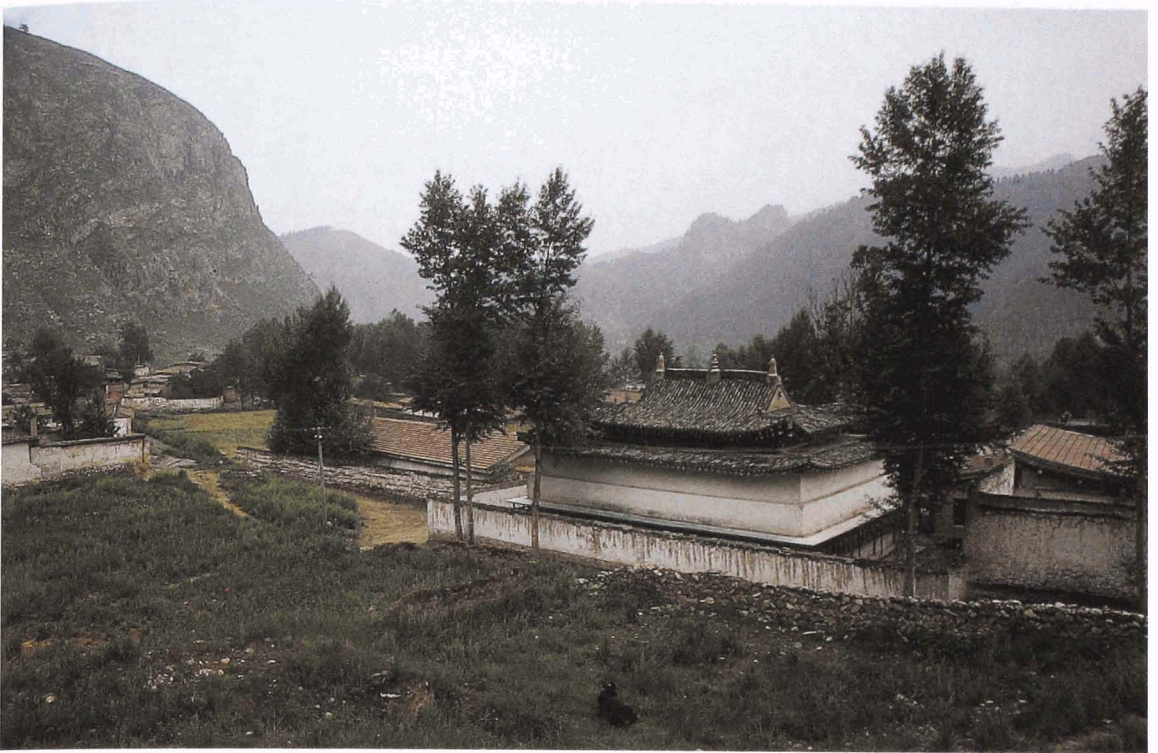


25. Prayer-flag on a door to a temple of Thendru (*Shimen Si*).

26. Datong Gorge and Datong river mark the boundary between Gansu and Qinghai provinces, yet lie in the heart of the Tibetan Pari region.



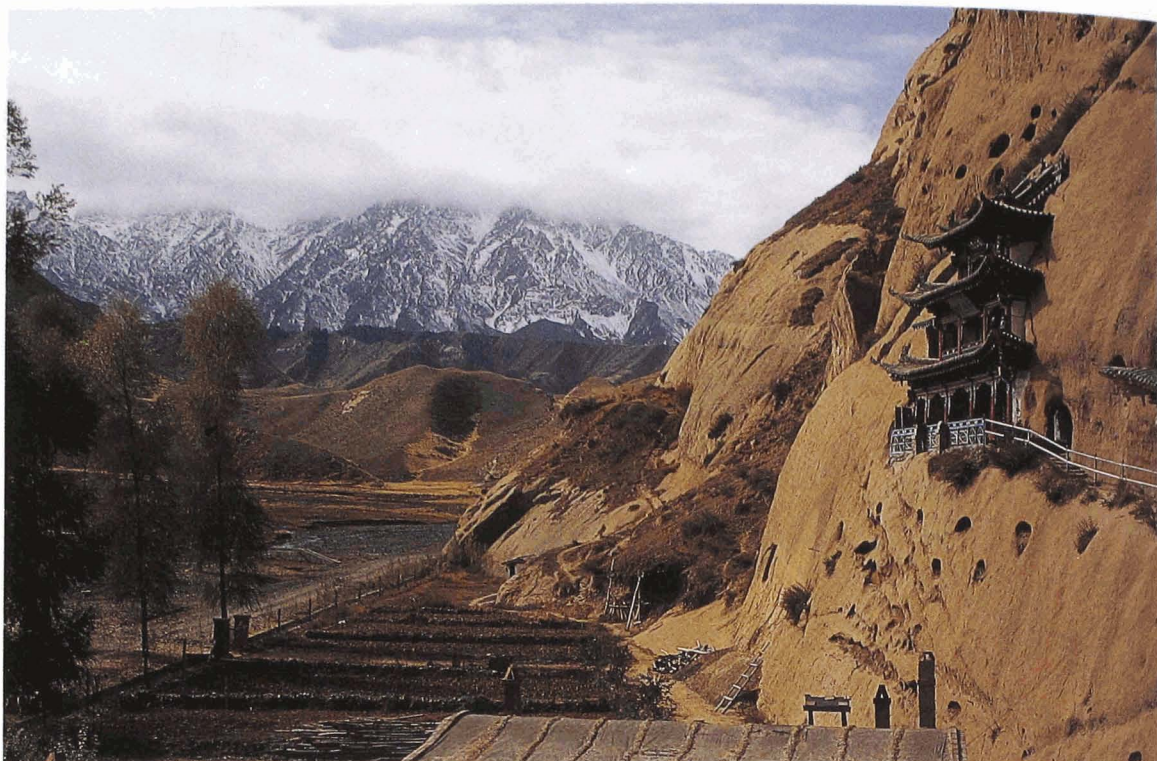
27. Chörten Thang (Chin. *Tiantang Si*) is the leading monastery of Thendru's Tibetan Buddhists. To the left of the sutra hall rises the bare brickwork of the newly built six-storeyed hall, which was still under construction in 2000.



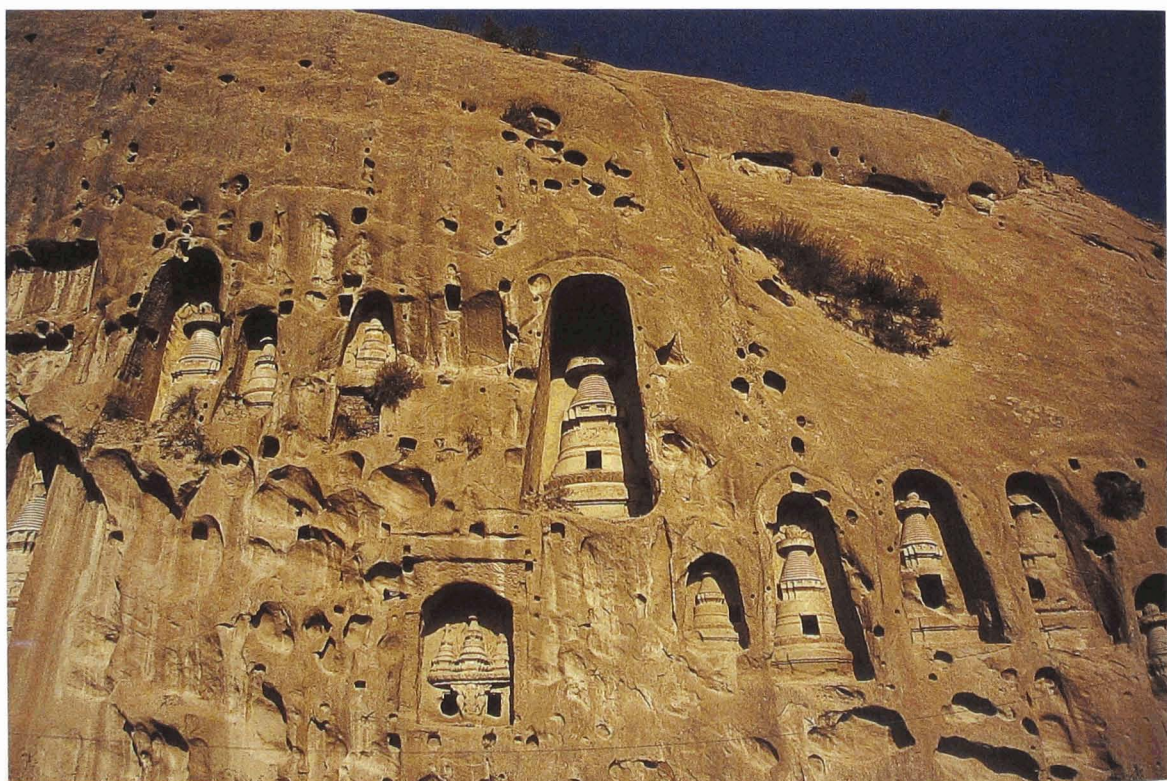
28. The Lesser Assembly Hall of Chörten Thang.



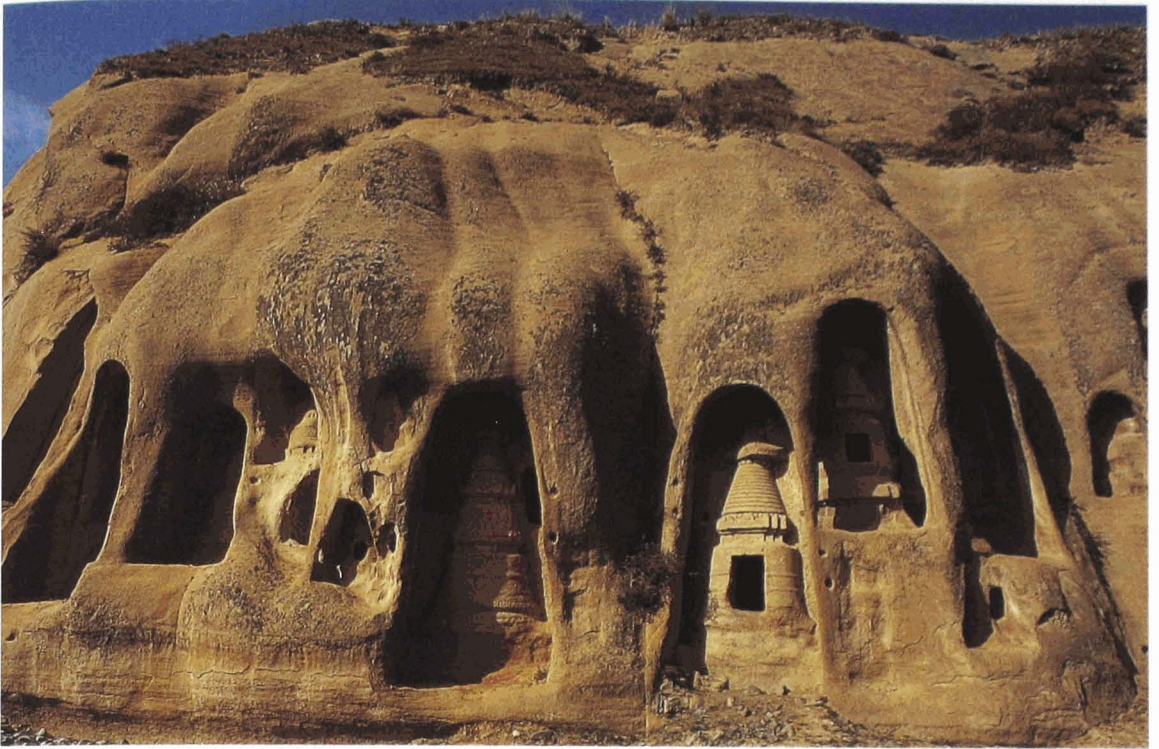
29. A rock painting of Vajradakini on the mountainside behind Chörten Thang.



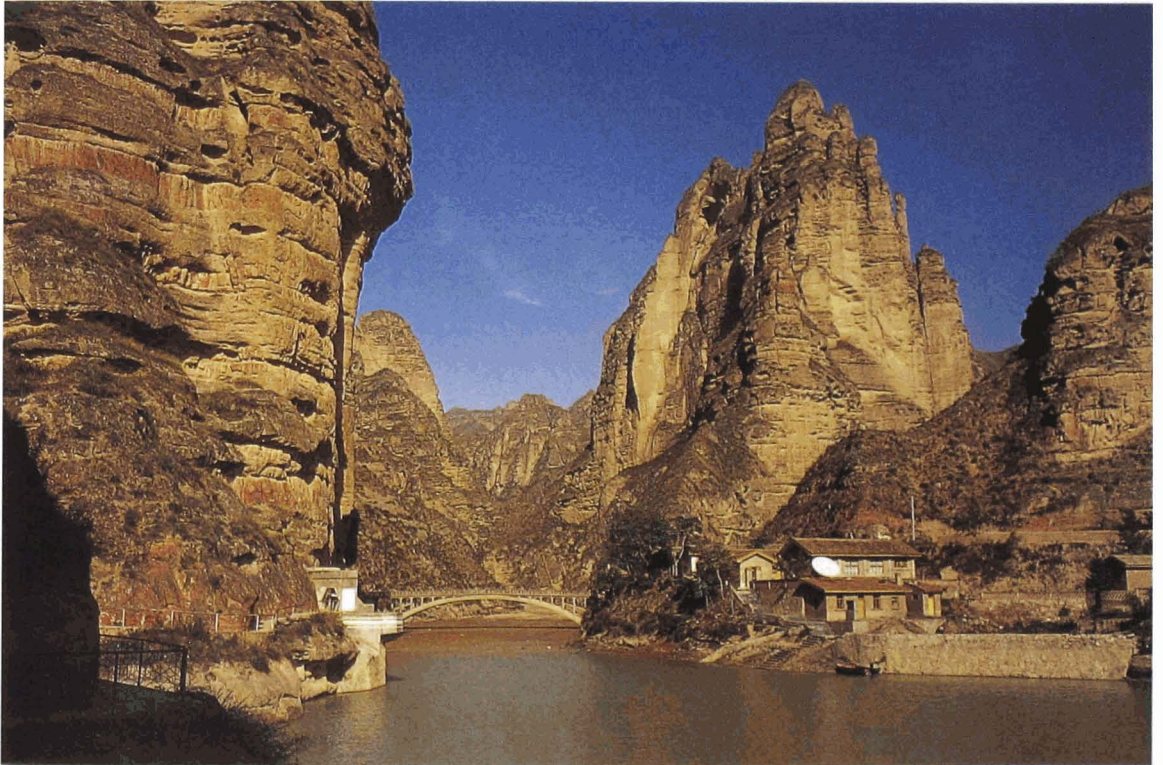
30. Panoramic view of the Thousand Buddha Caves (Qianfo Dong) of Mati Si Grottoes.



31. Mati Si's Tibetan-style relief *stupas* cut into the rocks of the cliff.

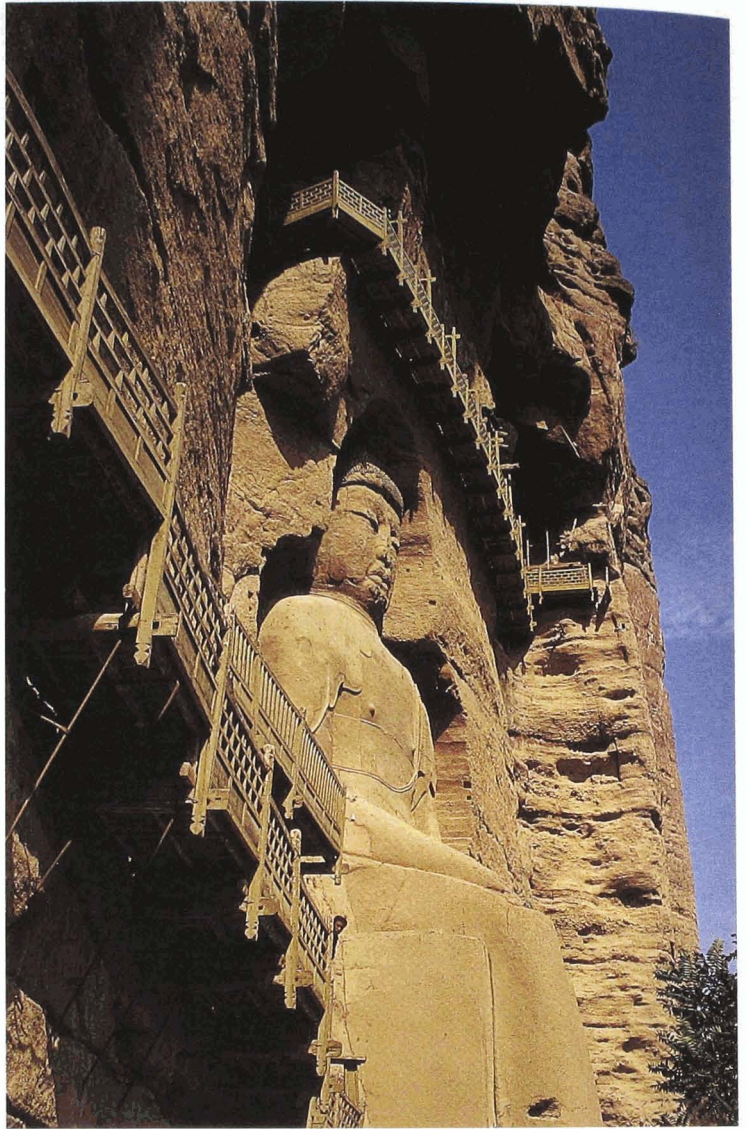


32. Another view of the rock-cut *stupas*.



33. Location of the Bingling Si cave complex at a tributary of the Yellow River.

34. The giant rock-cut Buddha.



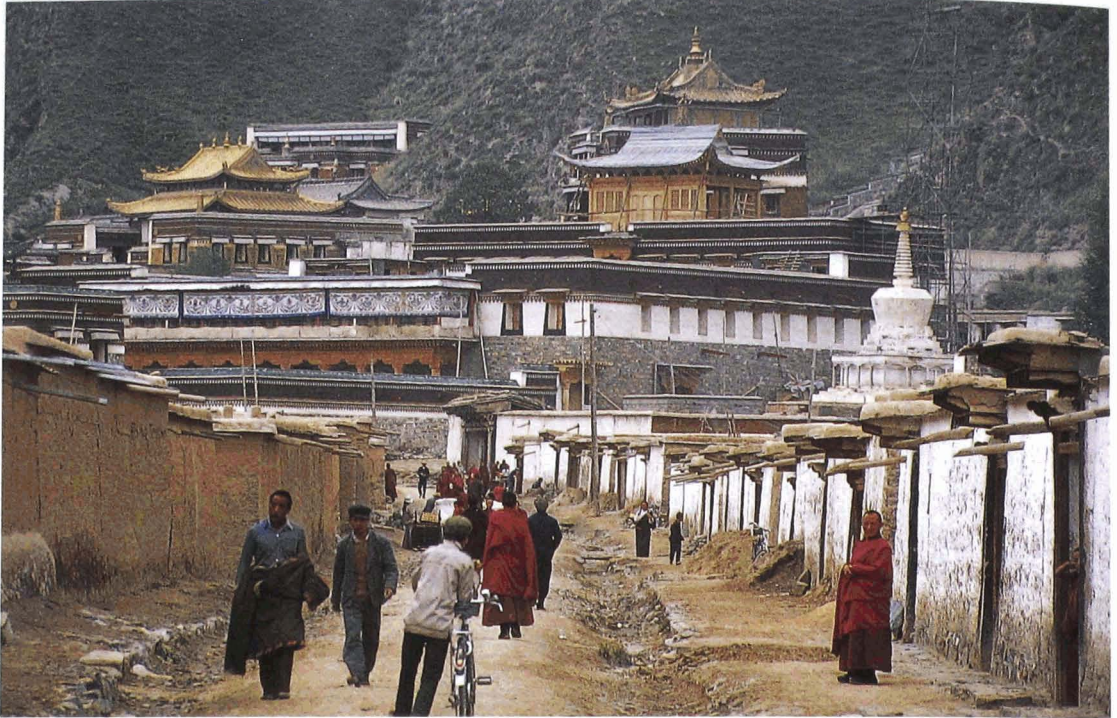
35. A *mandala* mural in cave no. 93.



36. A tutelary deity in cave no. 128.



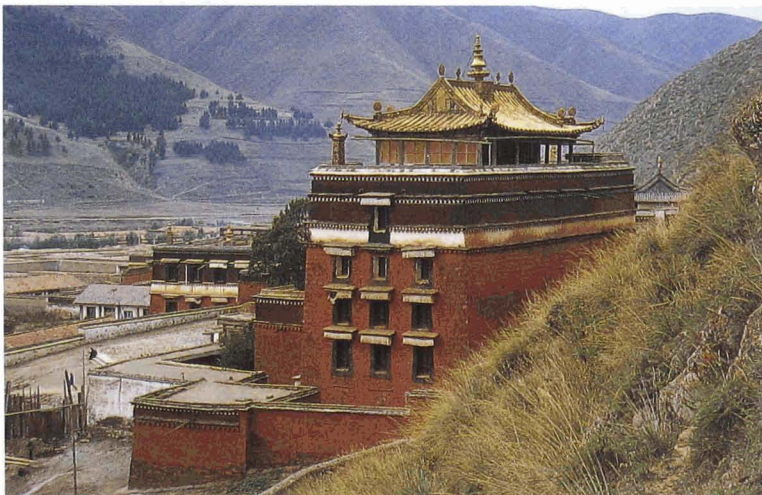
37. Labrang Tashi Chil as portrayed on a Tibetan painting.



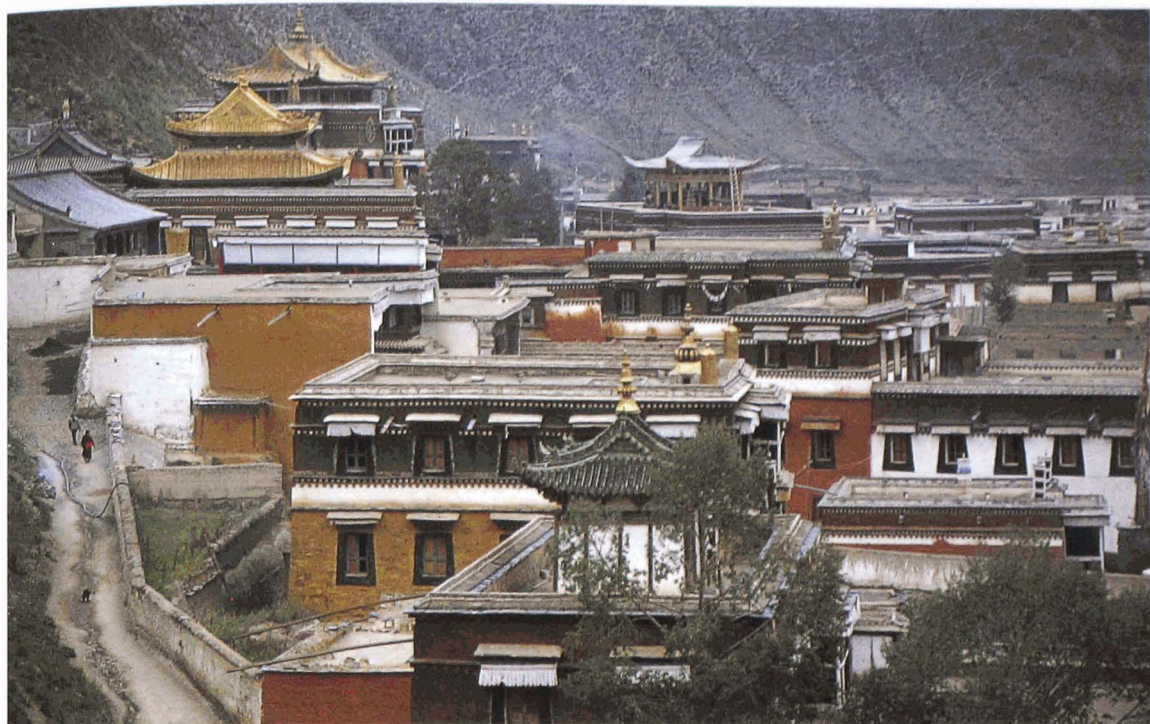
38. A road leading through the Labrang monks' living quarters.



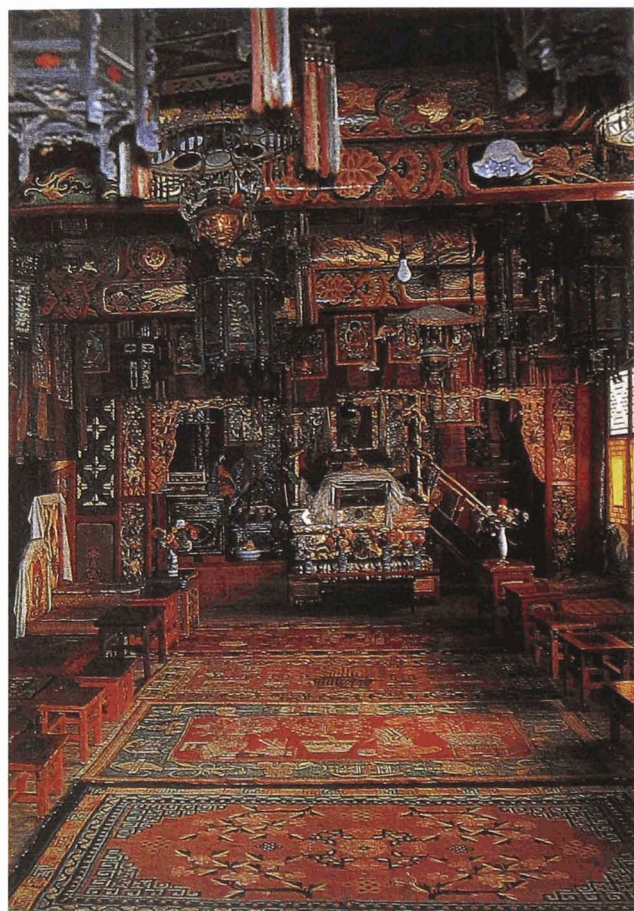
39. Prayer-wheel corridors surround the monastic complex.



40. Maitreya Temple (Jampe Lhakhang).



41. The core complex, including the Shakyamuni Temple, developed around the original 'Lama Palace' (*labrang*); construction began in 1711.



42. Audience hall in the Jamyang Palace (upper Deyang Palace).



43. The Tree of 1000 Taras is a unique bronze in Thubten Phodrang (Jamyang Palace).

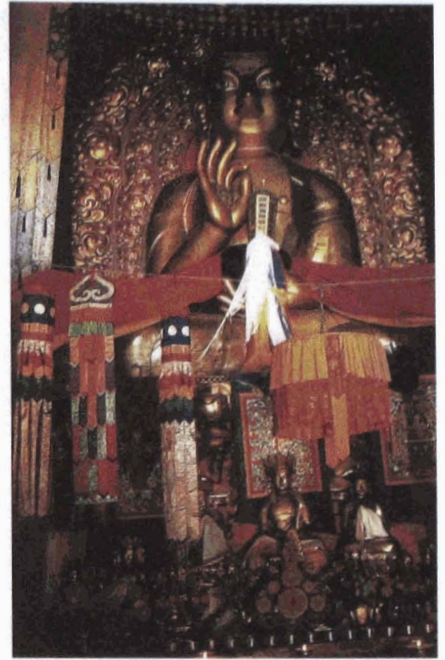


44. Detail of the Tree of 1000 Taras.

45. Pearl stupa in Labrang.



46. Sengge Naro, the Buddha of the Lion's Roar, is the largest Buddha image of Labrang Monastery. This 13 m high bronze statue in Shou'an Si, 'Temple of Longevity and Peace', was completed in 1809.



47. Mural of a tutelary deity.

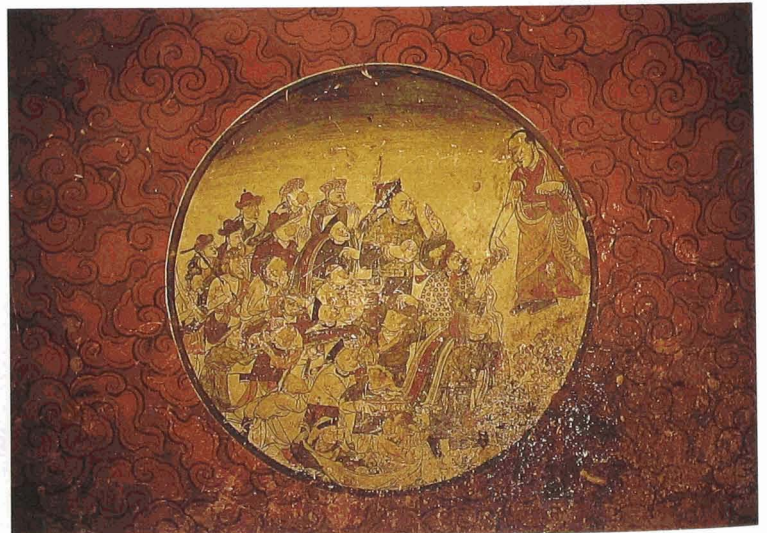


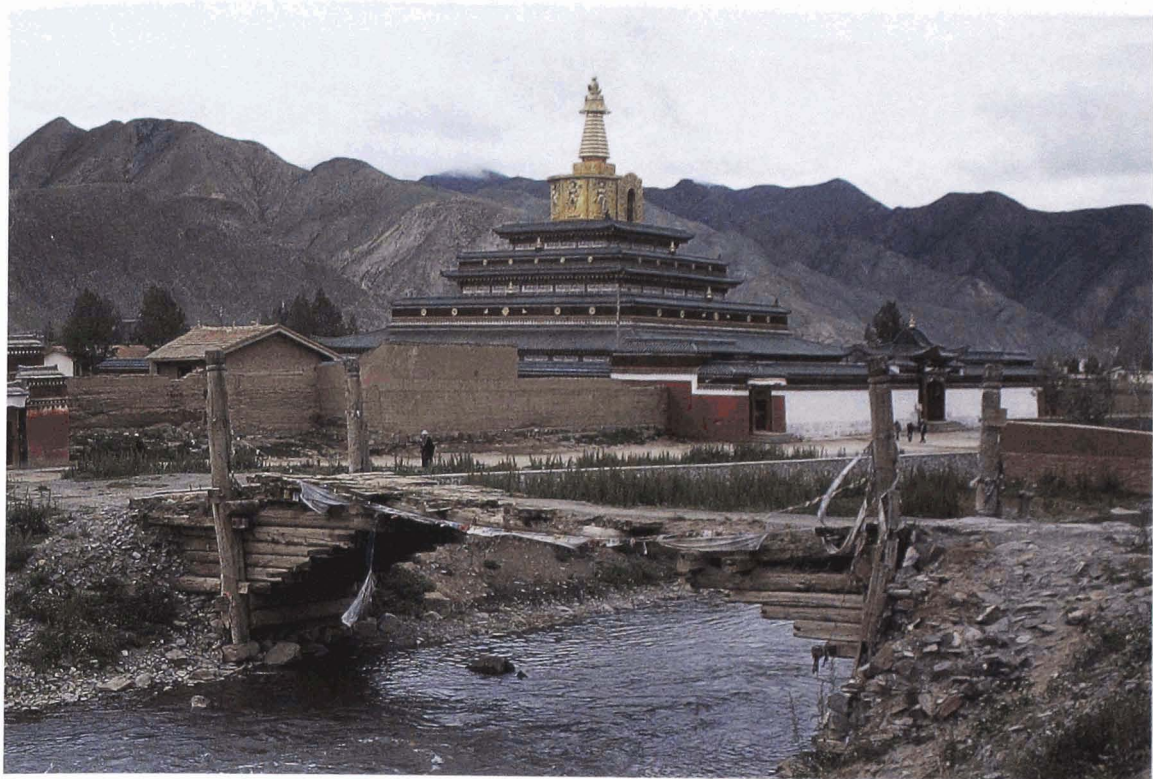
48. Mural of a garuda.



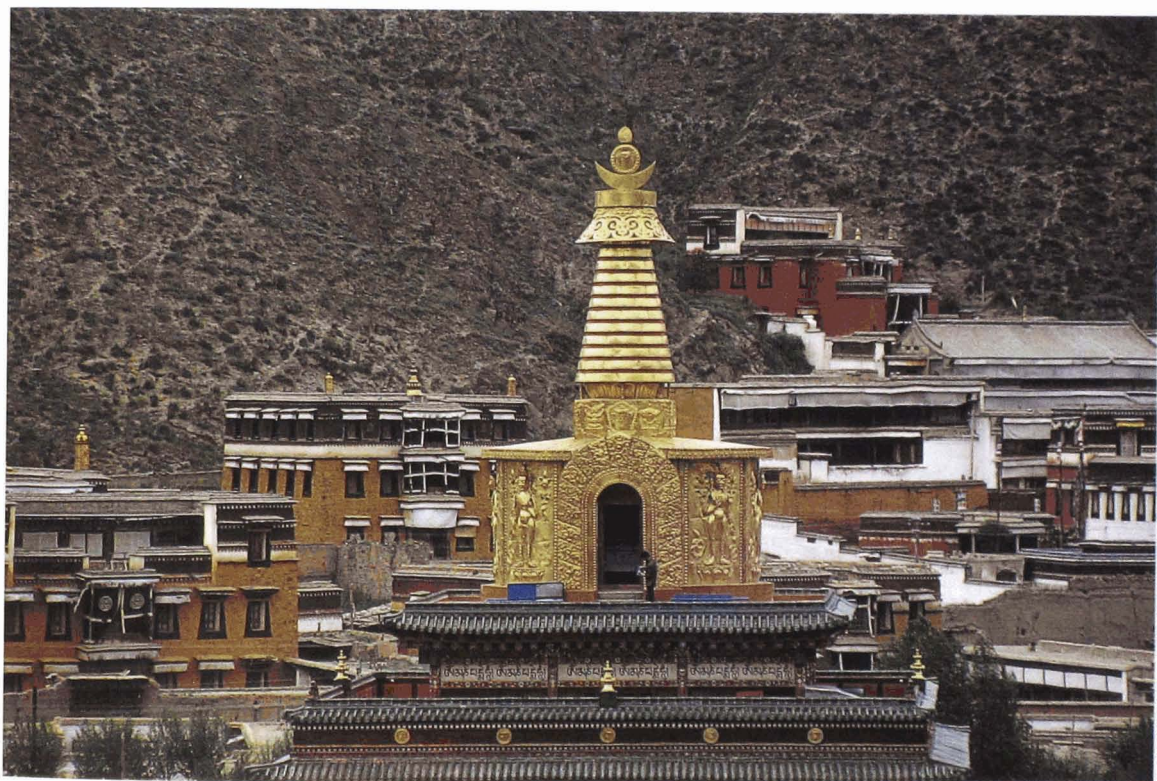
49. View of Labrang Monastery.

50. Mural of a scene depicting the encounter between Chahan Tendzin Pönjunang, the Mongolian Qoshot prince who initiated the establishment of Labrang, and its founder Ngawang Tsöndrü.





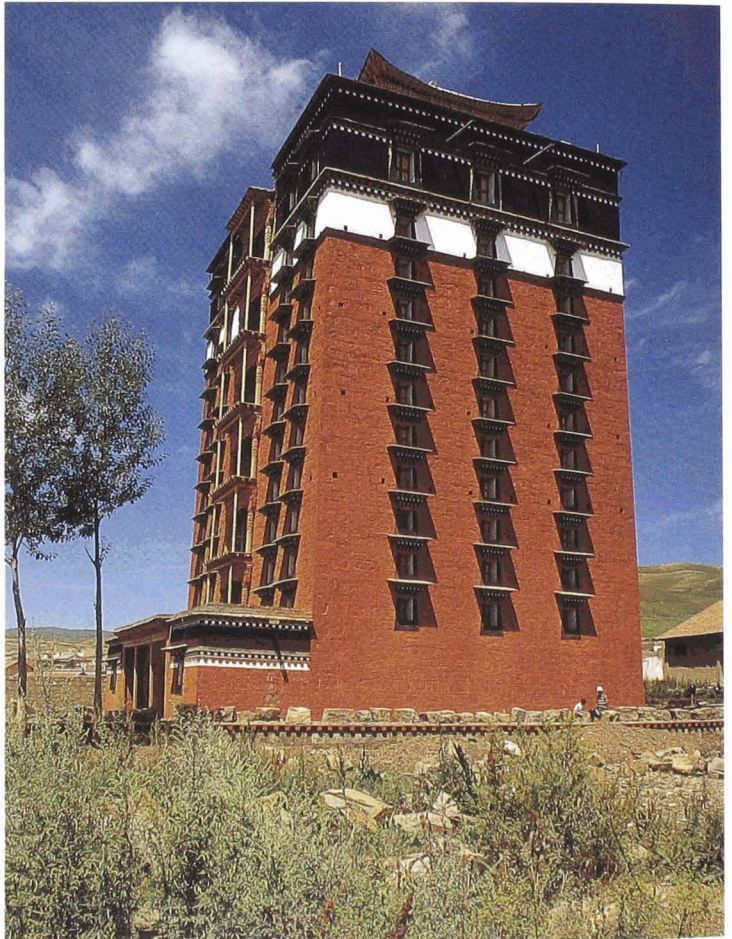
51. The large Gungthang Chörten was rebuilt during the early 1990s.



52. The upper sanctuary (*bumpa*) of the Gungthang Chörten, like the entire structure, was designed exactly after the model of the former *chörten* (cp. plate 6).



53. A distant view of Heitso Monastery.



54. Tsögön Chöling's *Guthog* ('Nine-storeyed Temple') rebuilt.

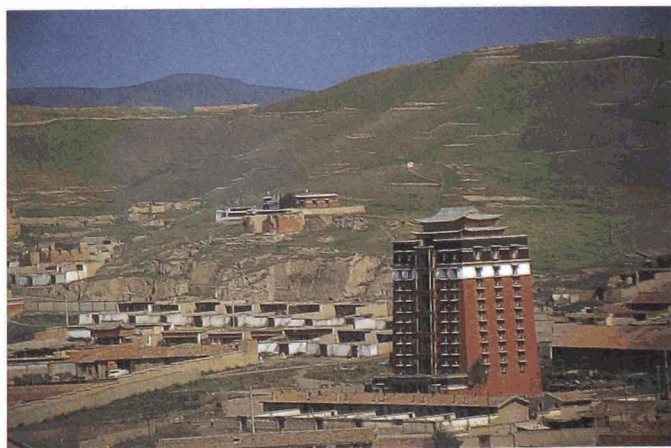


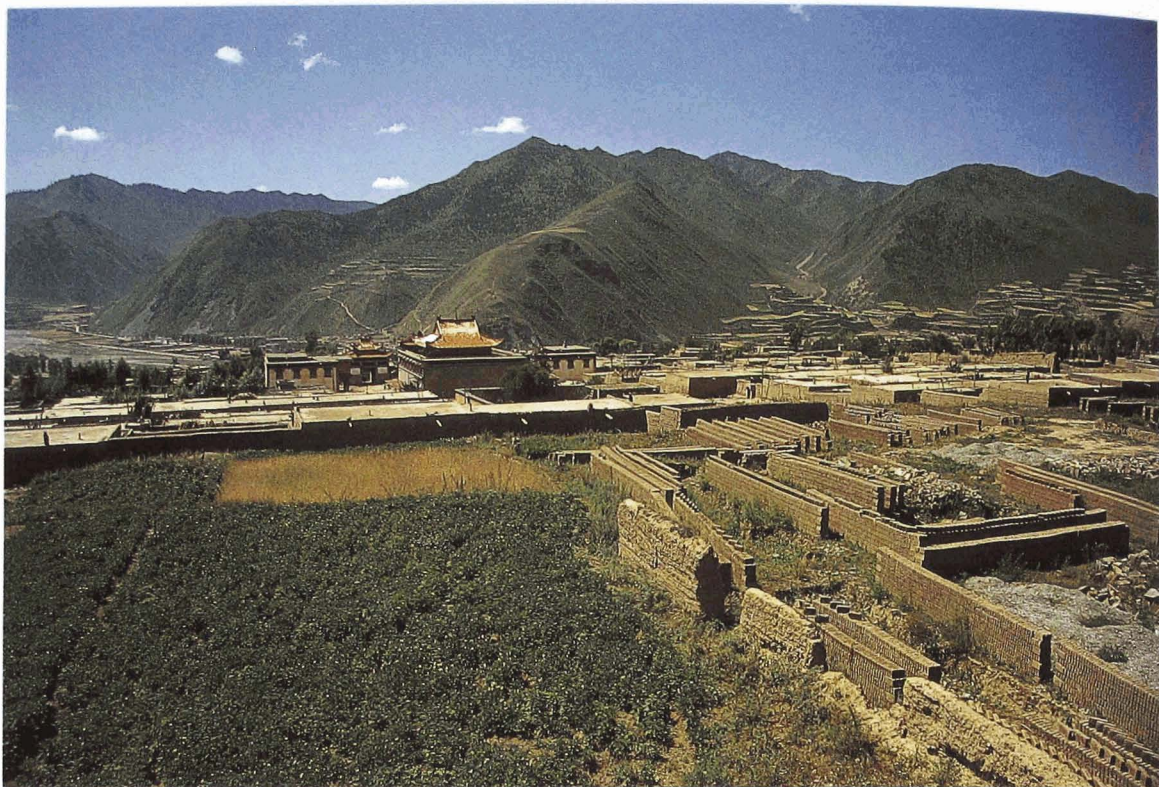
55. One of the main bronze images in the *Guthog*.



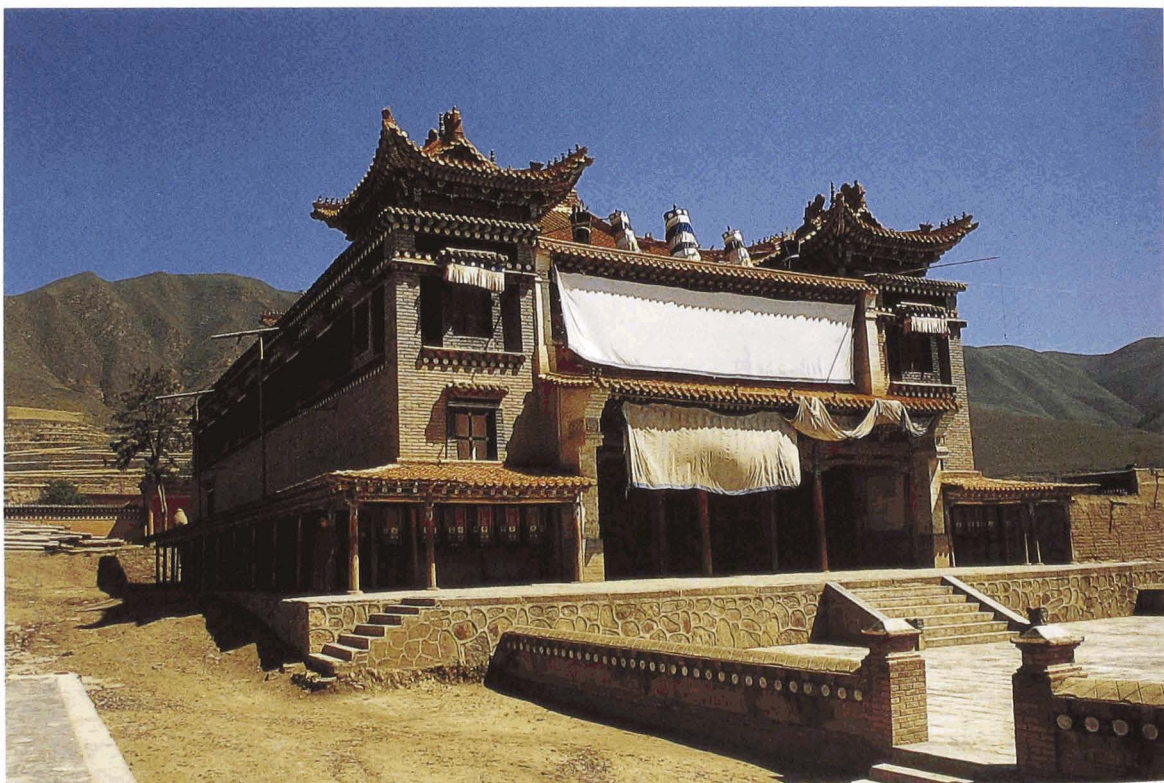
56. Moulding a Milarepa image in
Tsögön's *Guthog*.

57. A distant view of Heitso's *Guthog*.





58. Chone Monastery covers an extensive area, not all of which has been used for buildings.



59. Main assembly hall.

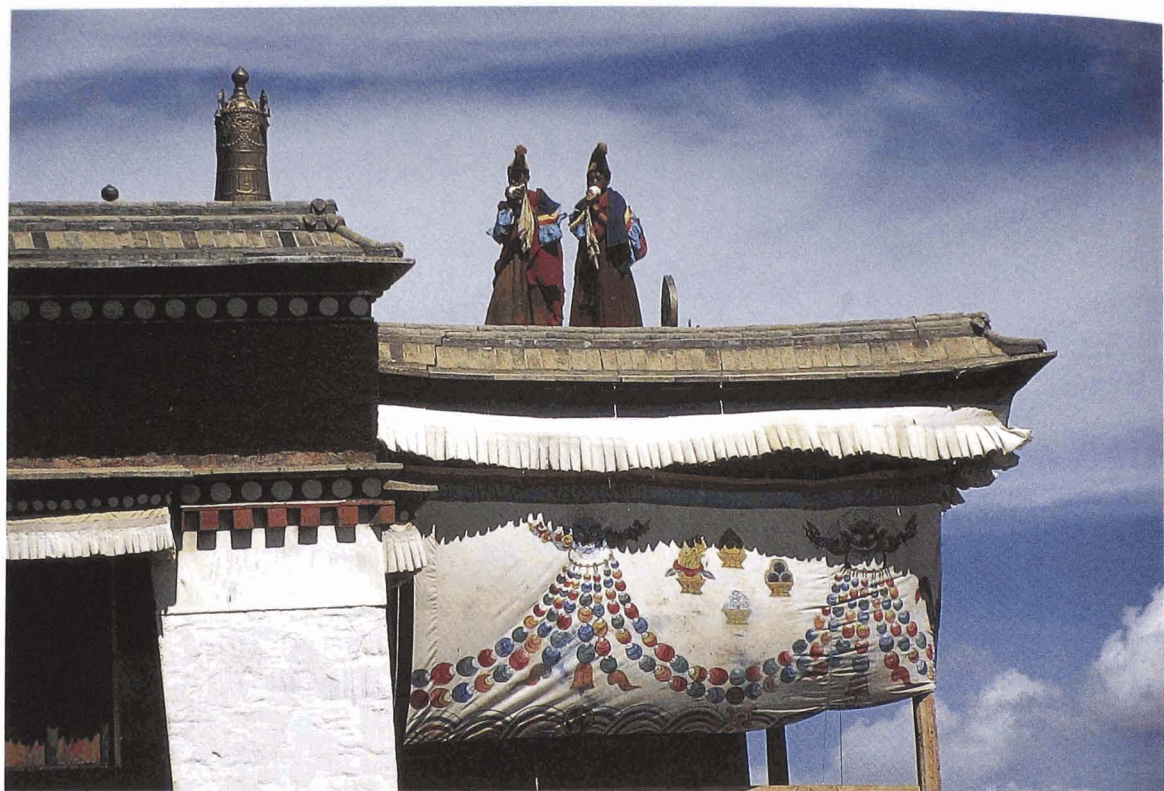


60. Two of the four Lokapalas in the vestibule of the *dukhang*.

61. Door-handles of the assembly hall's main entrance.



62. Amdo grassland near Tagtshang Lhamo.



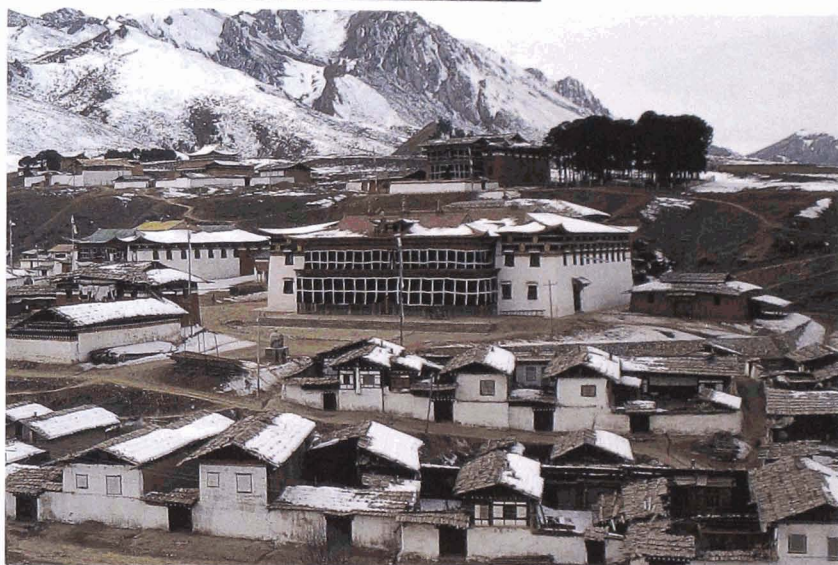
63. Amchog Gompa in Gansu: monks call for religious service to the assembly hall.



64. A distant view of Tagtshang Lhamo.



65. The monastery Kirti Namgyal Dechen Ling of Tagtshang Lhamo.

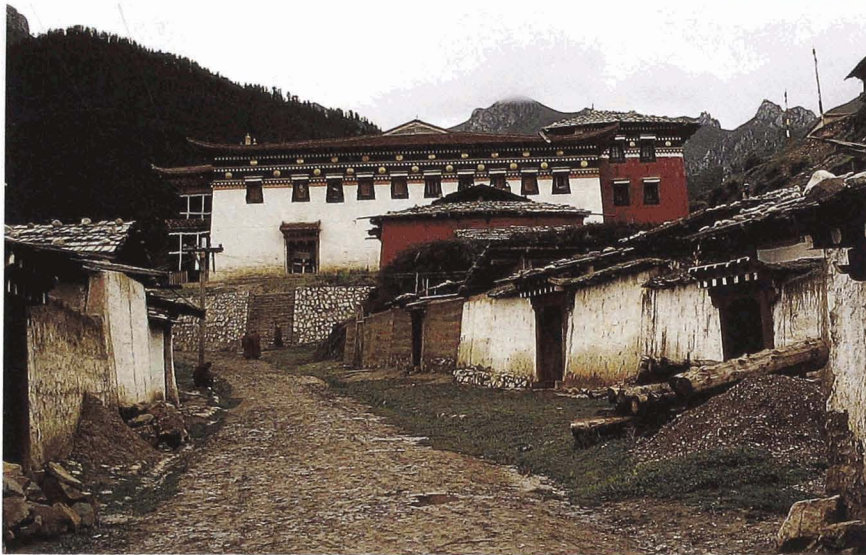


66. The assembly hall of Tagtshang Lhamo's Kirti Gomba is built on a platform-like elevation, giving the impression of a Bhutanese Dzong. The massive structure is also used for housing the exoteric Loseling College.



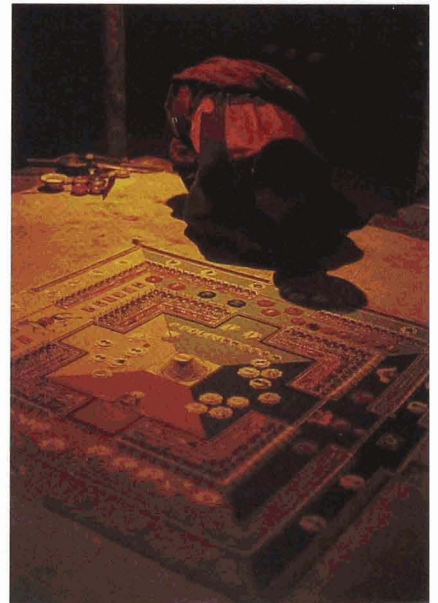
67. Bronze of the bodhisattva Vajrapani in the assembly hall of Kirti Gomba.

68. Mural in the *dukhang's* vestibule depicting the last battle of the mythical Shambhala Kingdom.



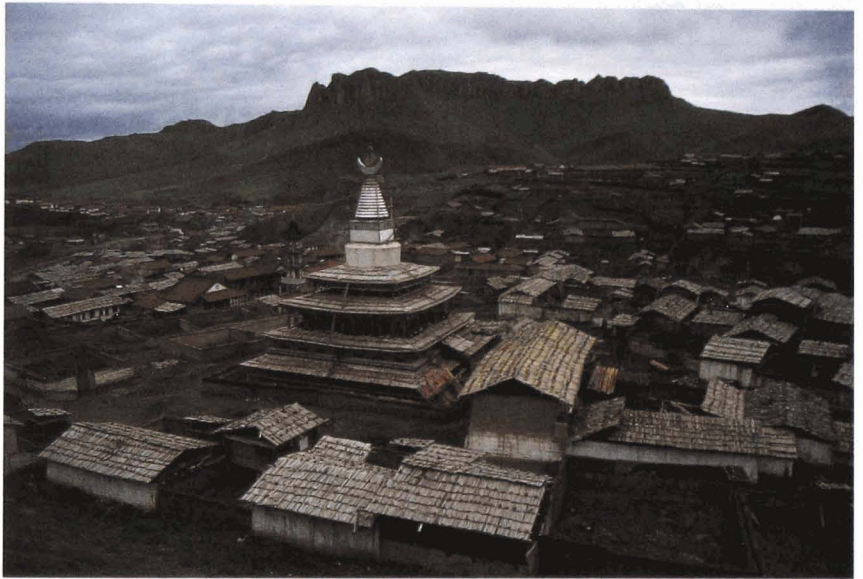
69. Starting from the Treasure stupa and going up the main street of Kirti Gompa, the huge assembly hall is reached.

70. A sand *mandala* being made in Kirti Gompa.

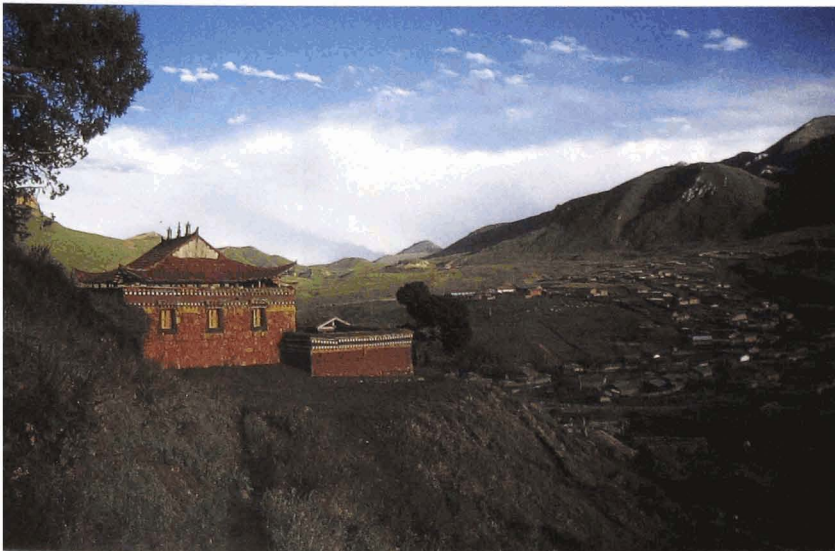




71. View of the *dukhang* and a smaller temple building.

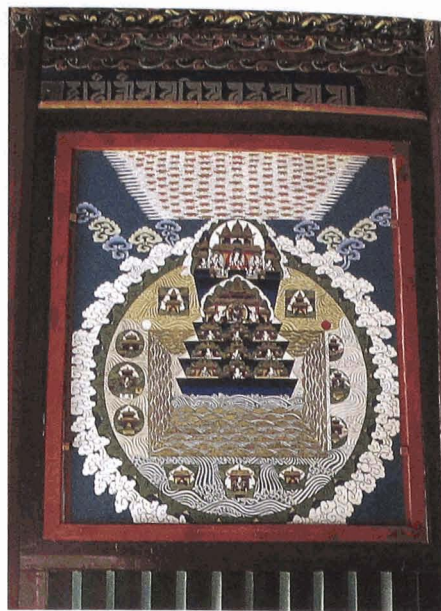


72. View of the Treasure Stupa in Kirti Monastery.

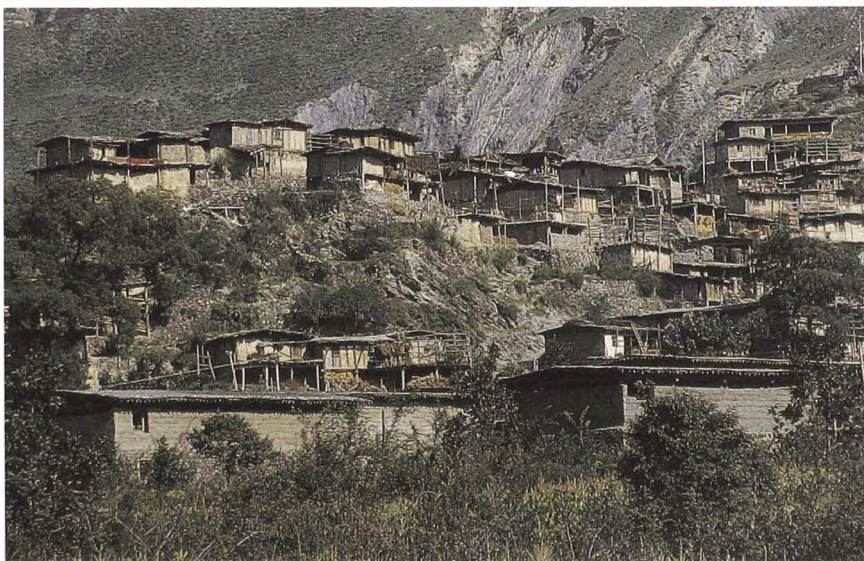
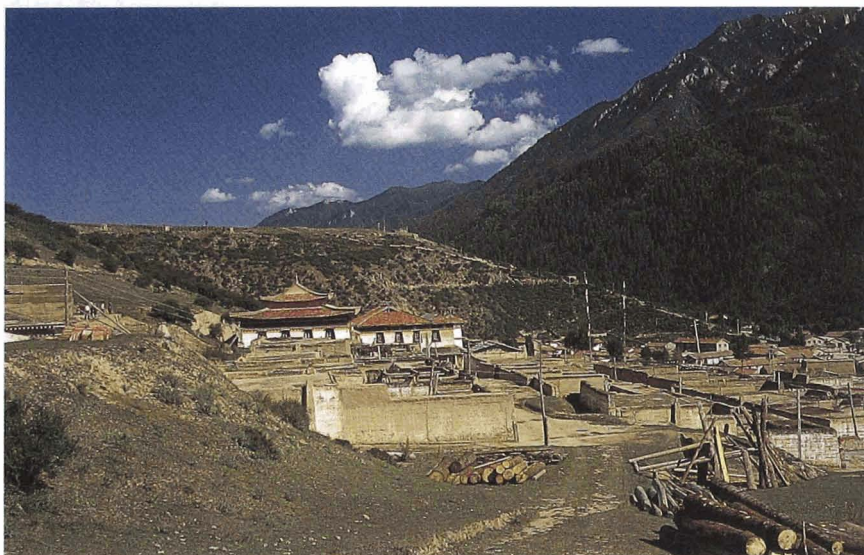


73. Tagtshang Lhamo: Ganden Shedrub Pekar Drölwe Ling Monastery.

74. Luchu Shitshang Gumpa: mural of mythical Mt. Sumeru.



75. Pelshe Dengkha Gumpa (Chin. *Baxidianga Si*) in Thewo county is a 13th century Sakyapa monastery that later was reconstituted as Gelugpa.

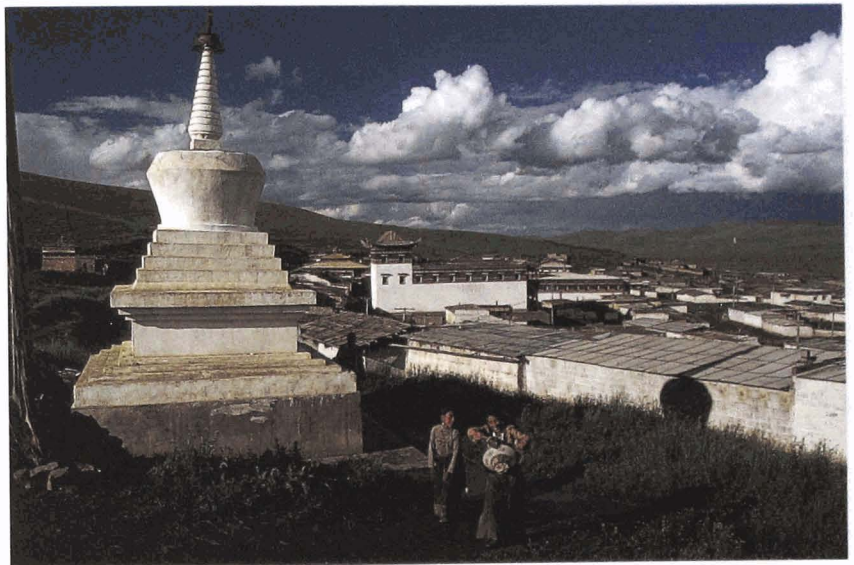


76. A village near Drugchu in the gorge of the river Bailong Jiang.

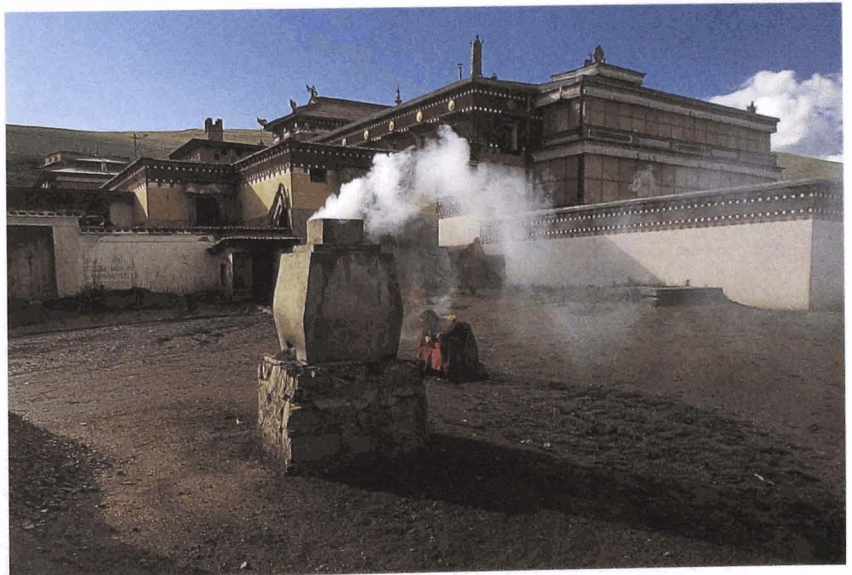


77. The grassland around Dzöge belong to the best pastoral grounds in Tibet.

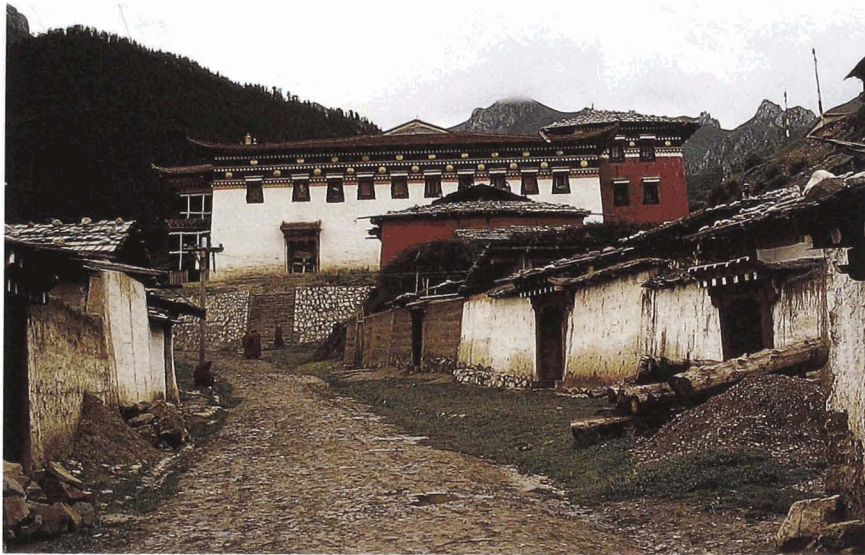
78. A panoramic view of Tagtsha Gompa in Dzöge Tagtsha Göndren.



79. Main assembly hall of Tagtsha Gompa.

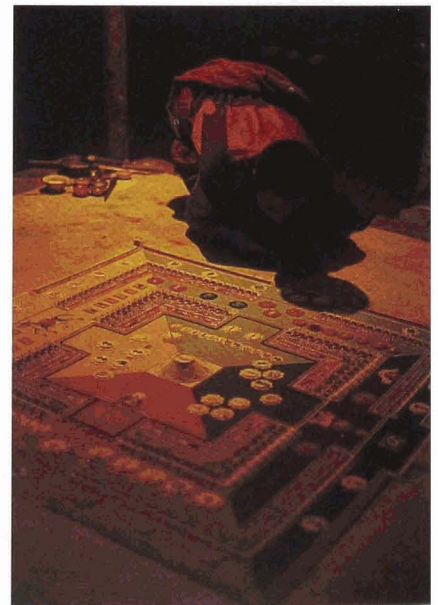


68. Mural in the *dukhang's* vestibule depicting the last battle of the mythical Shambhala Kingdom.



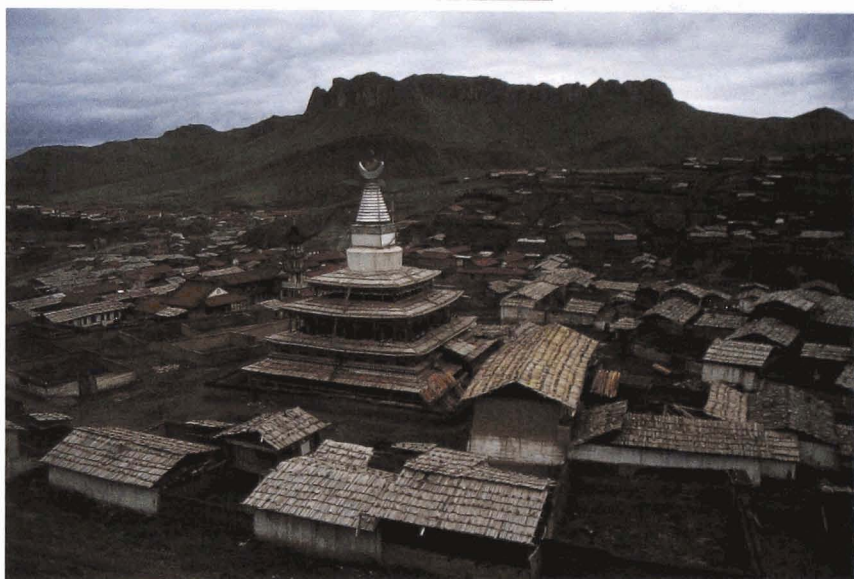
69. Starting from the Treasure stupa and going up the main street of Kirti Gompa, the huge assembly hall is reached.

70. A sand *mandala* being made in Kirti Gompa.

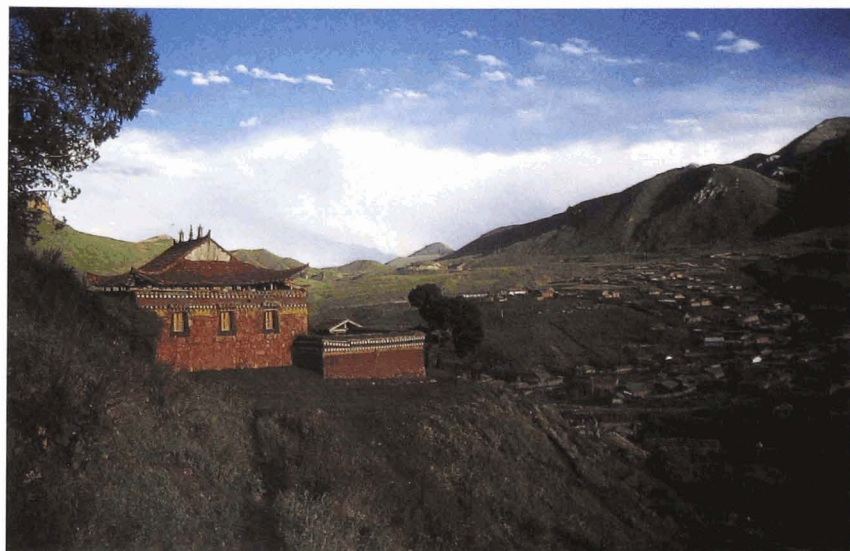




71. View of the *dukhang* and a smaller temple building.



72. View of the Treasure Stupa in Kirti Monastery.

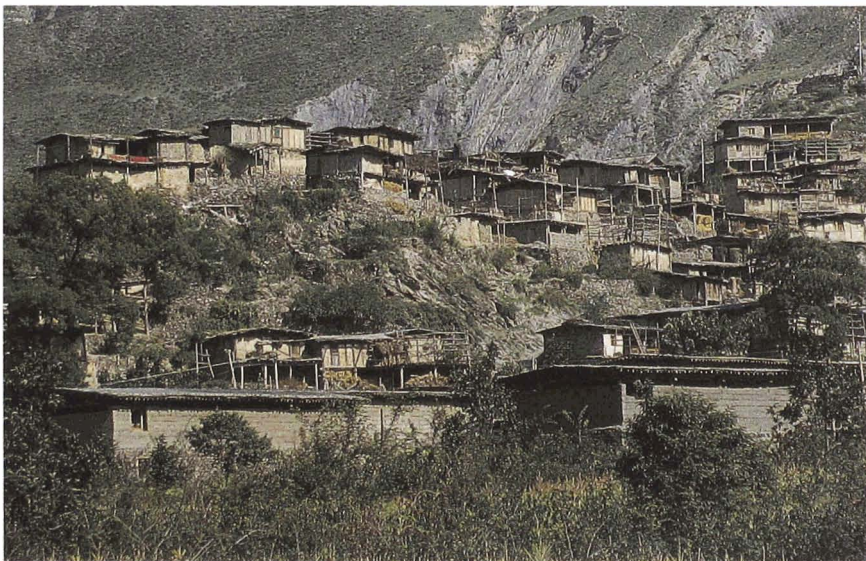
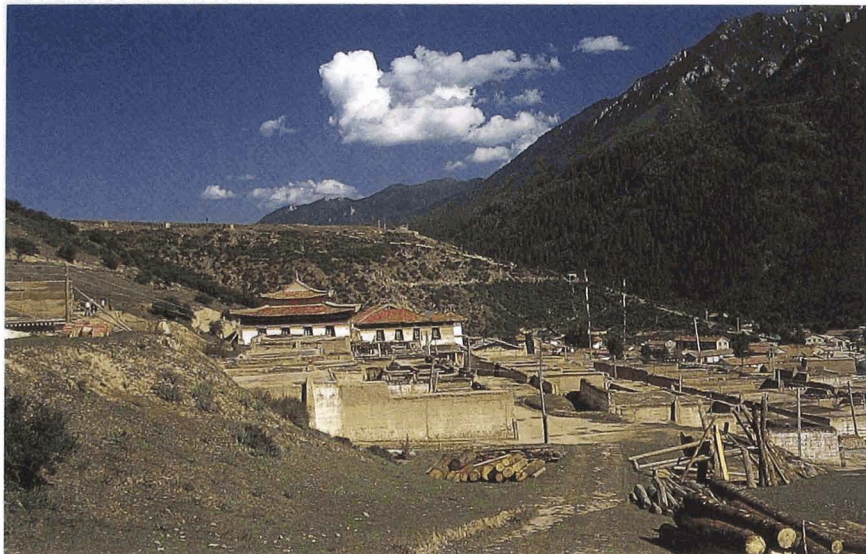


73. Tagtshang Lhamo: Ganden Shedrub Pekar Drölwe Ling Monastery.

74. Luchu Shitshang
Gompa: mural of mythical
Mt. Sumeru.



75. Pelshe Dengkha Gompa (Chin. *Baxidianga Si*)
in Thewo county is a 13th century Sakyapa
monastery that later was reconstituted as Gelugpa.

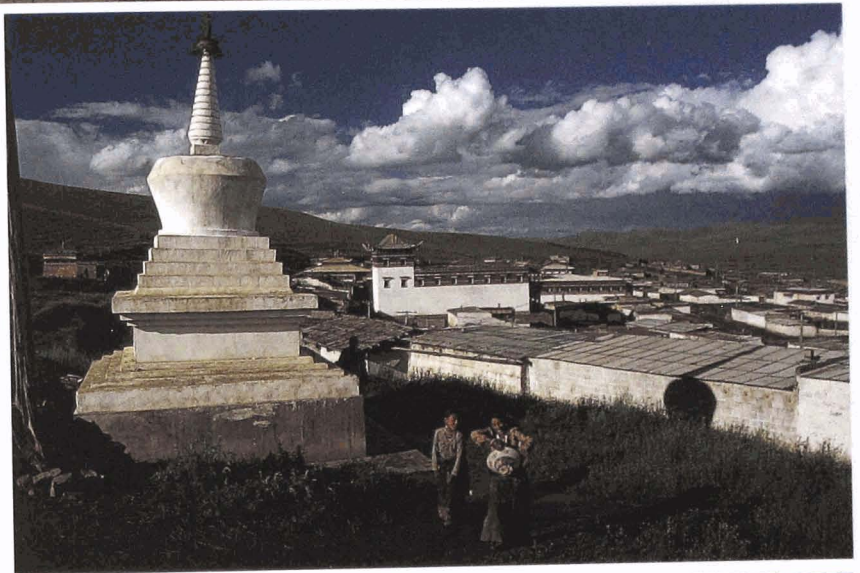


76. A village near
Drugchu in the gorge of
the river Bailong Jiang.

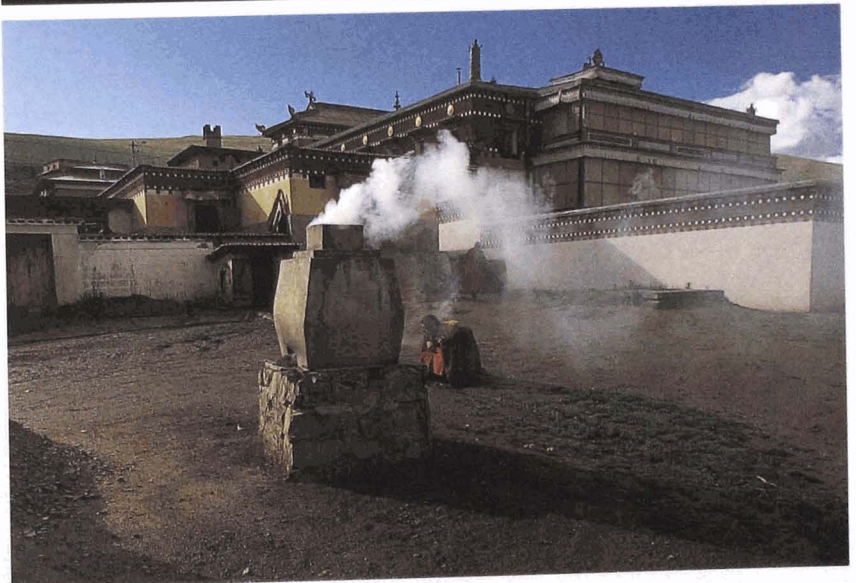


77. The grassland around Dzöge belong to the best pastoral grounds in Tibet.

78. A panoramic view of Tagtsha Gompa in Dzöge Tagtsha Göndren.



79. Main assembly hall of Tagtsha Gompa.



80. Murals in the vestibule of Tagtsha Gompa's main assembly hall.



81. From the outside the Bön monastery Nangshig Gompa resembles a Tibetan Buddhist monastery of the region.

82. Long corridors with prayer-wheels lead around Nangshig Gompa.

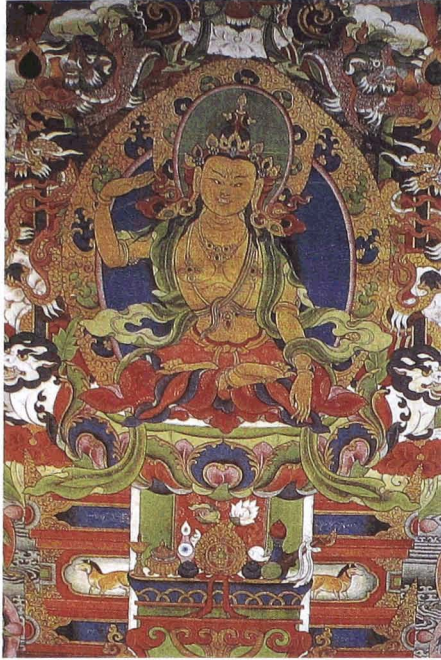




83. Nangshig Gompa: a Bönpo wheel of life and death.



84. Mural of the Bön mythical kingdom of Olmolungring in the assembly hall of Nangshig Gompa.



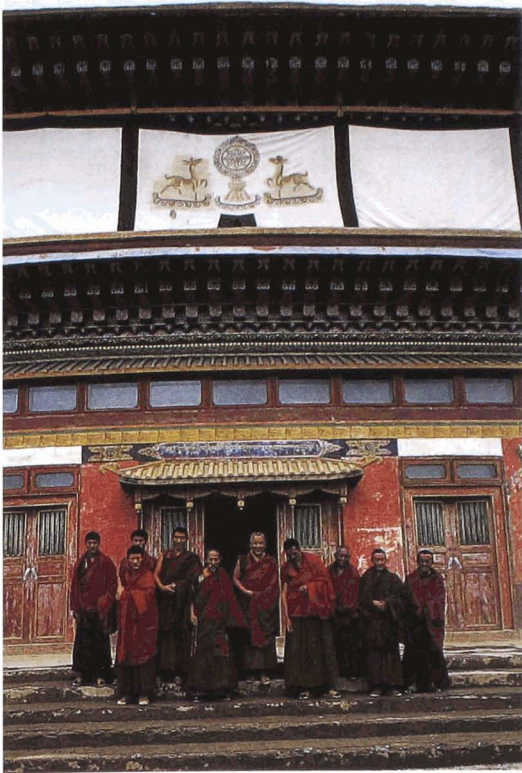
85. Bön deity Nampar Gyalwa.



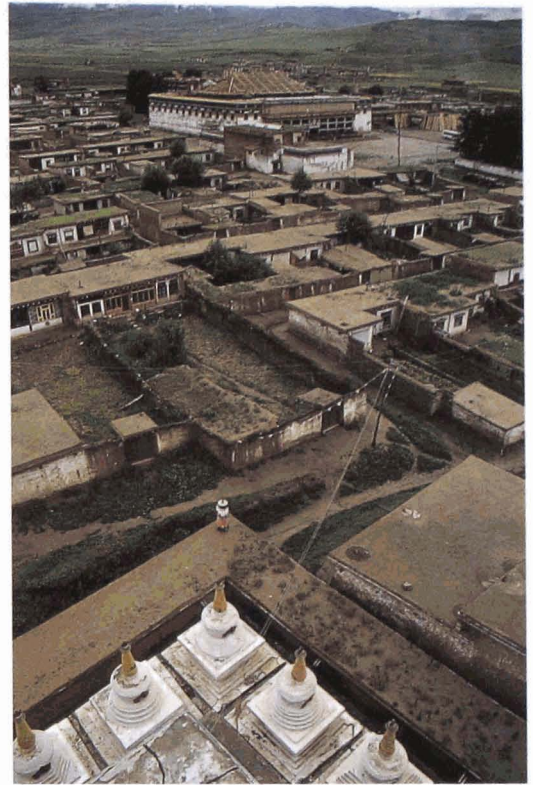
86. Bön deity Mawe Sengge.



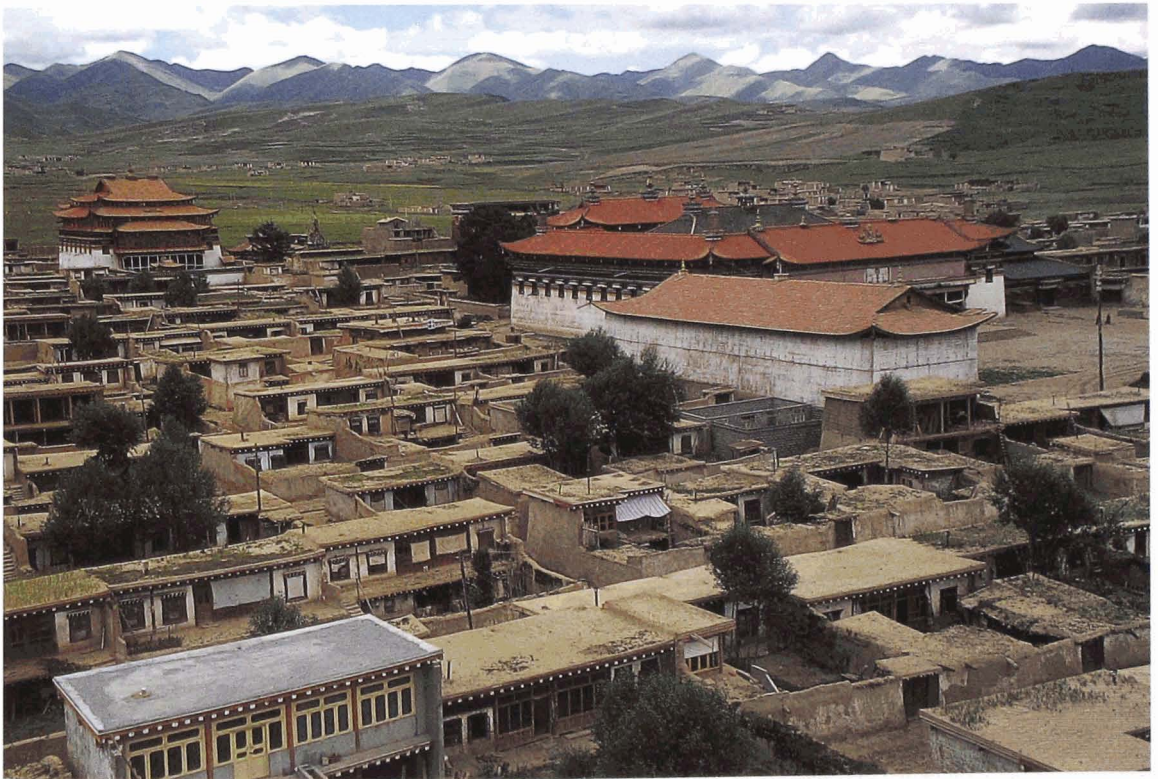
87. Bön deity Blue Shenrab.



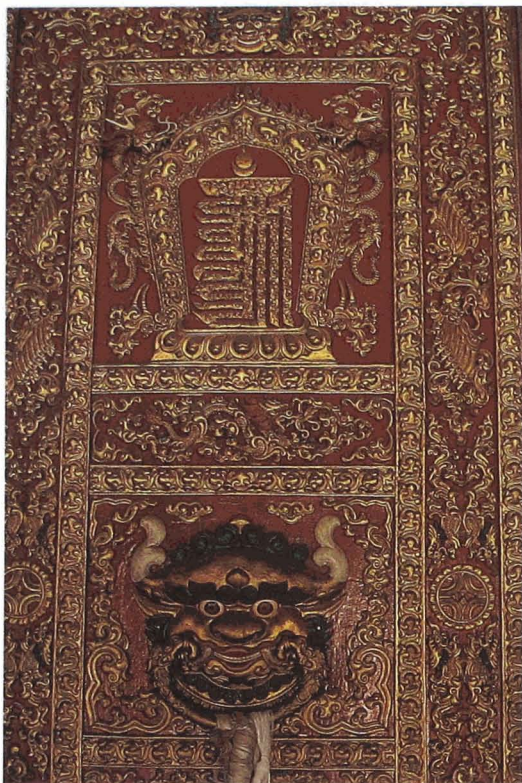
88. Bön monks in front of Nangshig Gompa's *dukhang*.



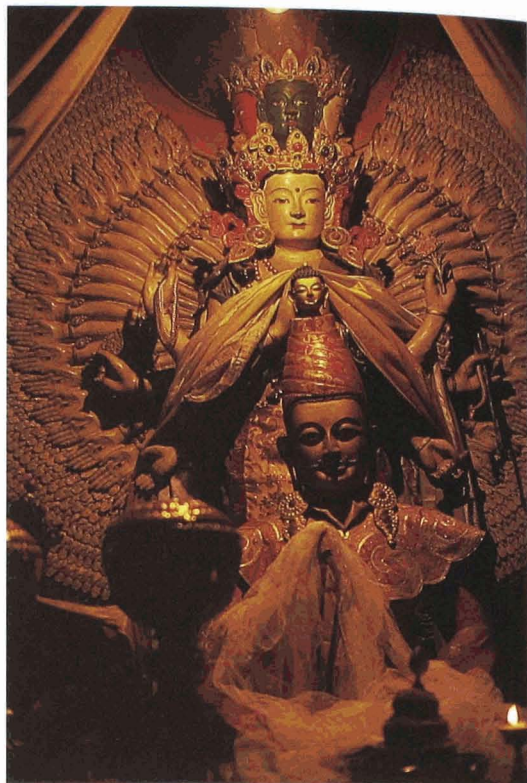
89. Ngawa Kirti Monastery: the large structure is the lamasery's main assembly hall.



90. For the restoration of Kirti Gompa's giant assembly hall, called Gomchor, a local family of traders donated 600,000 Yuan.



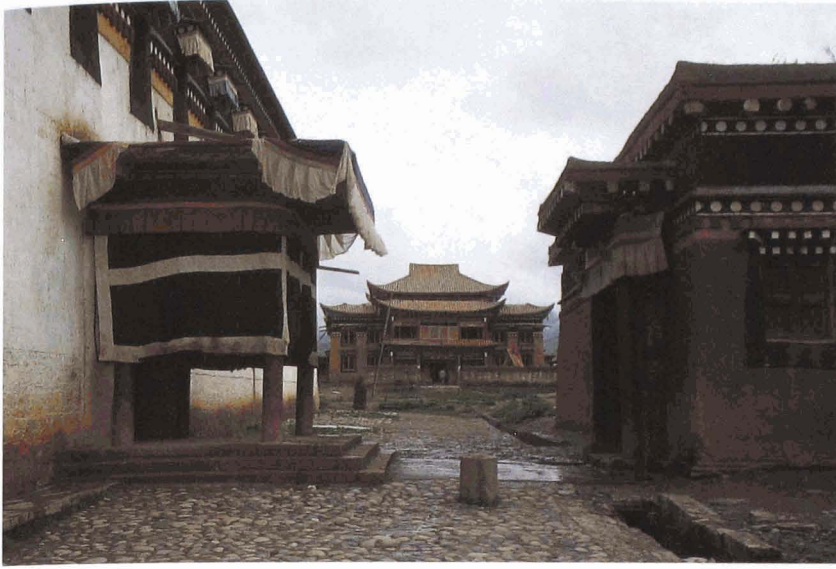
91. Decorations on the entrance door of the Gomchor.



92. Statues of a 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara and King Songtsen Gampo are the main images of worship on the first floor of Ngawa's Dündül Chörten.

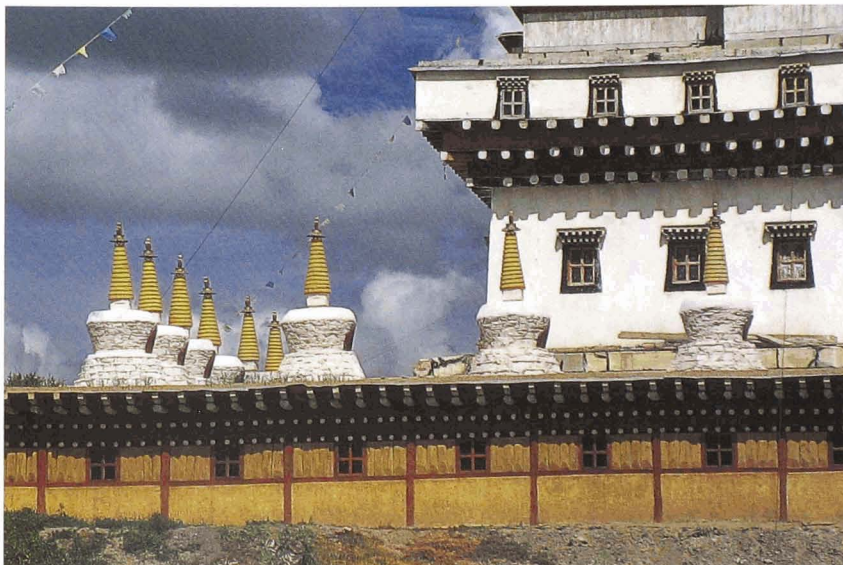
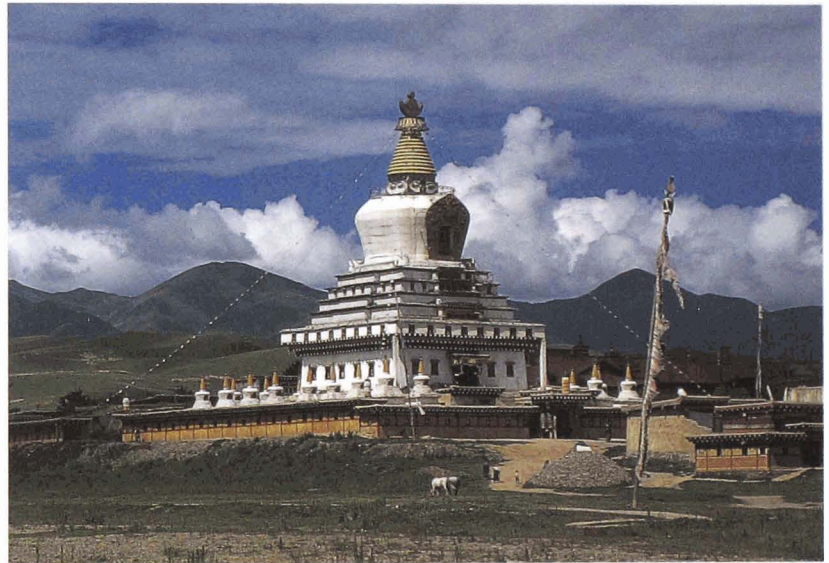


93. The sanctuary of the assembly hall shelters, among others, this large image of Lama Losang Chunli, who enlarged and renamed the monastery two centuries ago.

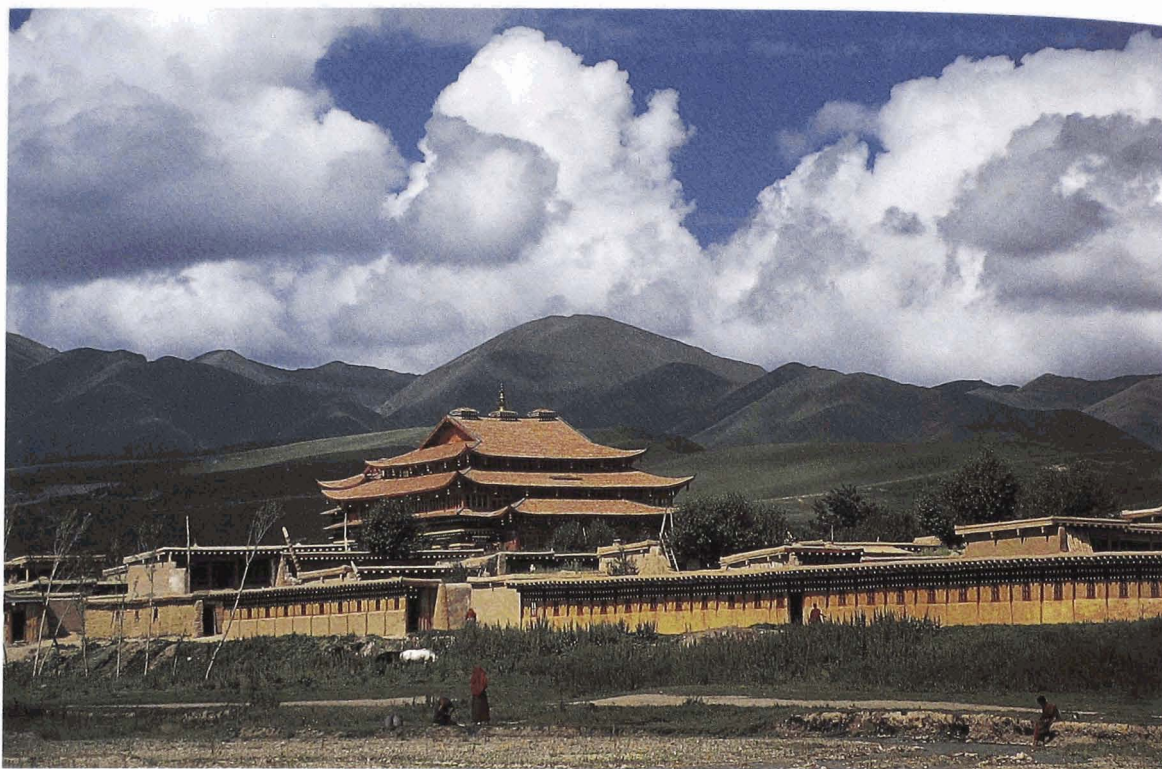


94. The esoteric Dünkhor Dratshang, or Kalacakra College, lies behind the *dukhang*.

95. Kirti Gompa's location is easily identified by the huge *stupa* Dündül Chörten on the southwestern corner of the monastic complex. It belongs to the largest *chörten* in Amdo.



96. Dündül Chörten: Along the base of the main *stupa* 24 smaller *chörten* are erected in rows. The main body of Dündül Chörten is about 30-40 m high.



97. Kirti Gompa's Gyüpa Dratshang—the Tantric College.



98. Upper Ngawa's Gomang Monastery: The sanctuary at the sutra hall's back side shelters monumental 5-6 m high statues of Yamantaka, Maitreya (picture) and Avalokiteshvara.



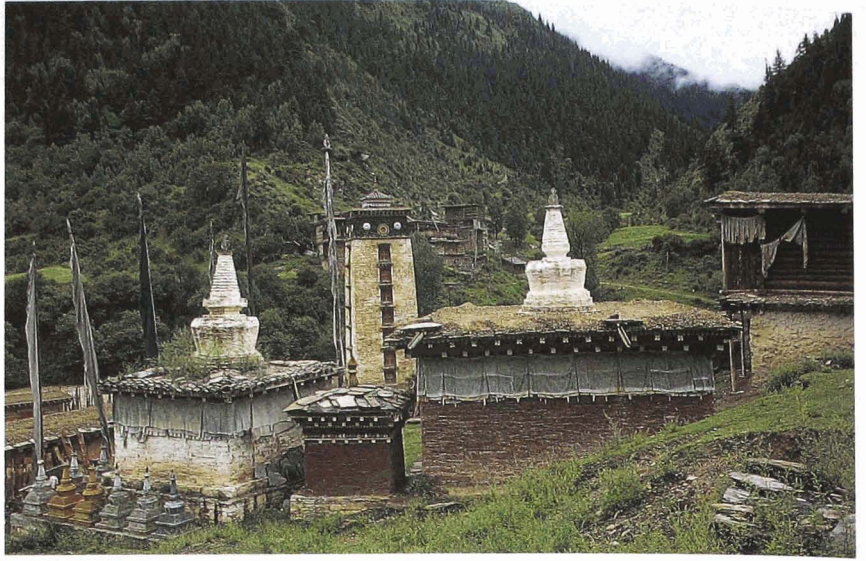
99. Mural of Gomang Gumpa.



100. The multi-coloured *chörten* in front of Sirin Kar monastery nestle in a forested valley of the river Do Chu.



101. A view of the multi-coloured *chörten* row in front and two of the three Milarepa towers in Sirin Kar.

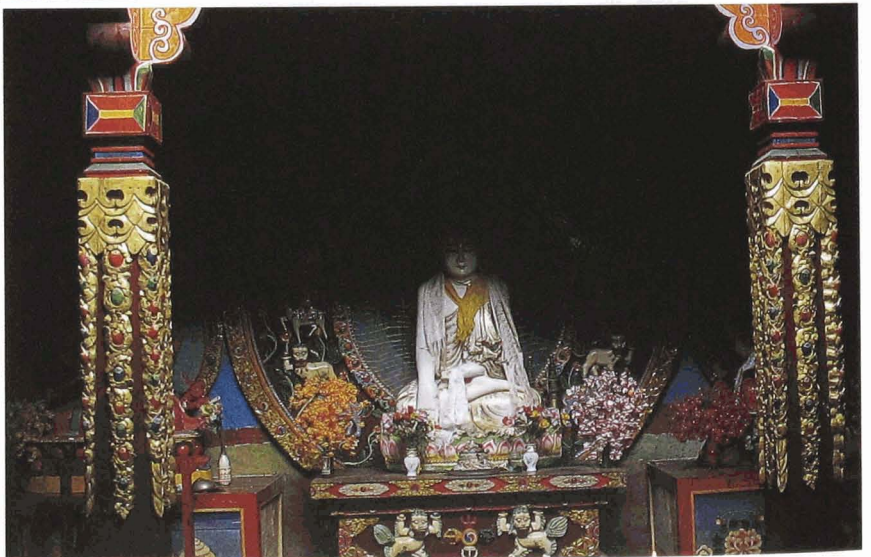


102. Sirin Kar: view of the Kagyüpa monastery.



103. A side door of the assembly hall.

104. The main image in the *dukhang* is a Burmese jade Buddha statue.

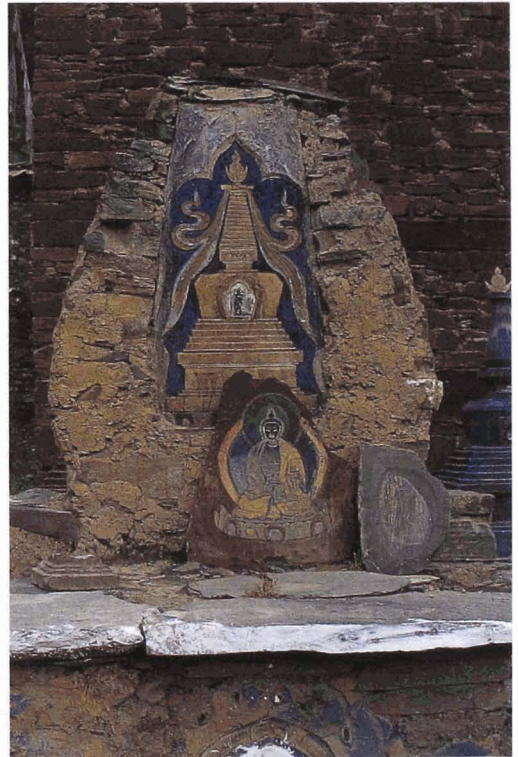




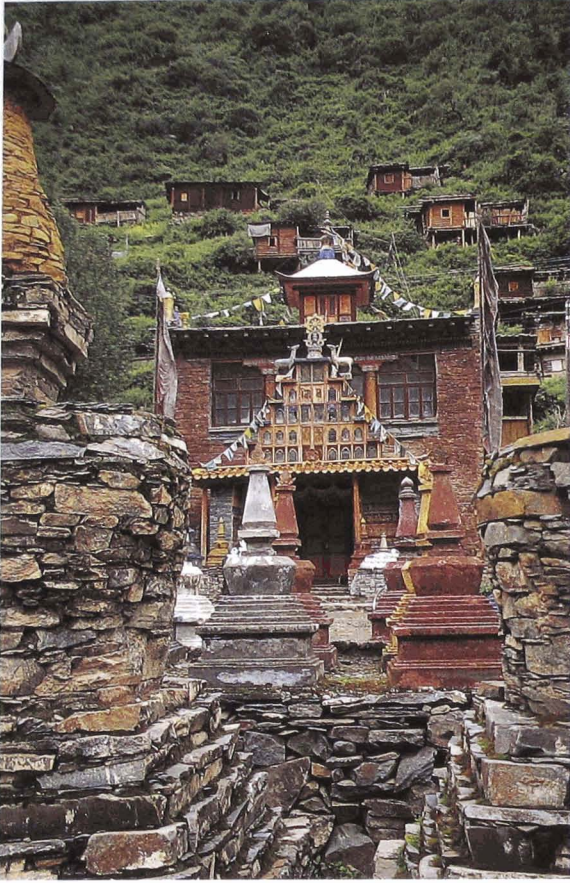
105. The sanctuary of the Tsanden Hwaré hall has a *mandala*, its main image depicting Padmasambhava, surrounded by many more smaller figures of other gurus.



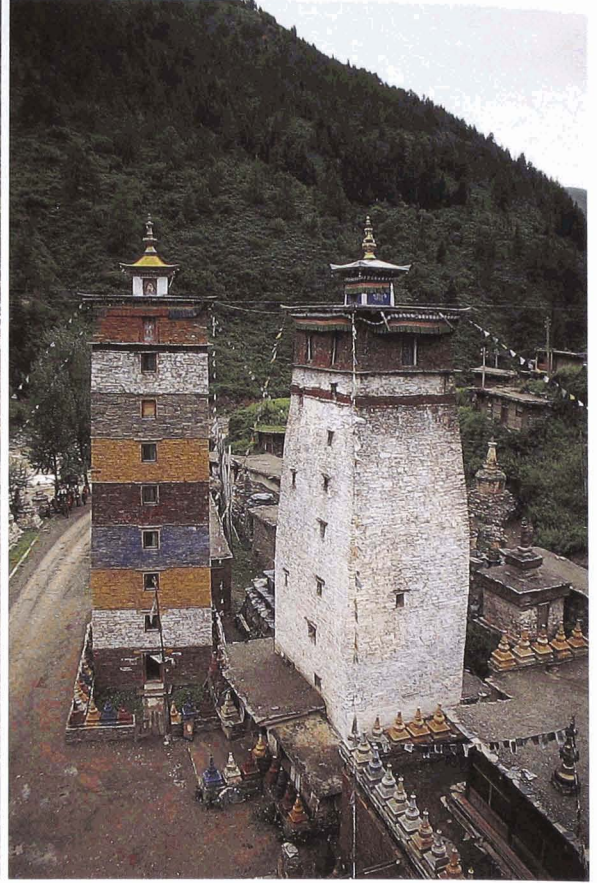
106. Small bronze statues on the altar of the *dukhang* (lama, Buddha Shakyamuni).



107. Mani stones at the side of the *mandala* hall Tsanden Hwaré.



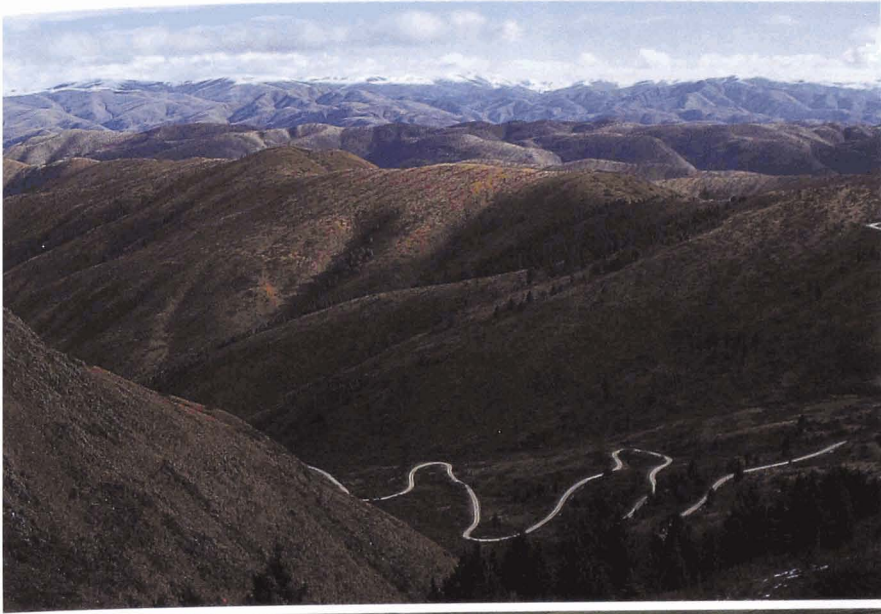
108. Main assembly hall.



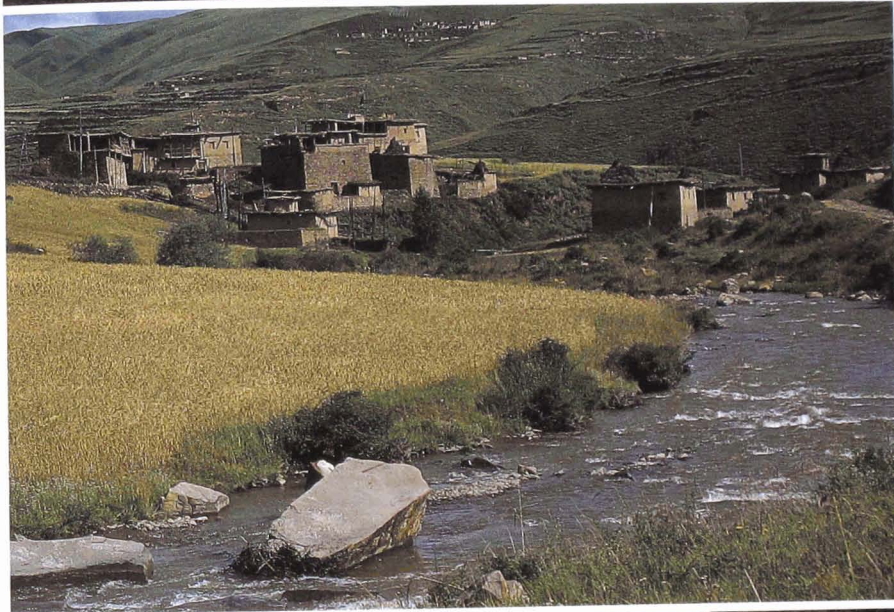
110. The Jingkar tower and the third Milarepa tower.



109. A panoramic view of the three Milarepa towers in Sirin Kar.



111. The Dzamthang road to Dzikhog valley leads from forested gorges into the grasslands and fields of upper Dzamthang.



112. The middle part of Dzikhog valley near Kathog village is characterized by barley fields and farming villages.



113. A panoramic view of the thron of *chörten* at Bangtuo monastery (Bathong Gompa), built from the 17th century up to 1910.



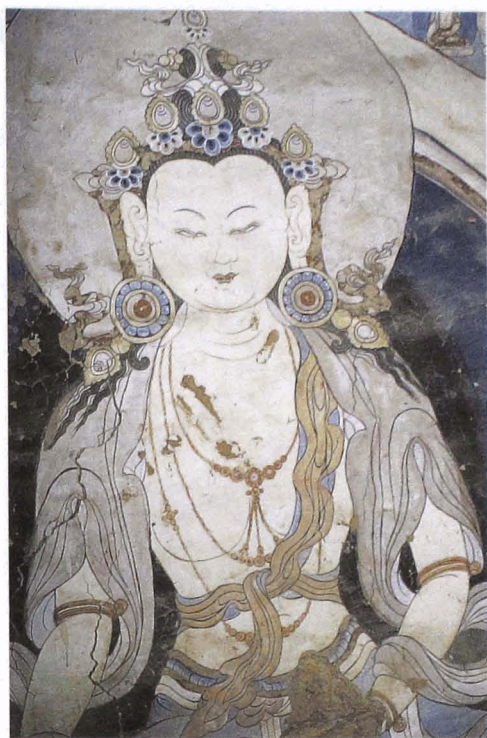
114. The five largest of these *chörten* are impressive structures built from stone and wood, apparently a combination of typical Tibetan reliquary stupas and the famous Kumbum *chörten* of Tsang province in central Tibet.



115. A very basic restoration in 1990 was done in an extremely simple and rustic manner.



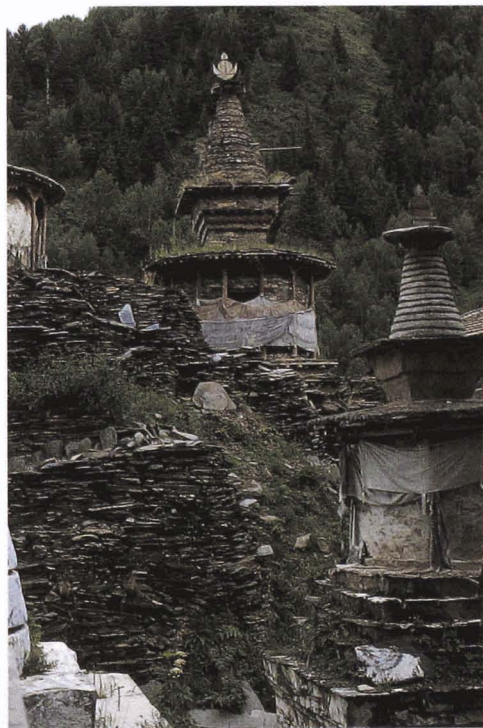
116. With a height of 42 m and a ground space of 484 square metres the chörten of 1910 belongs to the largest examples of this architectural type in the Tibetan realm.



117. Only the upper floors of the *chörten* still exhibit remains of the original paintings of the early 20th century—here a bodhisattva image.



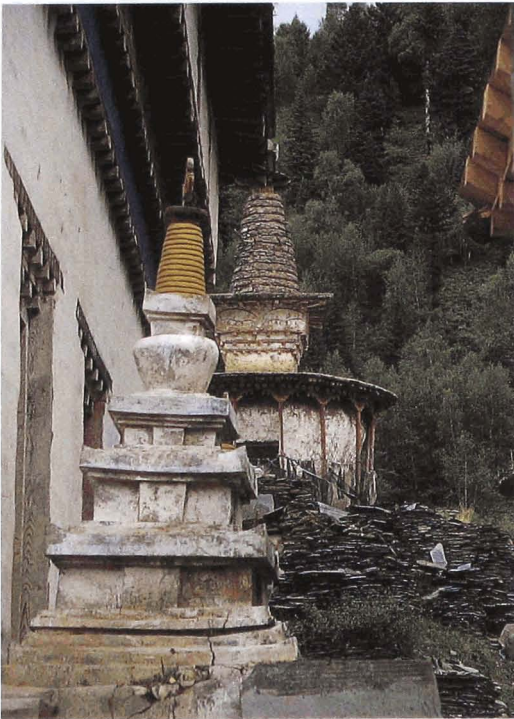
118. Mural of Buddha Shakyamuni.



119. The Bangtuo sutra walls define another specific type of Tibetan cultural monuments—a special Amdo feature.



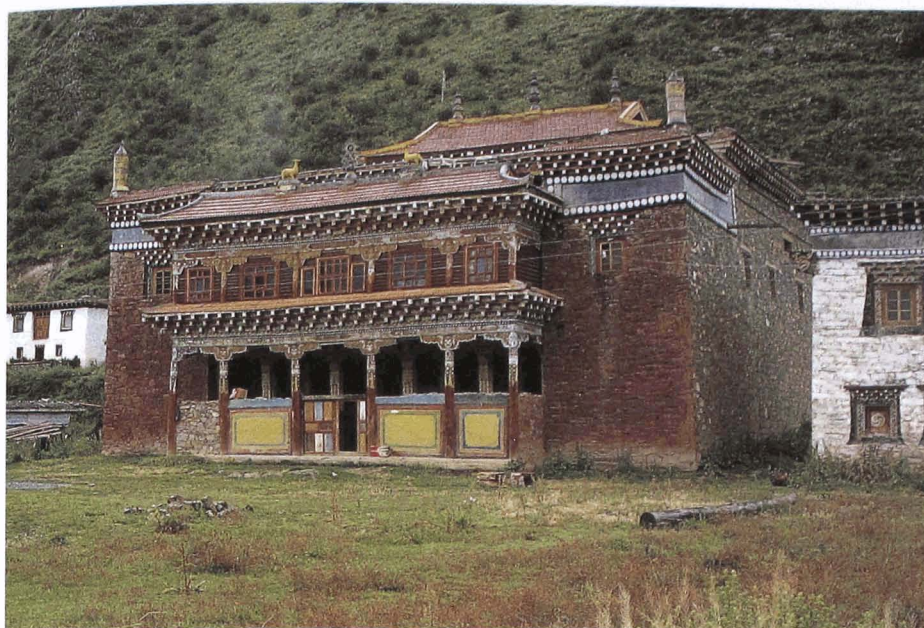
120. Surrounded by the Bangtuo *chörten* are more than 100,000 stone slabs bearing inscriptions of Buddhist sutras, corresponding to the text of 24 volumes of scriptures.



121. Smaller stupas line up along the base of the larger ones.

122. Many farm villages of Dzikhog valley's Namda community are dominated by impressive fortress-like houses, here overlooked by a large monastery on the slope of the mountain.





123. Sanglong Gompa (Chin. *Sanlang Si*) in Namda community is one of the Nyingmapa's 33 monastic institutions in the Dzamthang area.



124. The excellent woodcarving of Sanglong monastery's rebuilt assembly hall displays a very high standard of craftsmanship.

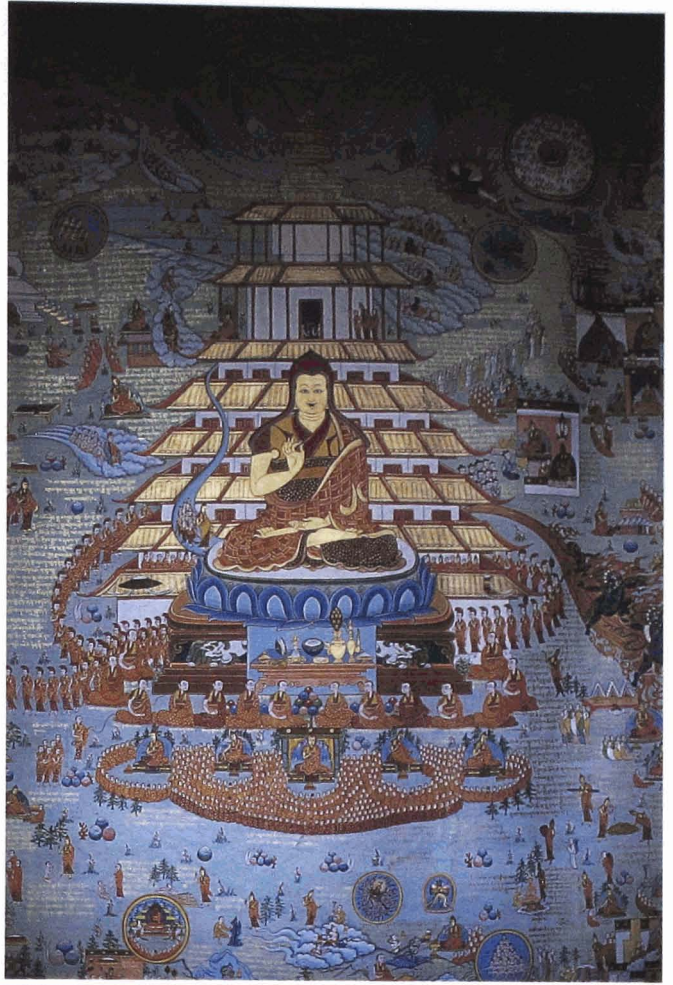


125. There are beautiful new murals in Sanglong's *dukhang*, such as the *adibuddha* Samantabhadra.

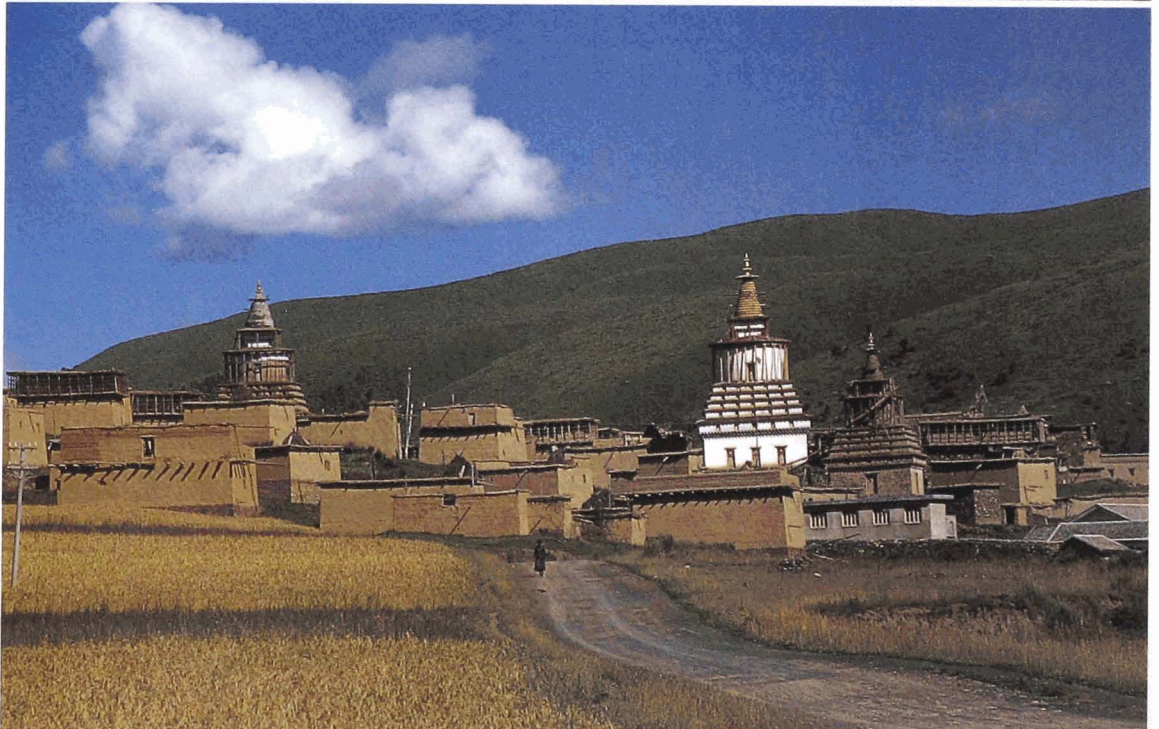


126. A panoramic view of the large monastic city Dzamthang Chöde Chenpo, of which Tsangwa Gompa is the main lamasery and chief institution of the Jonangpa order.

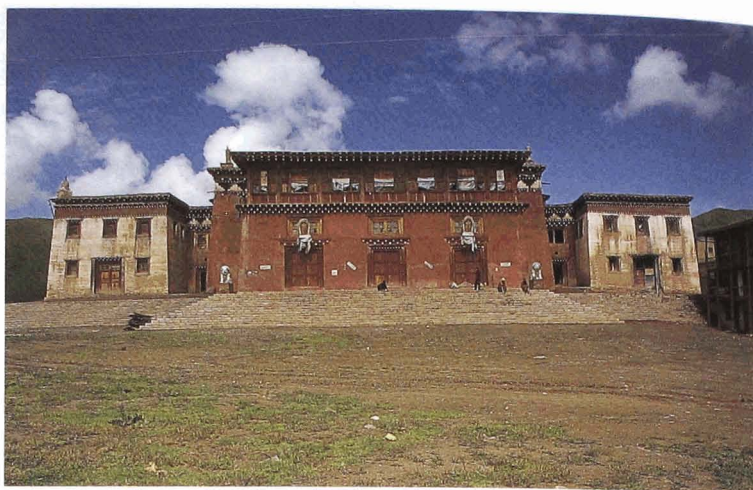
127. A *thangka* in Chöje Gompa's upper floor depicts Taranatha, one of the most brilliant exponents of the Jonang school of Tibetan Buddhism, and the famous Kumbum *chörten* of this order's main monastery Jomonang.



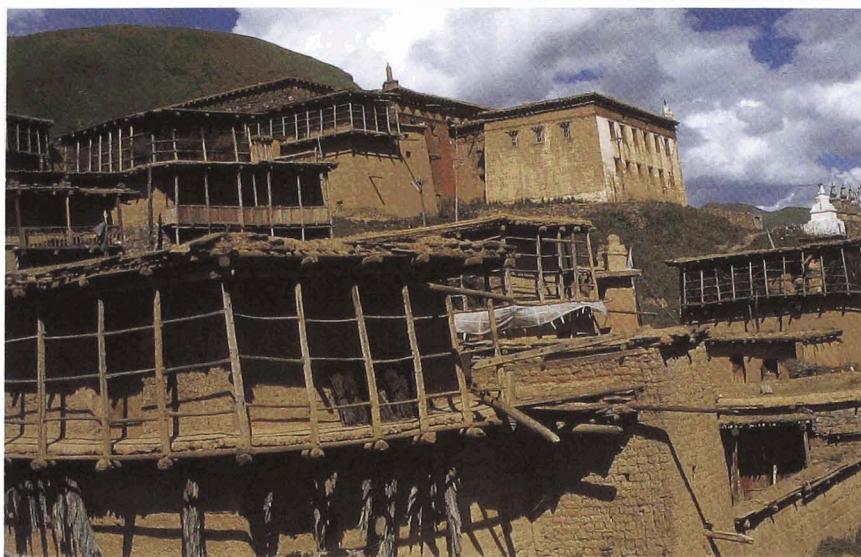
128. Dzamthang's monastic city has a skyline marked by a considerable number of large and middle-sized *chörten*.



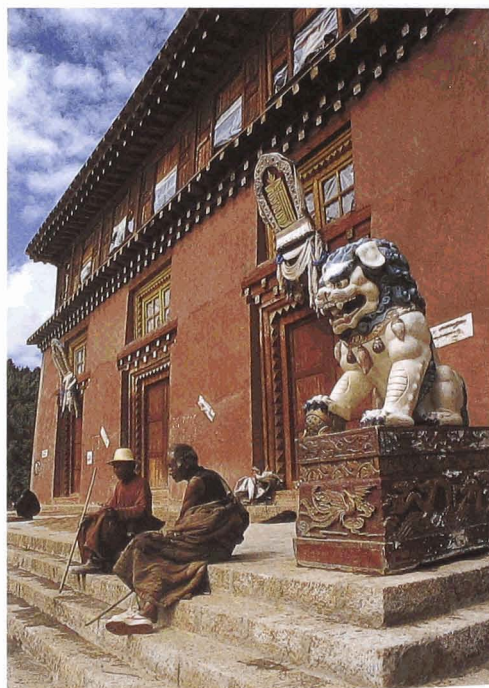
129. Main assembly hall of Tsangwa Monastery.



130. The monastic complexes extend from the village of Middle Dzamthang itself.



131. Entrance to the main *dukhang* of the lamasery.





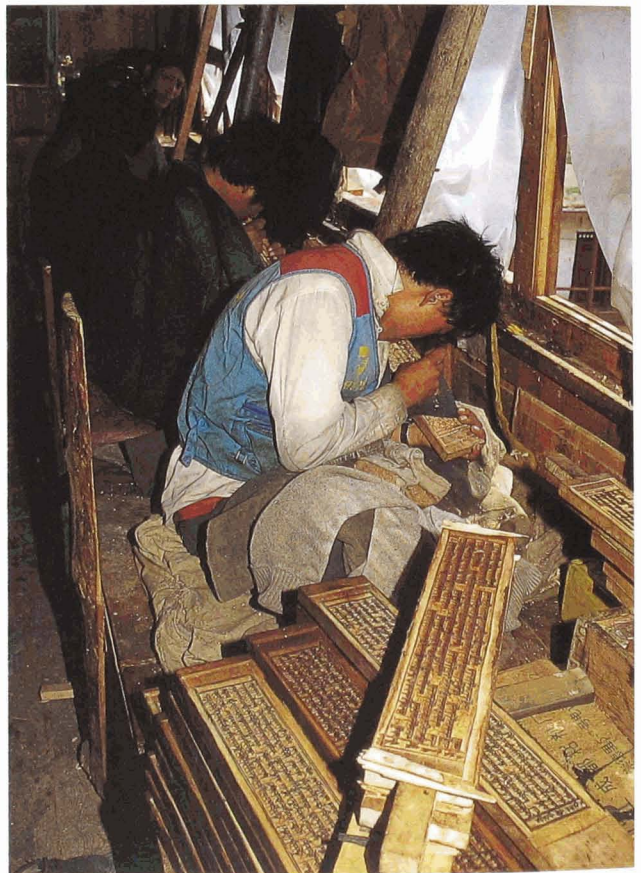
132. A wheel of Life and Death (*bhavacakra*) in the vestibule of Tsangwa Dukhang.



133. Statue of Shakyamuni.



134. A bronze image of Taranatha.



135. About 15,000 wooden printing blocks are stored in the depot of the printing establishment (Tib. *parkhang*), probably the only Jonangpa xylographs world-wide. As many of them were destroyed, a great number of blocks had to be newly engraved.



136. Dzamthang's *parkhang* offers prints of writings of Dolpopa, Taranatha and other important teachers of the Jonangpa order.



137. 24 volumes are works solely by Taranatha, while eight volumes are of works by Dolpopa. Here a monk wraps a freshly printed volume.

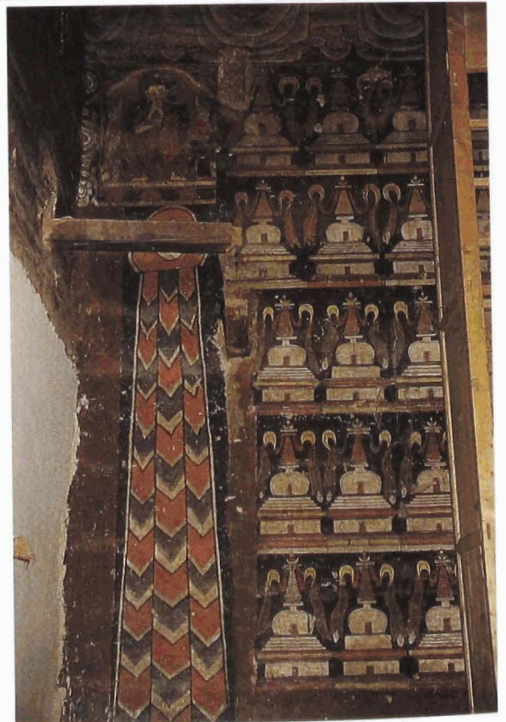


138. The hall at Tshebkhang shelters a large Jowo bronze statue.



139. Old murals in the Tshebkhang depict rows of *chörten* and Tantric deities.

140. These paintings belong to the oldest remaining murals of Dzamthang.

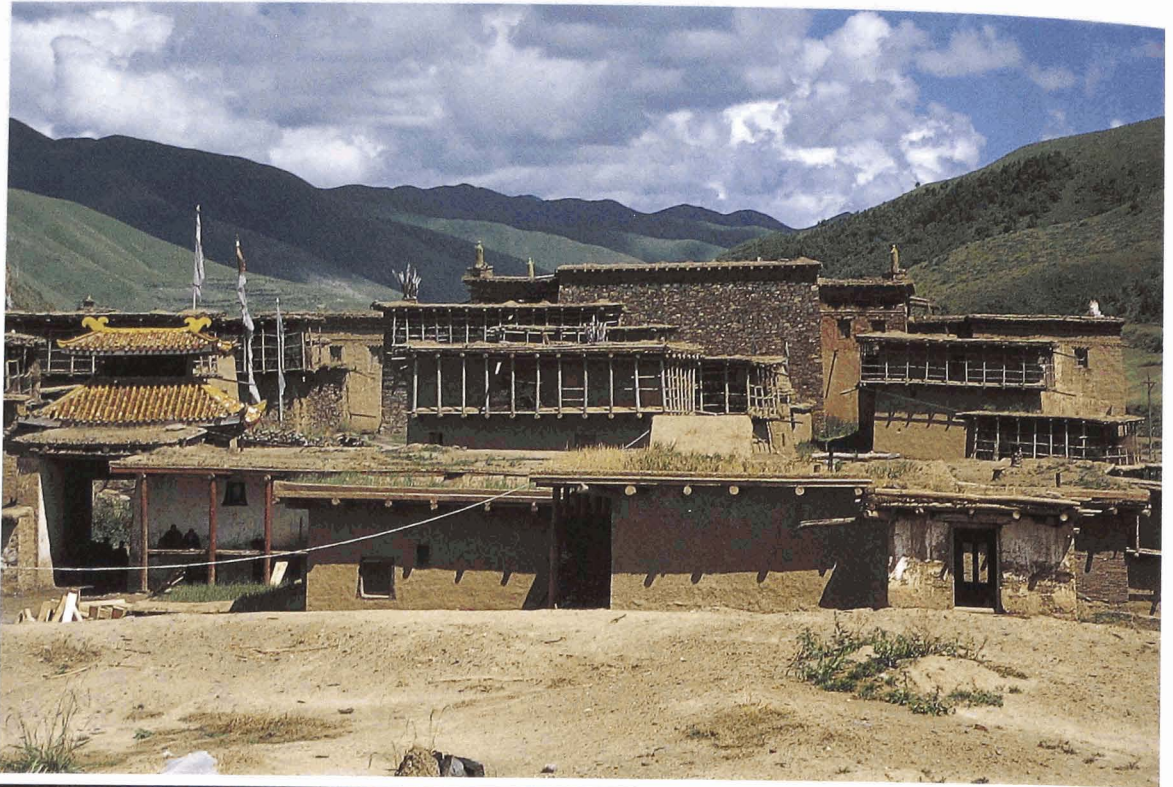




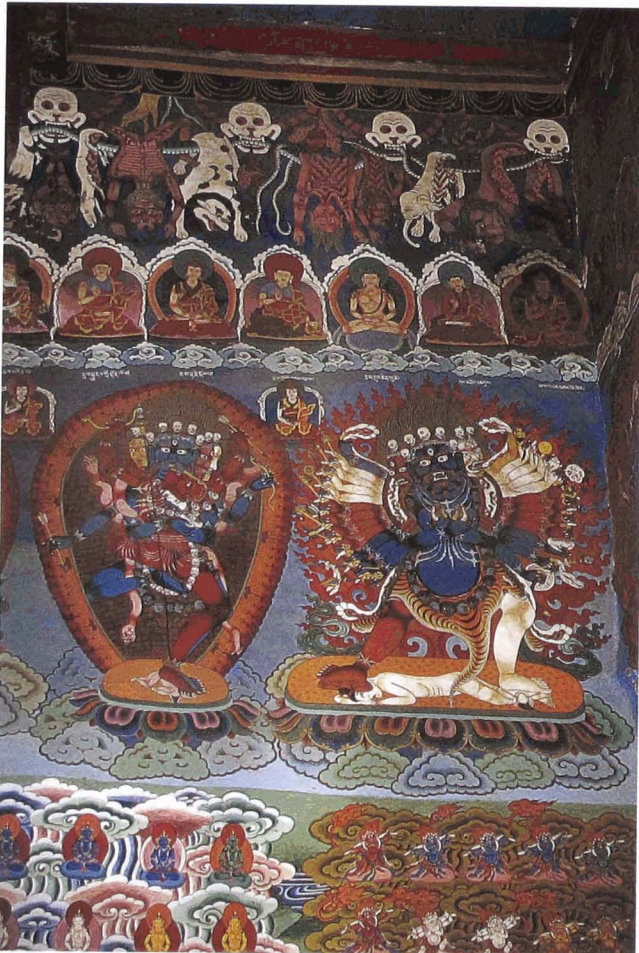
141. The large Tashi Gomang Chörten within the compound of Tshebcu Gompa was built by Rinchen Pel's disciple Tshebcu Ratnakirti after the model of the Kumbum Chörten of Central Tibet's Jomonang monastery.



142. Monks riding a motor-bike have become a common sight in Tibetan areas.



143. Above the roofs of
Dzamthang Chöde Chenpo.



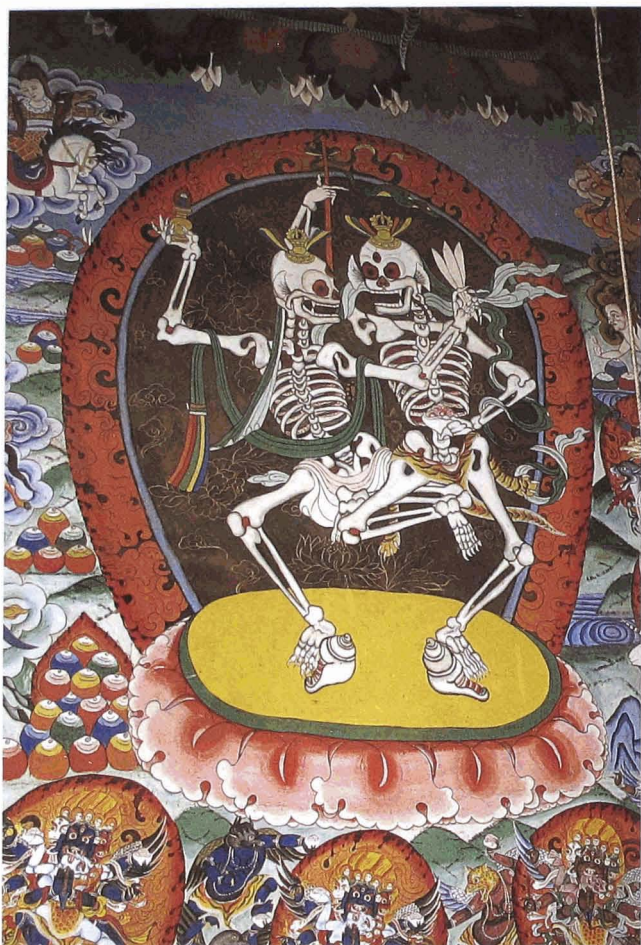
144. The protectors' temple is amazingly large and consists of a big ante-chamber and the actual sanctuary. The walls exhibit an abundance of paintings, with murals in the upper part which were beautifully restored in the 1980s.



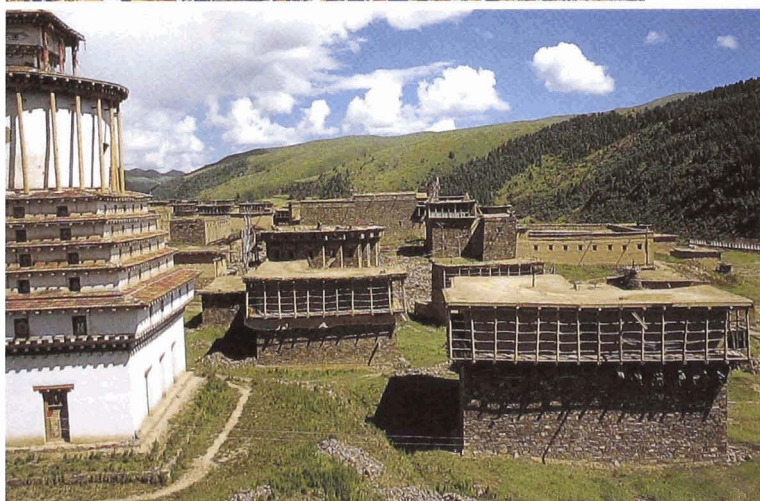
145. A long row of paintings portrays eminent masters of the Buddhist Doctrine: starting with the mythical kings of Shambhala and ending with the 46th Jonangpa Dharmaraja. Below are the Tantric deities Kalacakra and Cakrasamvara.



146. On the wall opposite to the entrance different protectors such as Yamantaka and Mahakala guard the holy site.



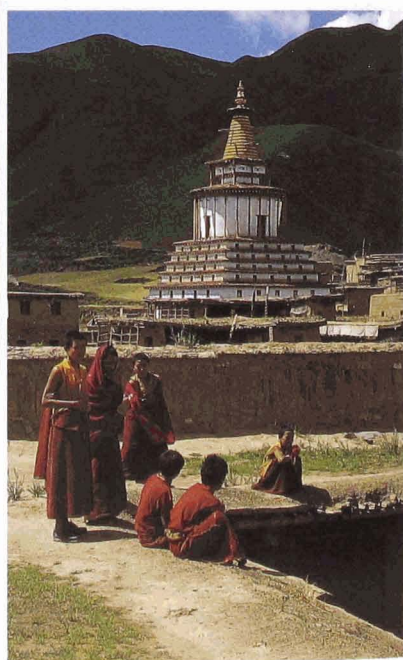
147. Citipati (Tib. *dur khrod bdag po*), the dancing Lords of the charnel grounds.



148. The monks in Dzamthang's monastic city reside in huge houses with large balconies.

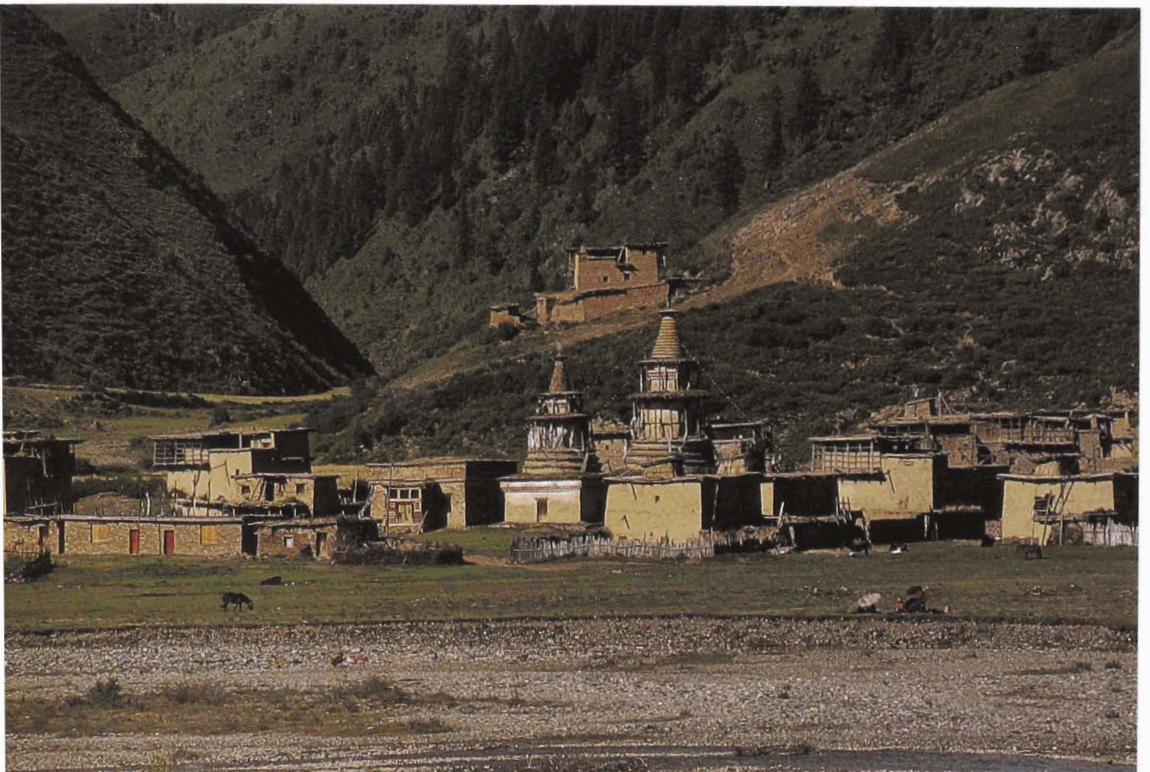
149. Rebuilt since 1982, Tashi Gomang Chörten again overlooks the monks' activities.

A considerable number of larger examples of Tashi Gomang and Changchub Chörten are built within the complex of Dzamthang's main lamasery.

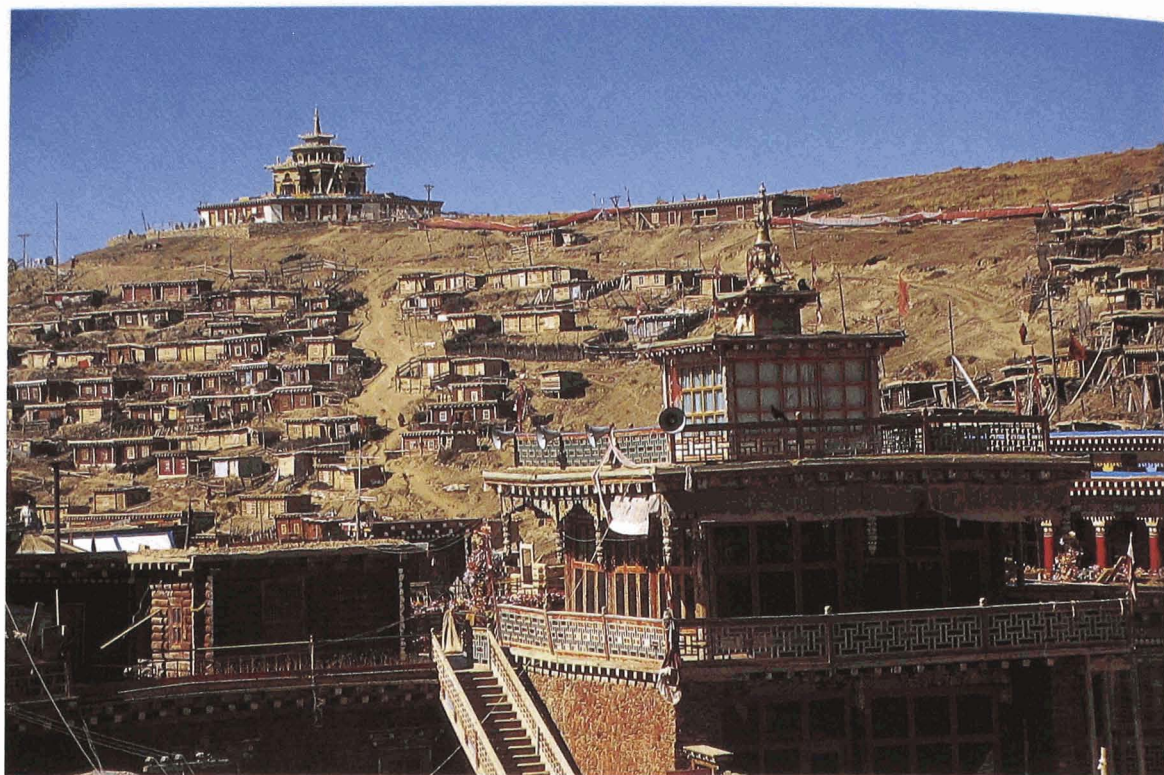




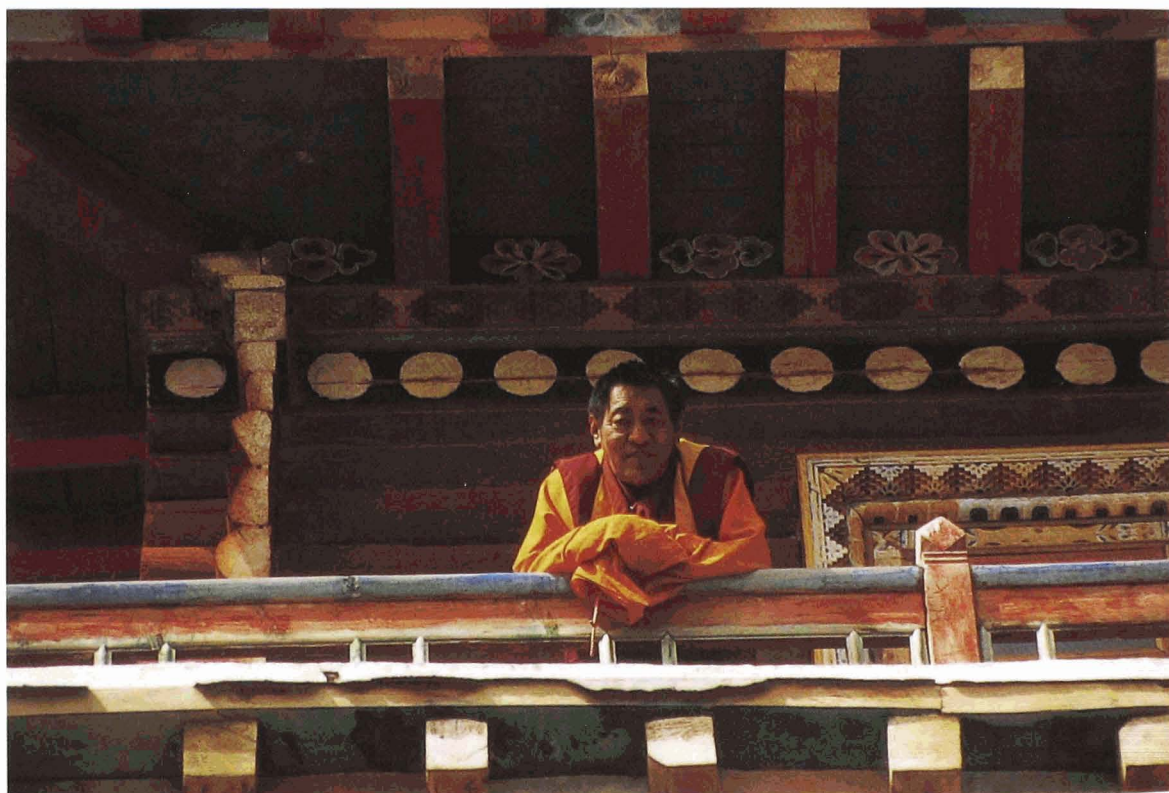
150. Houses of the monks extend across the entire slope of the mountain above Dzamthang.



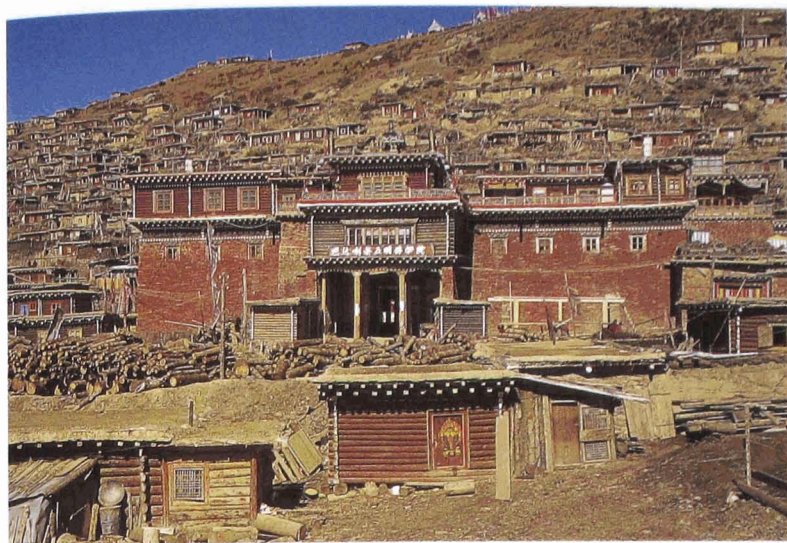
151. The Jonangpa order distinguished itself from other Tibetan Buddhist schools by their energy in building stupas. Ordinarily none of their monasteries and larger villages are found without at least one of this typical Tibetan architectural feature.



157. View from Jigme Phüntshog's residence looking towards the *mandala*-like temple on the ridge.



158. Khempo Jigme Phüntshog.



159. The undoubted core of Larung Gar is a huge and massive stone structure which, from the outside, looks like a fortress.

160. After passing through the tall gate, one enters a spacious courtyard area where Khempo Jigphün teaches his followers.



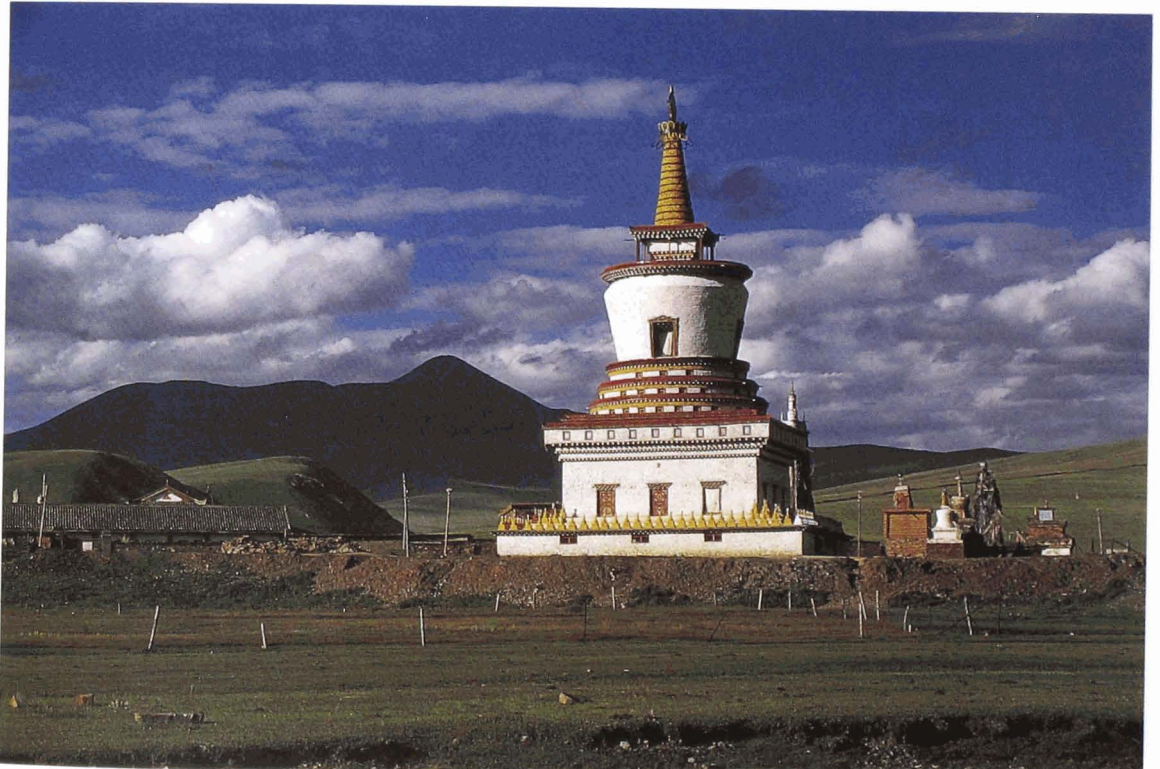
161. Monks studying at Larung Gar.



162. Since Khempo argues that nuns have only a few possibilities to get higher religious training, so he decided to establish a nunnery and strengthen the education of nuns.



163. Bronzes in the nunnery of Larung Gar.



164. The rather prosaic county town of Serta possesses an architectural landmark of splendid proportions—the large ‘Stupa for Subduing the Demons’, Dündül Chörten—almost a century old.

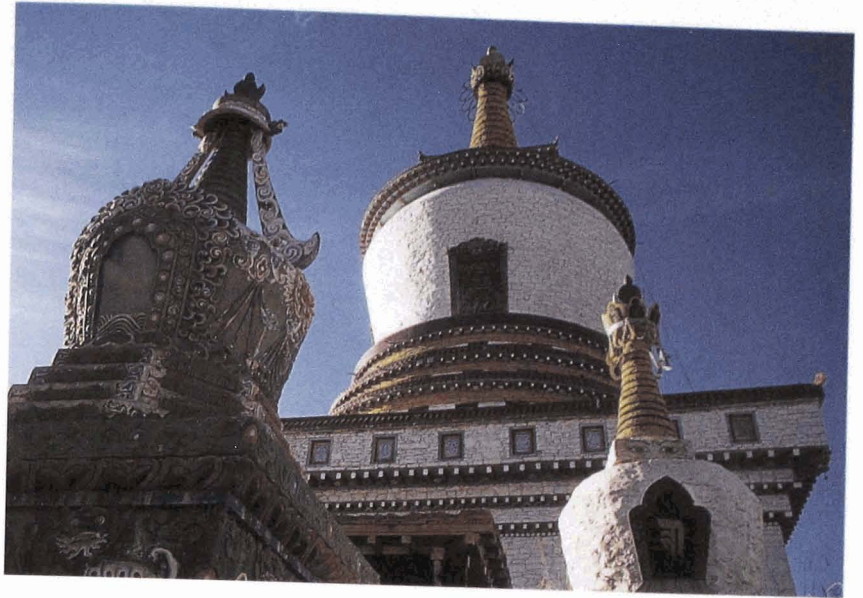


165. A small Nyingmapa monastery in the vicinity, Tashi Gompa, is connected to the large Dündül Chörten.

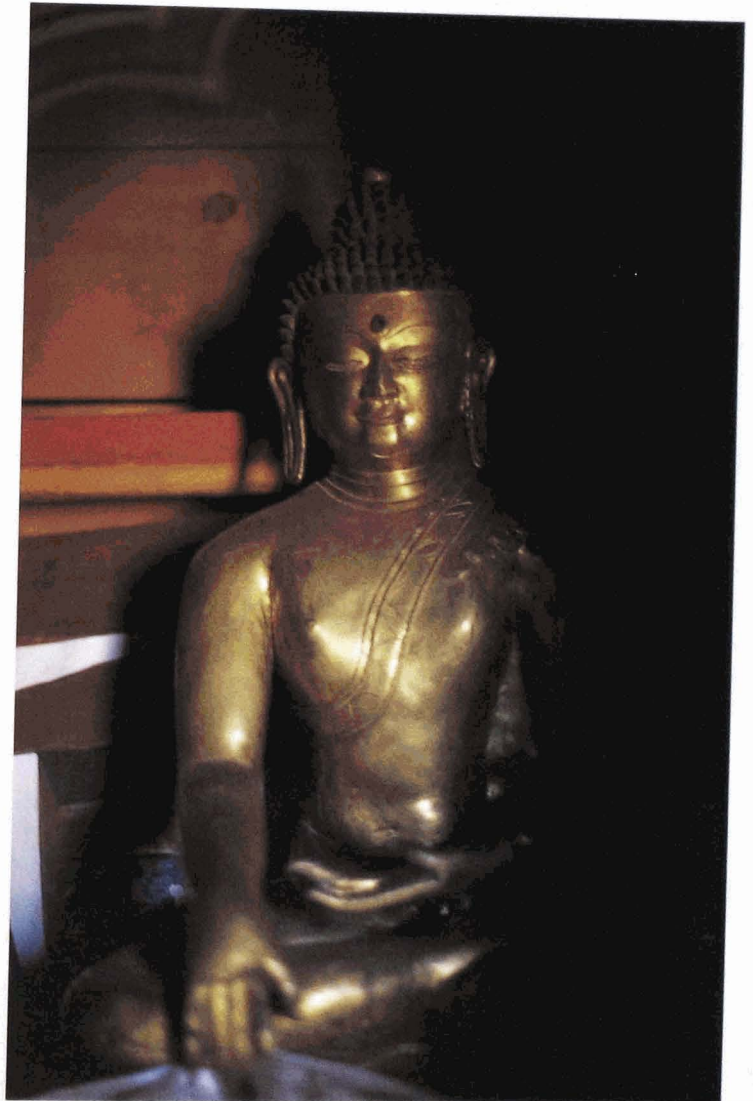


166. Monks proudly display three older bronzes kept in Tashi Gompa—a reliquary *chörten* and two statues of Shakyamuni Buddha.

167. Dündül Chörten is of the classical Tibetan *stupa* type, based on a square platform. The basement's circumference is 100 m, while the *chörten* rises up to 50 m in height. It is said to be the highest *stupa* in Sichuan province.

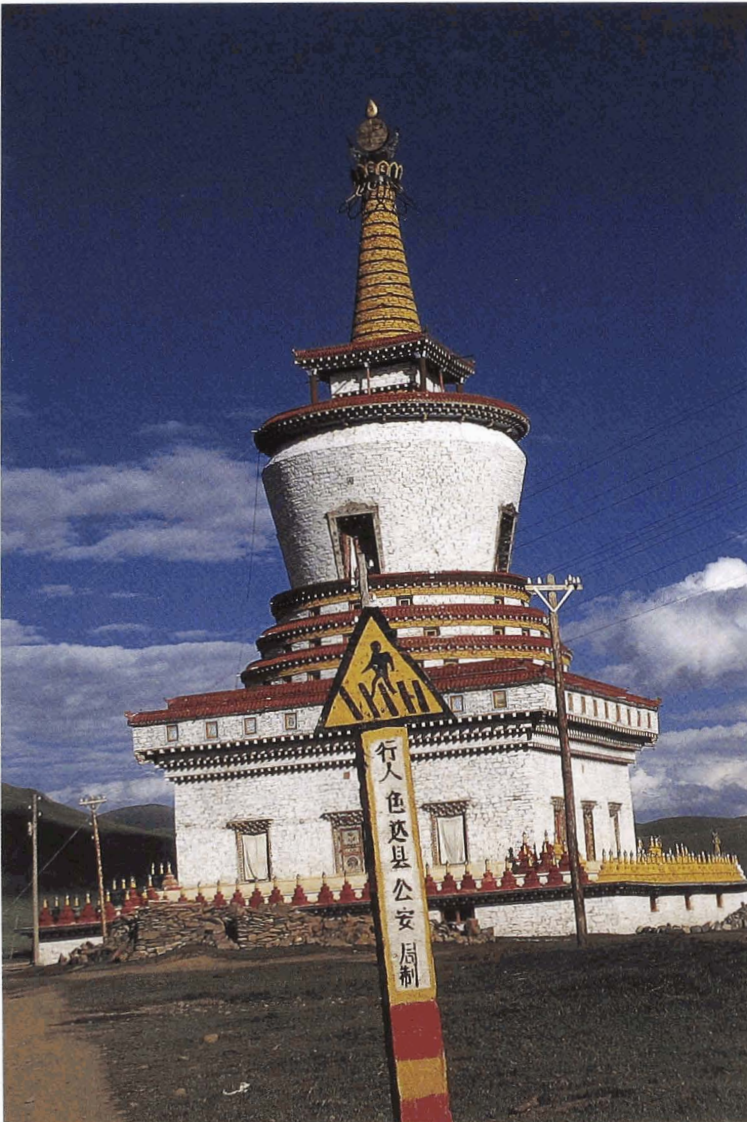


168. Dündül Chörten: bronze image of Buddha in one of the main chapels.

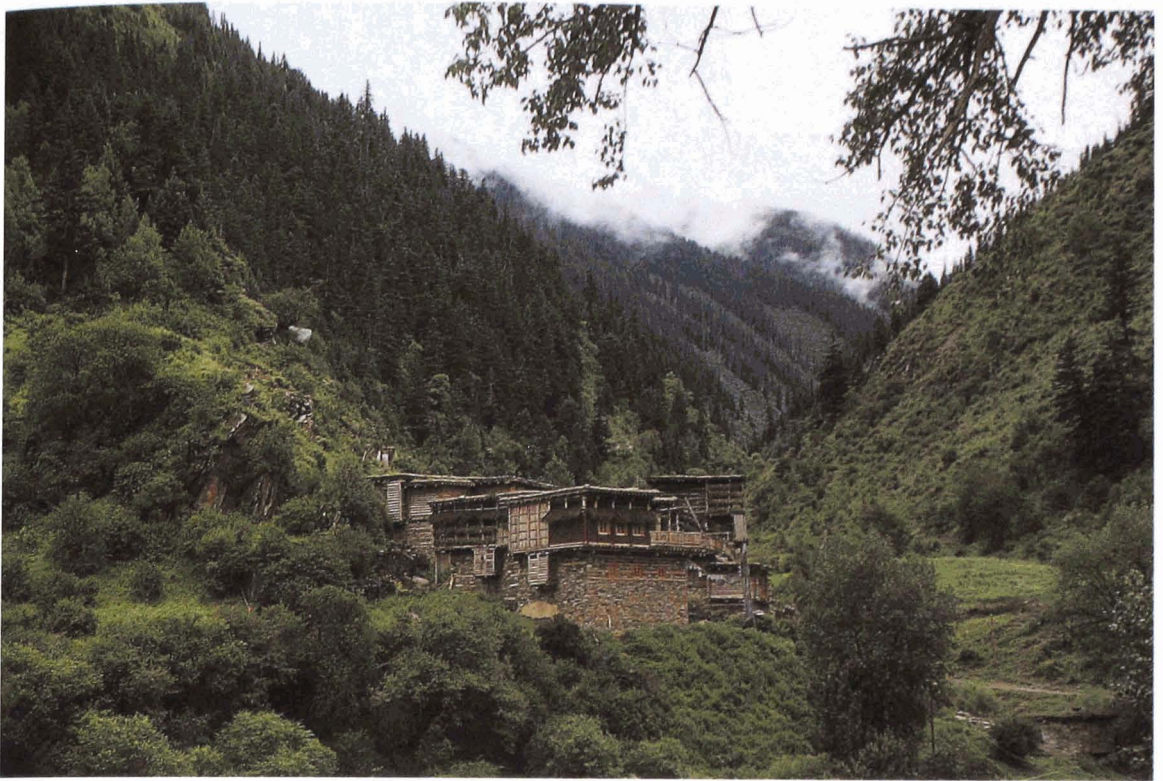




169. A ladder leads onto the roof of the *chörten*'s basement, the rim of which is framed by more than 100 white and yellow *stupas* of a smaller size.



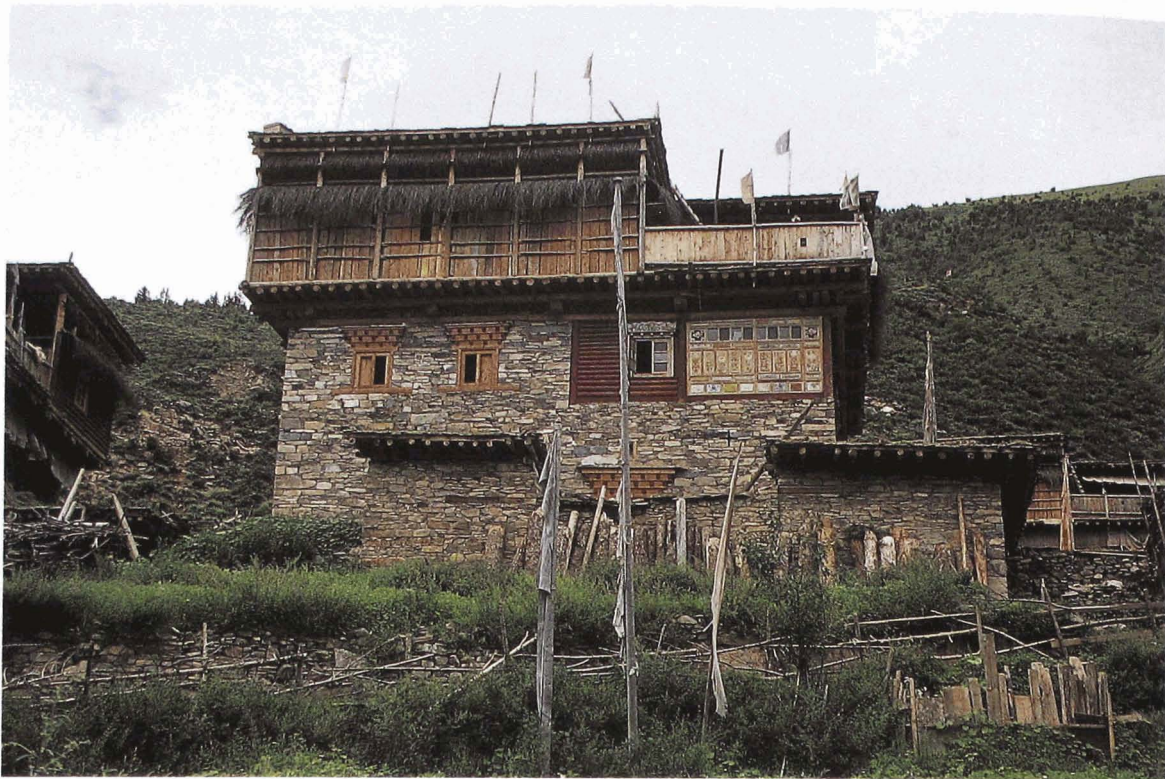
170. Comparing old photographs (see plate 11, p. 87) to the current structure of Dündül Chörten, the architectural framework is seen to be essentially the same as the old one erected in 1914.



171. The lower Ser Chu valley is a country of wealthy peasants who have built huge fortress-like farmhouses.



172. Typical farmhouses in Lower Serta reflect the region's abundance in stone and wood.



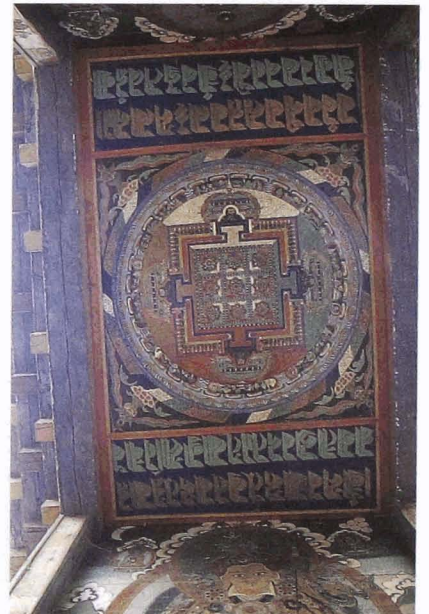
173. These farmhouses are usually perched on high eminences, easy to defend, and their thick stone walls are pierced with narrow slit windows.



174. The farmhouses have either two or three floors, with wooden overhanging balconies, and are topped by enormous open lofts used to store and dry the corn.



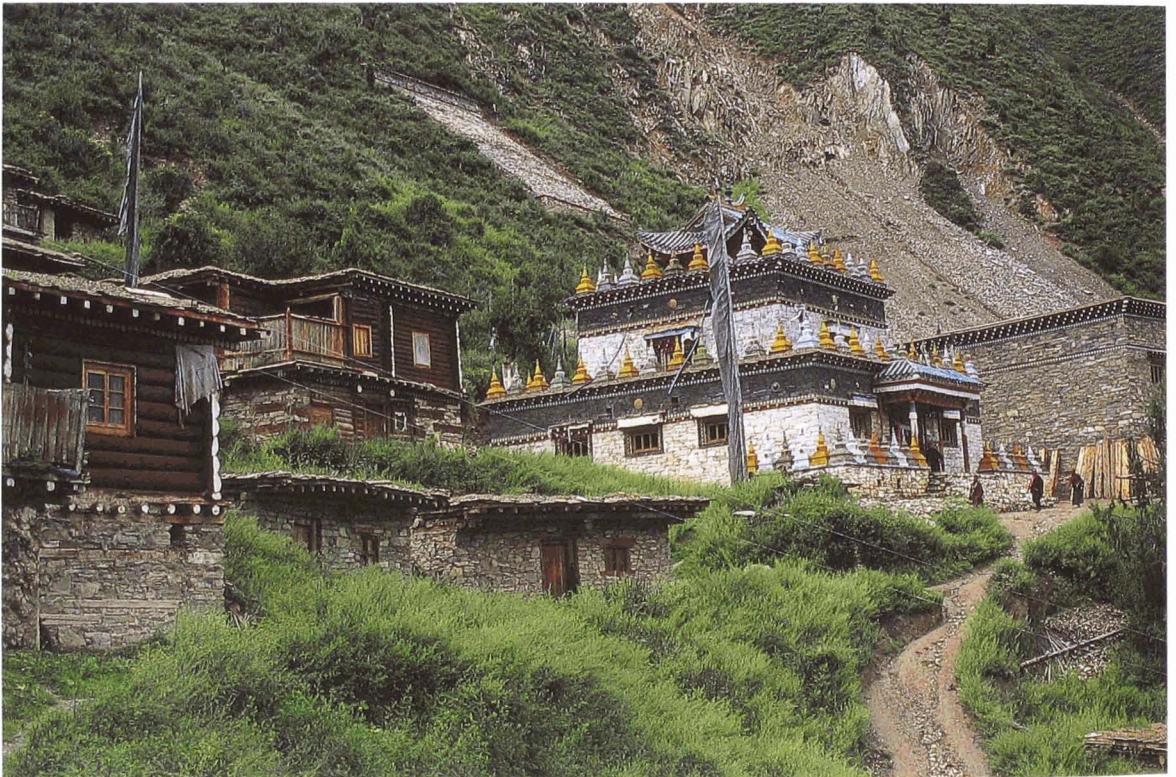
175. Gyirngo Gompa's gate chorten:
mural of Padmasambhava.



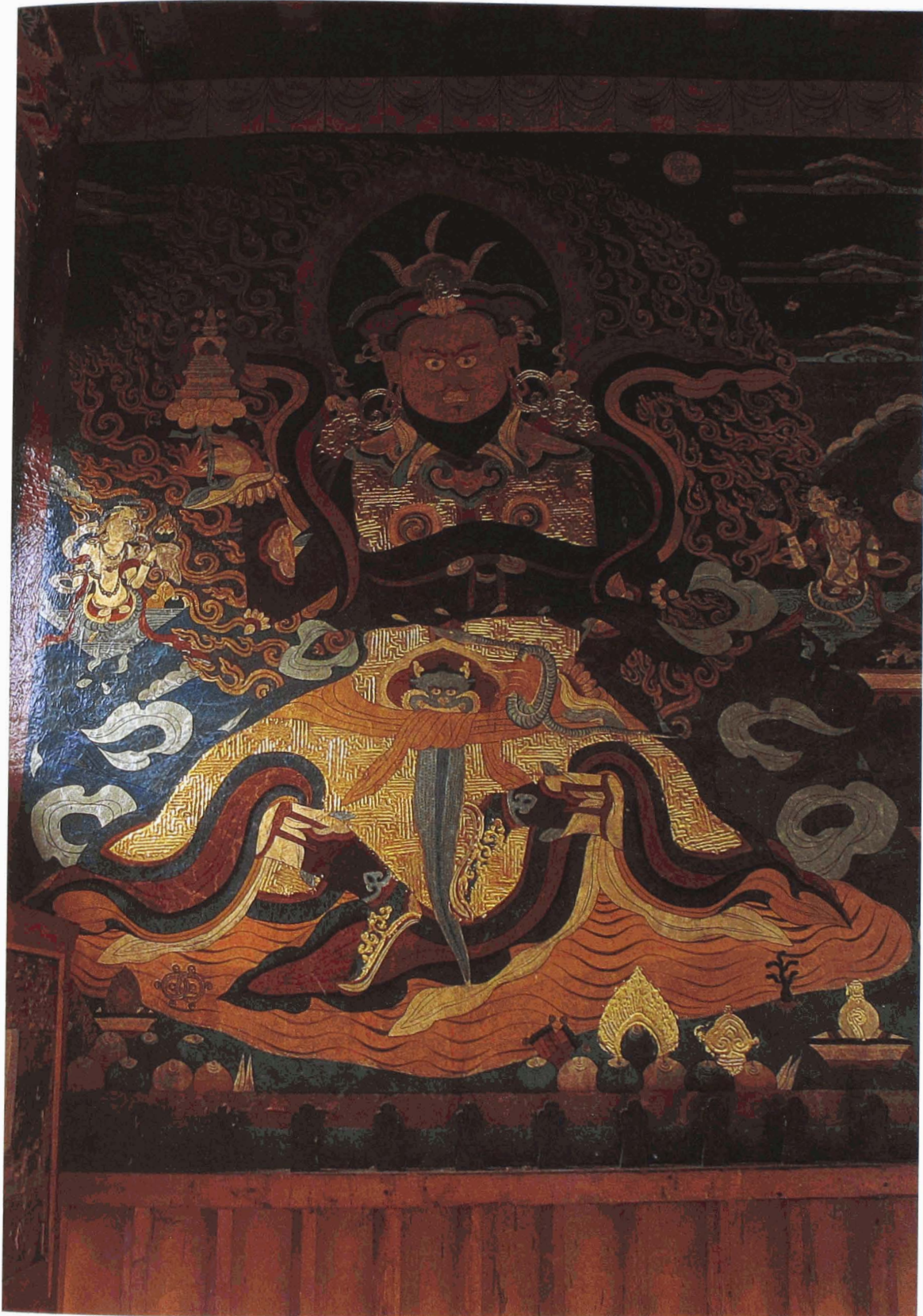
176. A mandala painting on the
ceiling of the gate chorten.



177. A mural depicting Padmasambhava in the *dukhang*.



178. *Dukhang* (assembly hall) of Gyirngo Gompa, a branch of the famous Nyingmapa lamasery of Peyül in Kham.



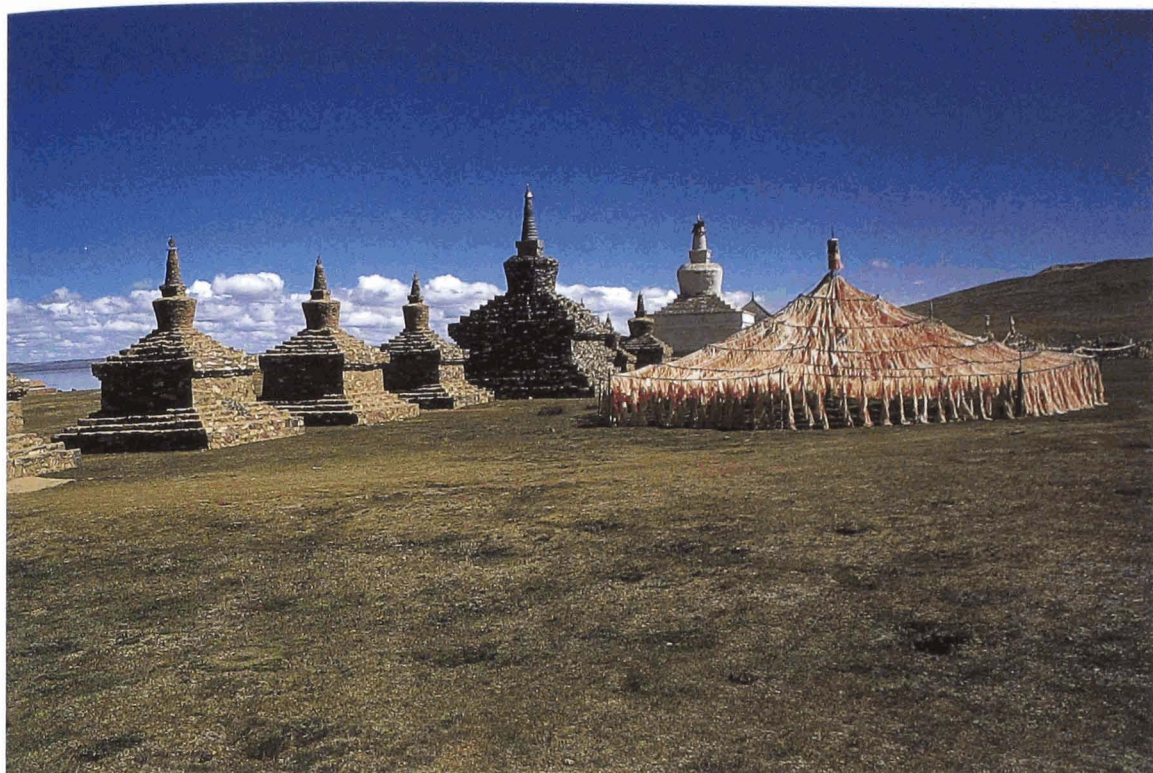
179. Virupaksa, a lokapala depicted in the vestibule of the *dukhang*.



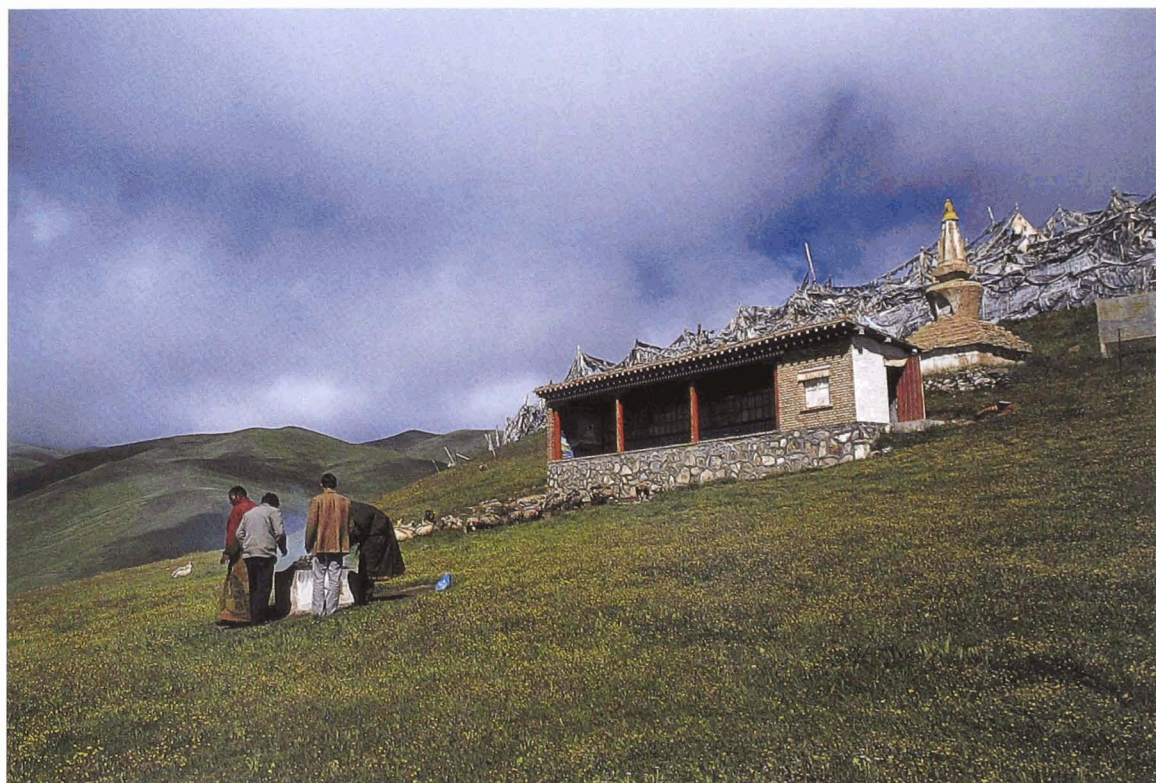
180. Prayer-flags (at Tshowar Karche, Matö).



181. The *gyodar* is a special pattern of prayer-flag arrangement characteristic of southern Amdo.



182. From afar a *gyodar* looks like a small *chörten*, or resembles a pyramid. Coming closer, one realizes that the object consists entirely of prayer-flags, hung up on strings or wires fixed to a central wooden flag-pole.



183. Burial ground near Thraling Gompa.



184. This kind of prayer-flag tower is often found at sky burial sites (*dur khrod*) in the Ngolok-Seta realm.



185. *Lhatu* typical of northeastern Tibet—a votive cairn, a large square-built altar for worship of local deities to prevent their doing harm.



186. A unique site is the so-called *chösden* north of Hongyuan (Mewa county).



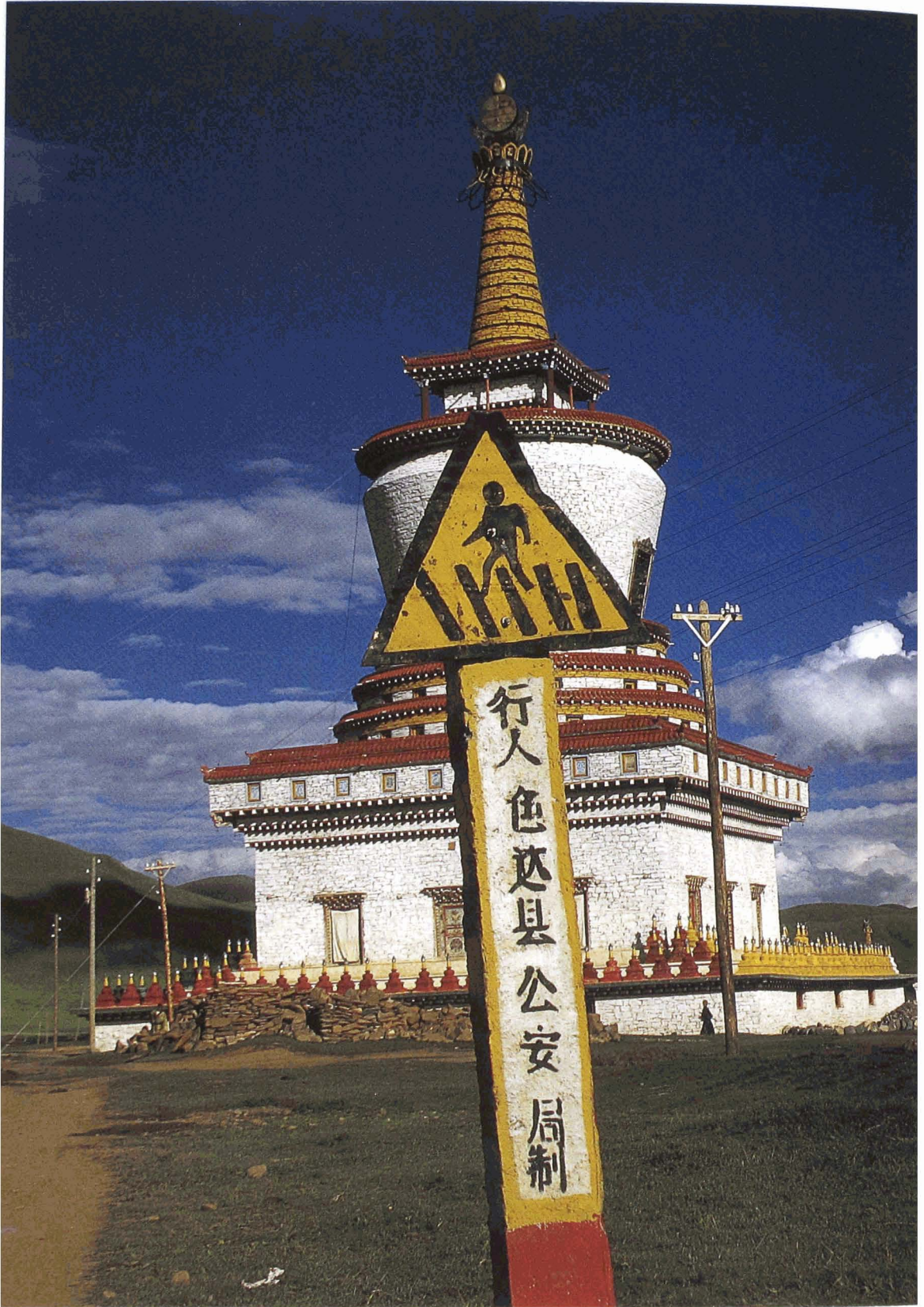
187. Another view of the Hongyuan *chösdön*.



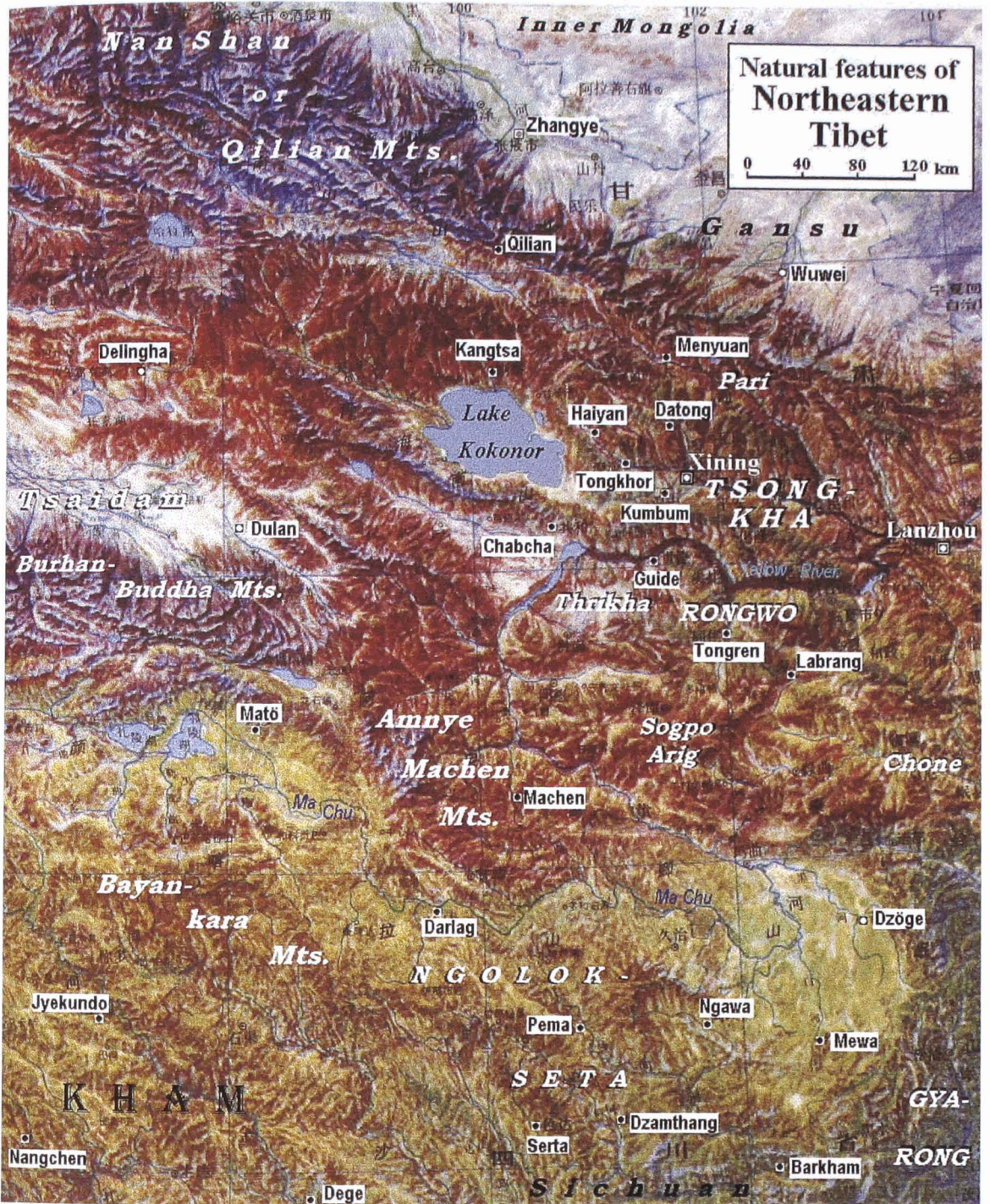
188. The *lhato* is the site for the annual offering of arrows to the mountain god, to be performed regularly. According to the nature of the area inhabited, each tribe may have its own mountain god, or several tribes would share a more important one.



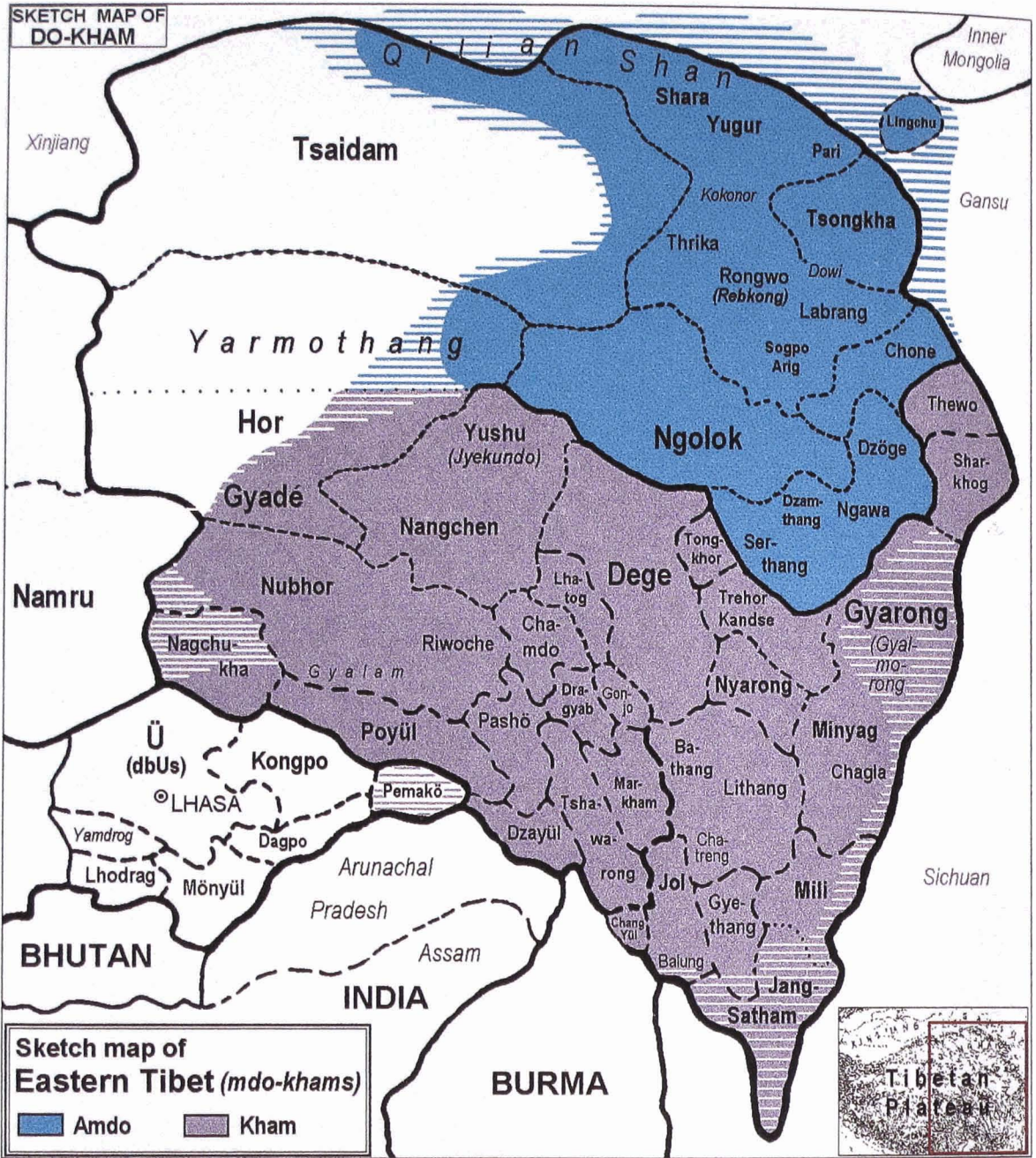
189. Examples of these arrow-*lhotos* and *obos* can be found all over Amdo, be it in Qinghai, Gansu or northernmost Sichuan.



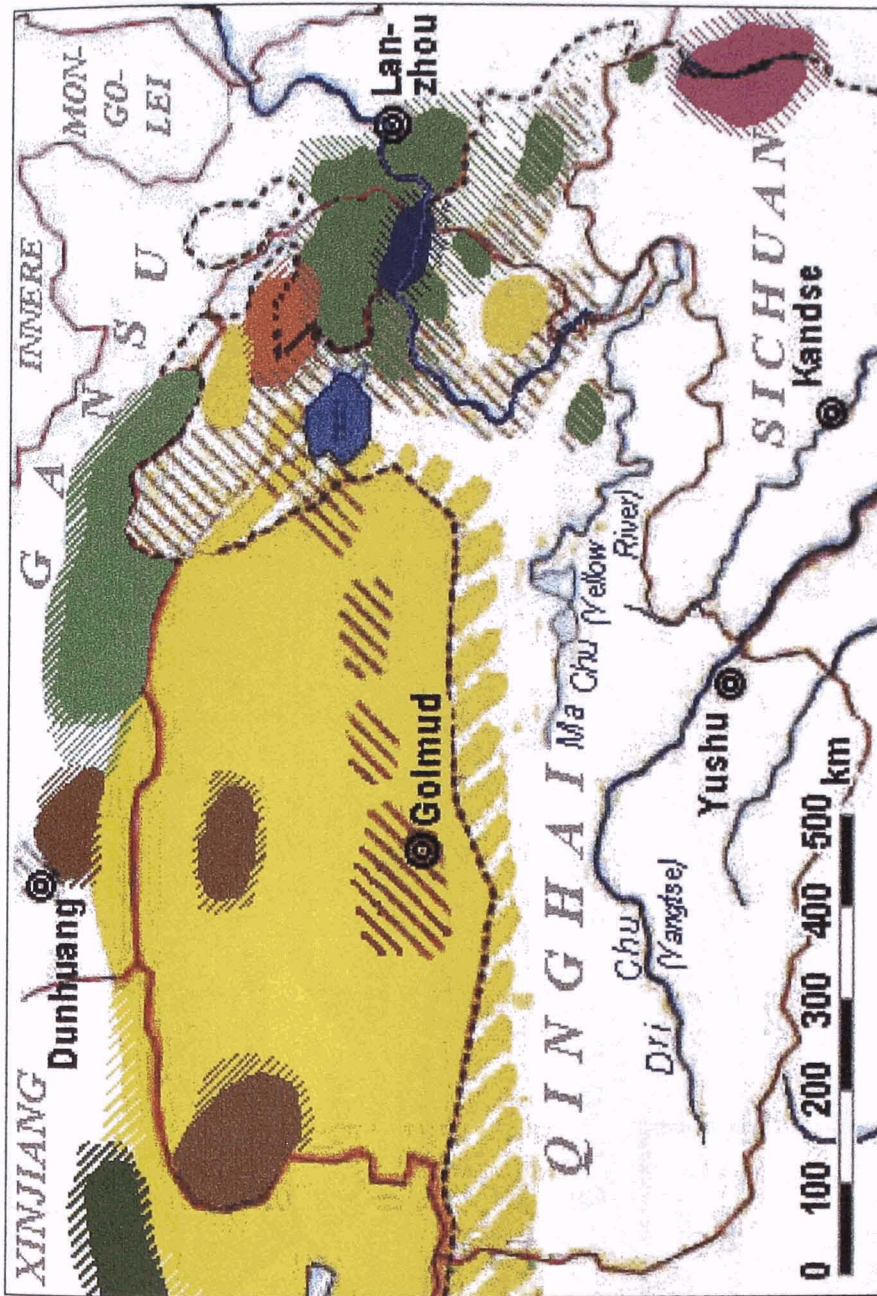
190. A traffic sign in Serta reminds drivers to be careful of pilgrims circumambulating the large Dündül Chörten who might cross the road.



Map 1. Natural features of northeastern Tibet

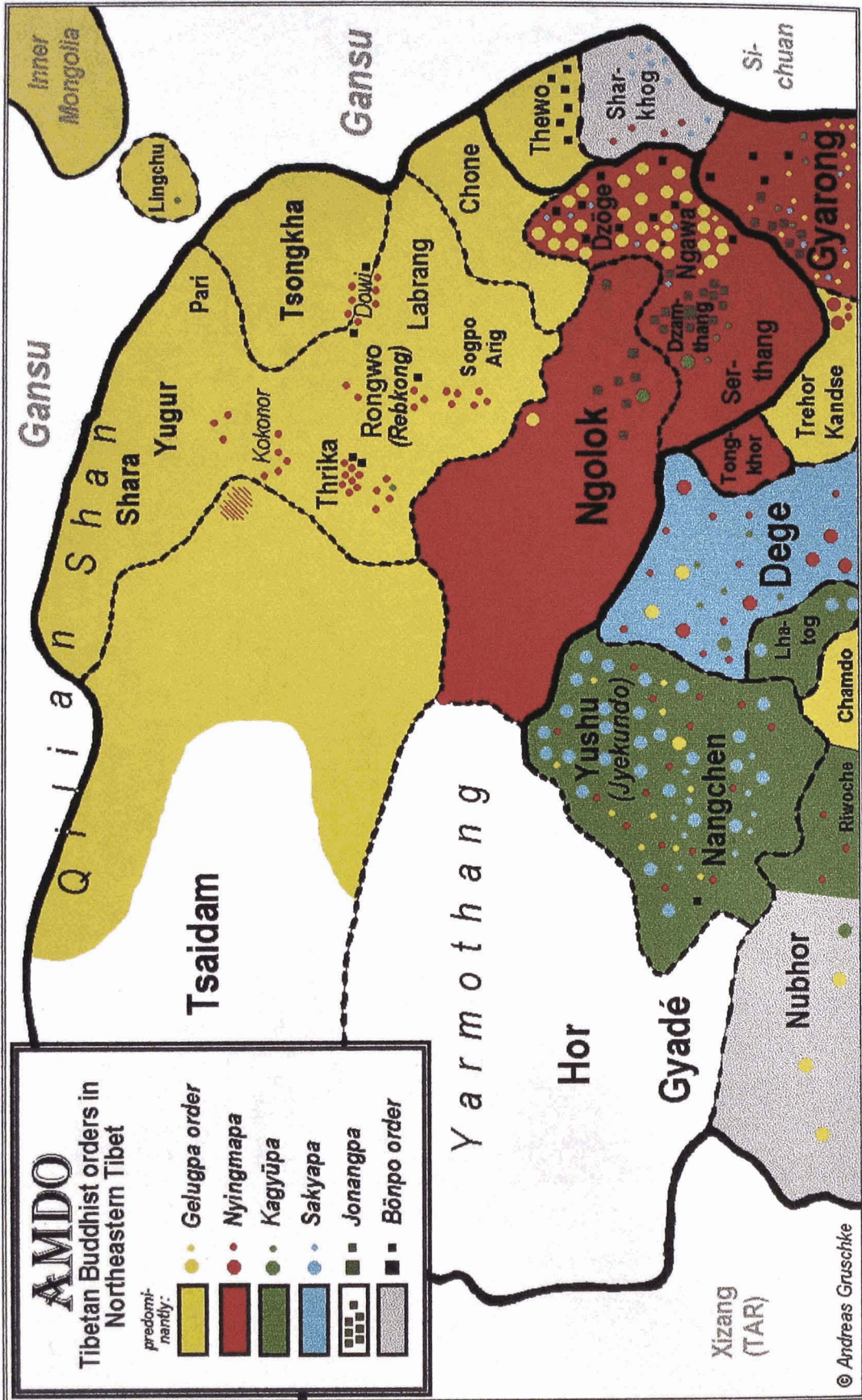


Map 2. Sketch map of eastern Tibet (*mdo khams*)

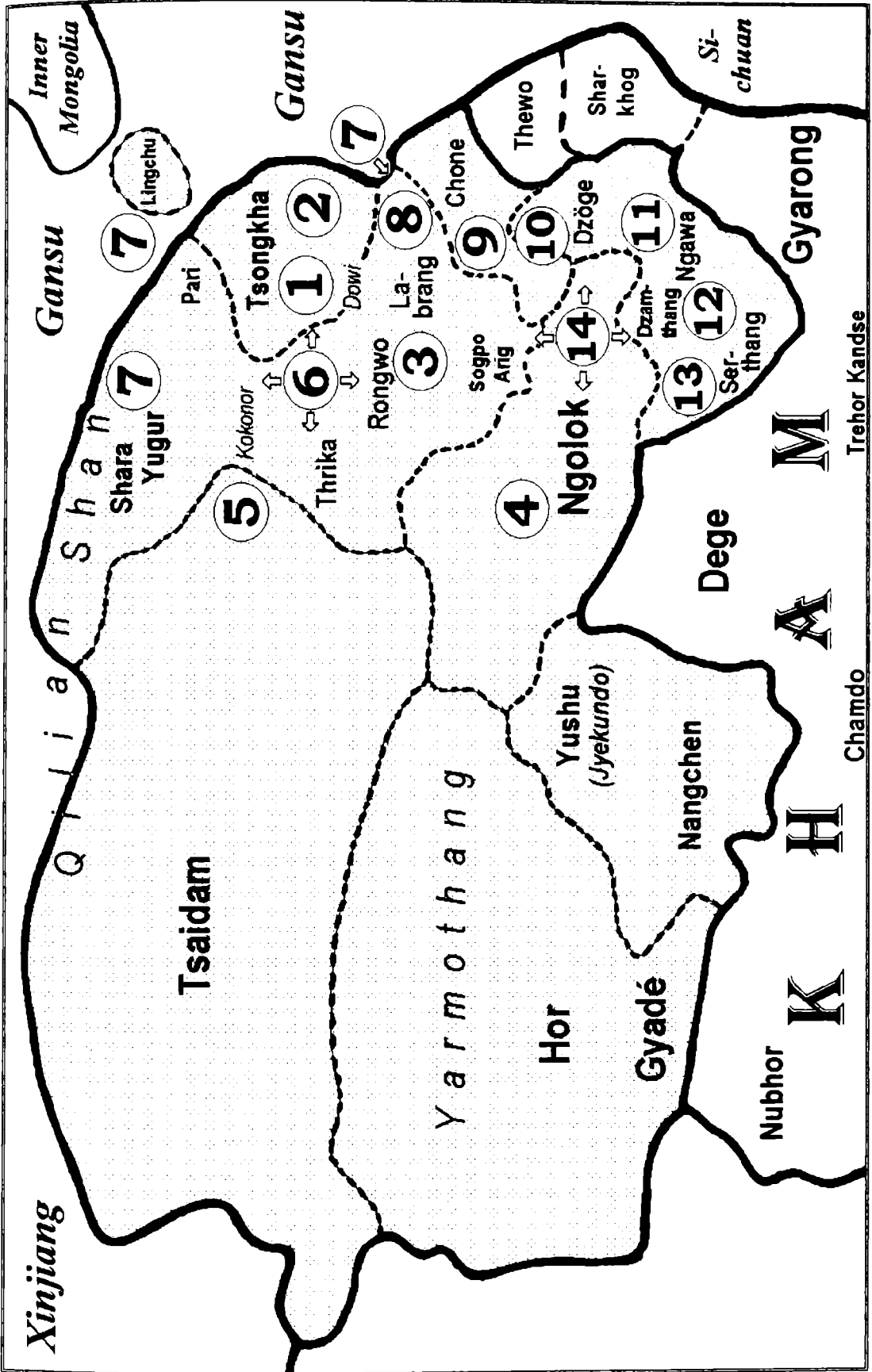


Sketch: Andreas Gruschke

Map 3. Distribution of ethnic groups in Amdo



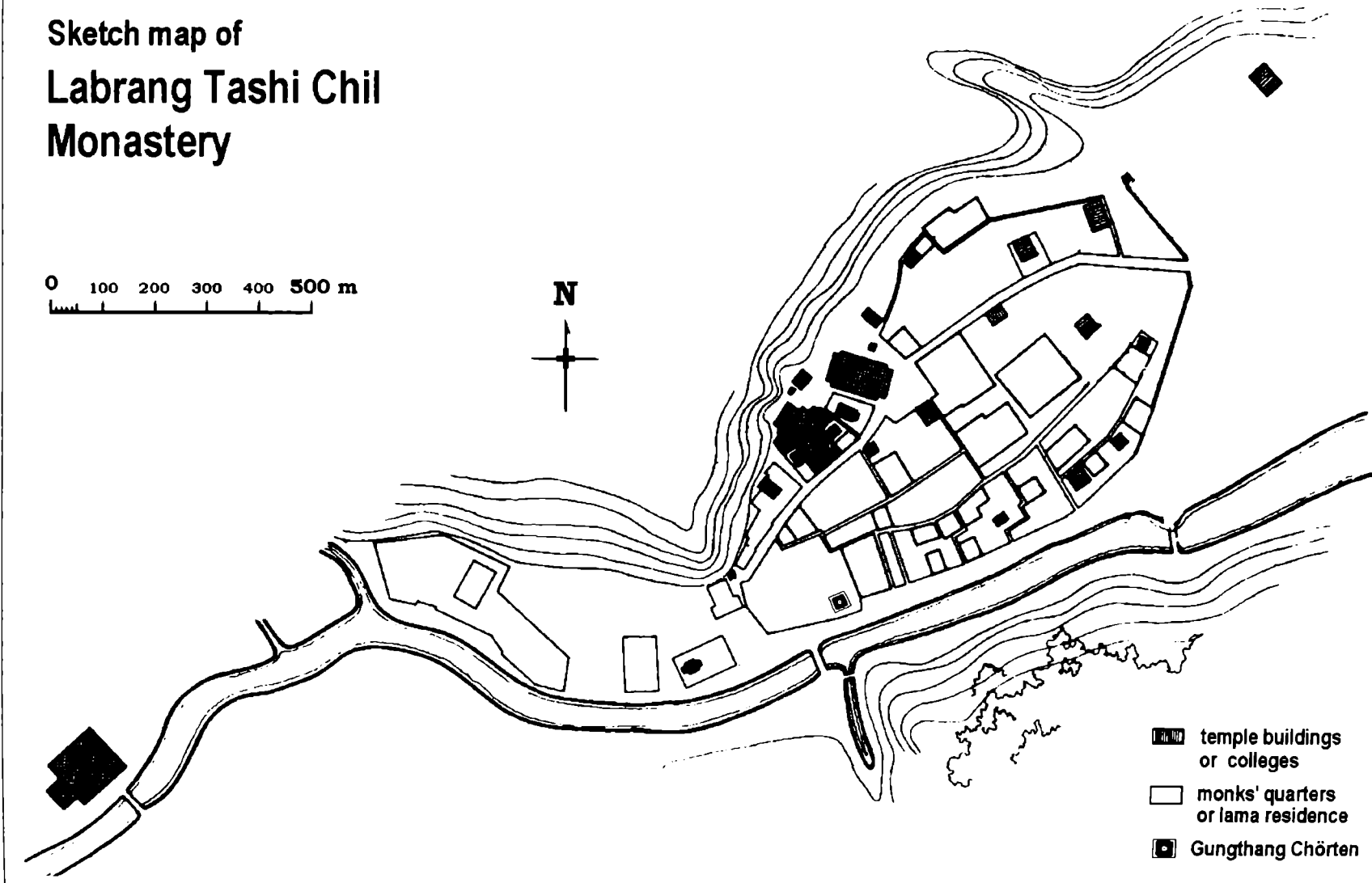
Map 4. Distribution of Tibetan Buddhist orders in northeastern Tibet






Map 5. Distribution of major cultural monuments in the Greater Amdo region of northeastern Tibet

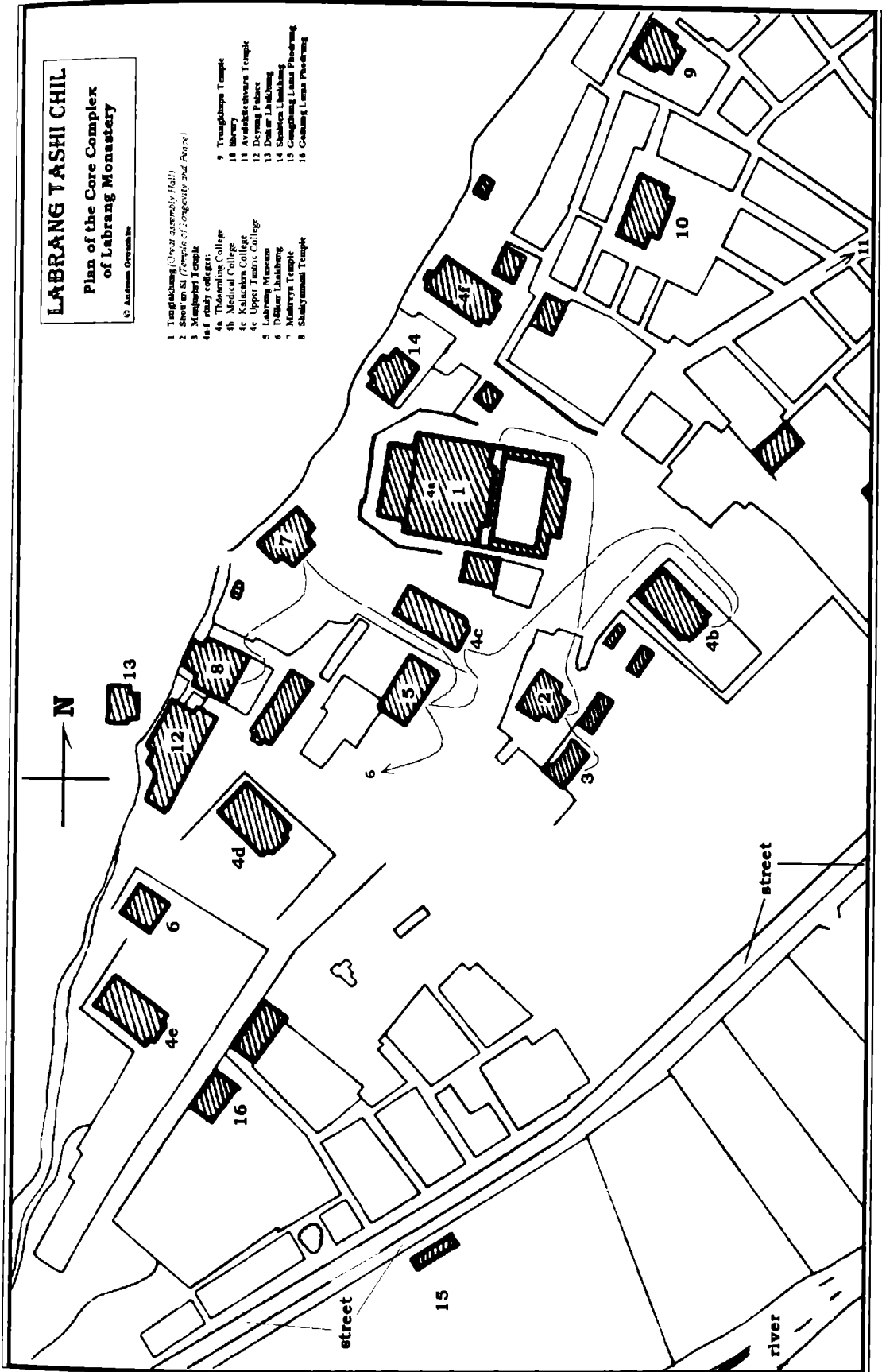
Sketch map of Labrang Tashi Chil Monastery

0 100 200 300 400 500 m

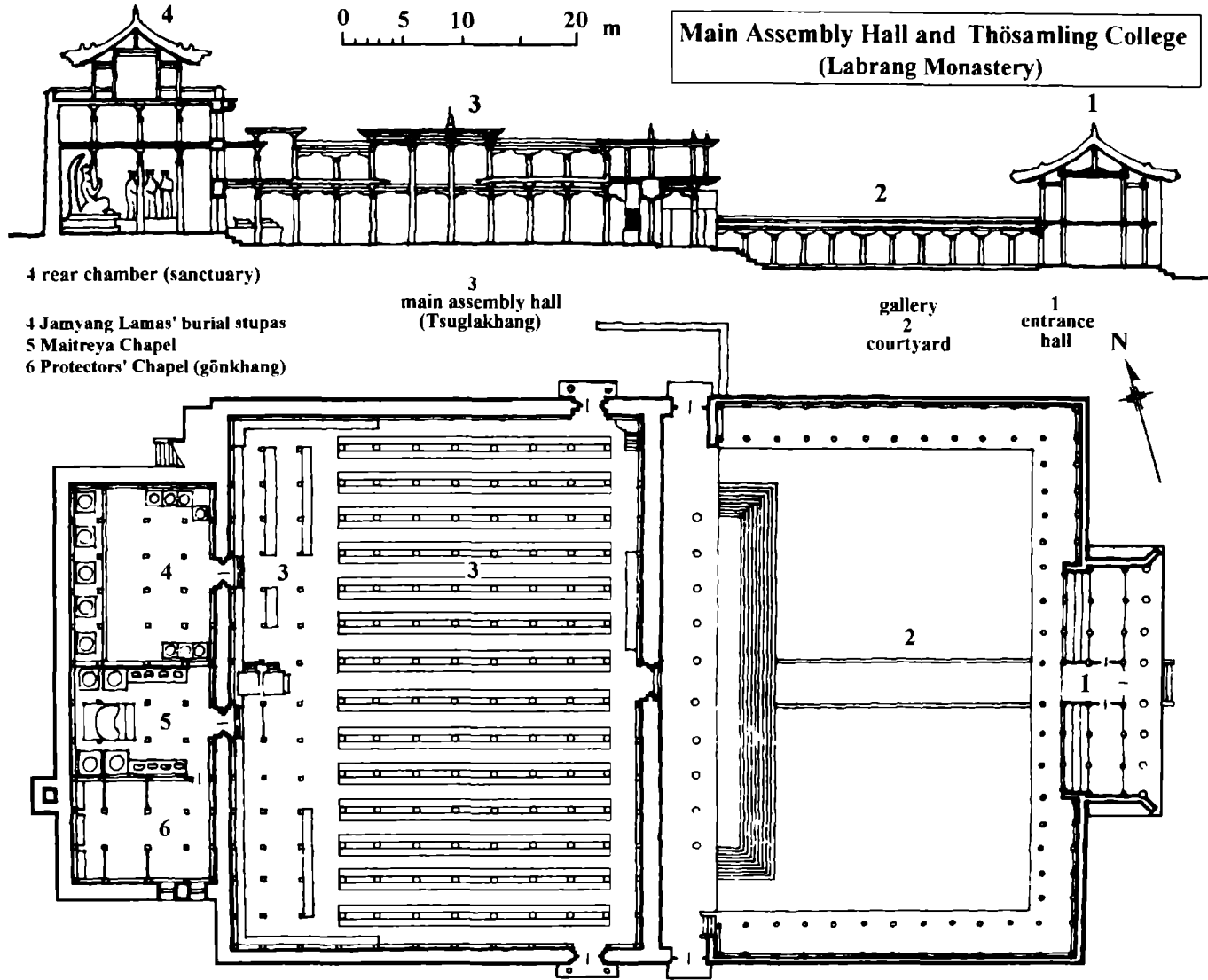


-  temple buildings or colleges
-  monks' quarters or lama residence
-  Gungthang Chörten

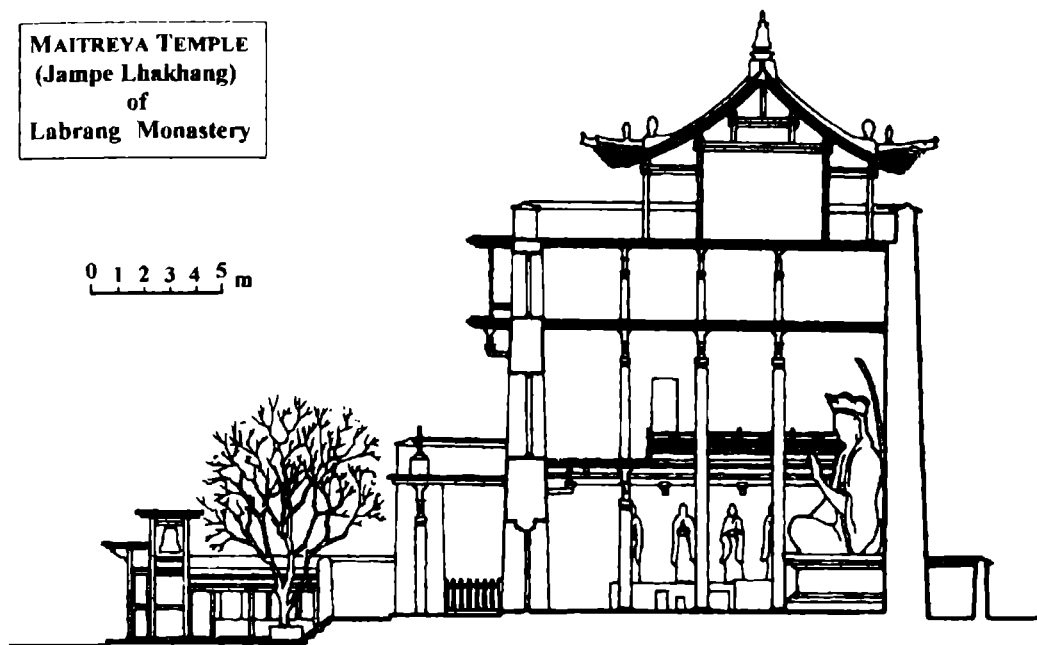
Map 6. Sketch map of Labrang Monastery



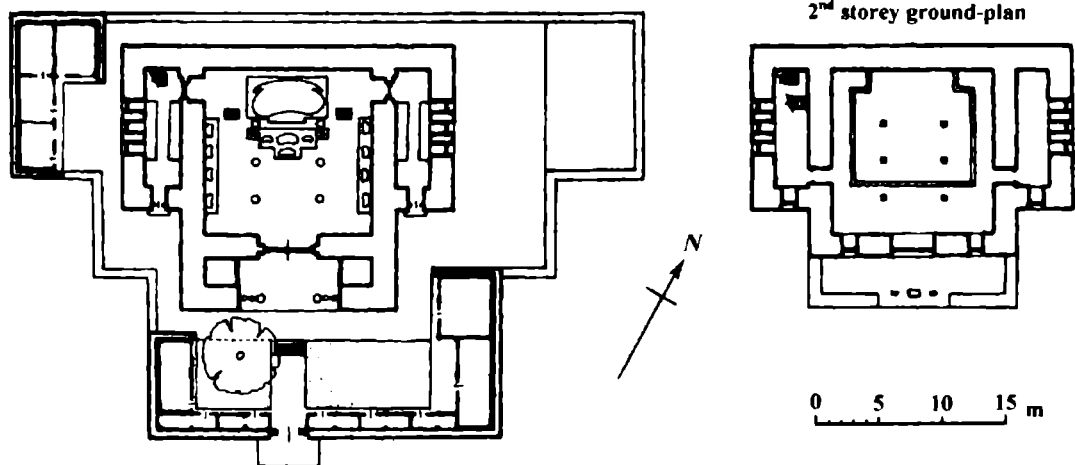
Map 7. Sketch map of Labrang's core complex



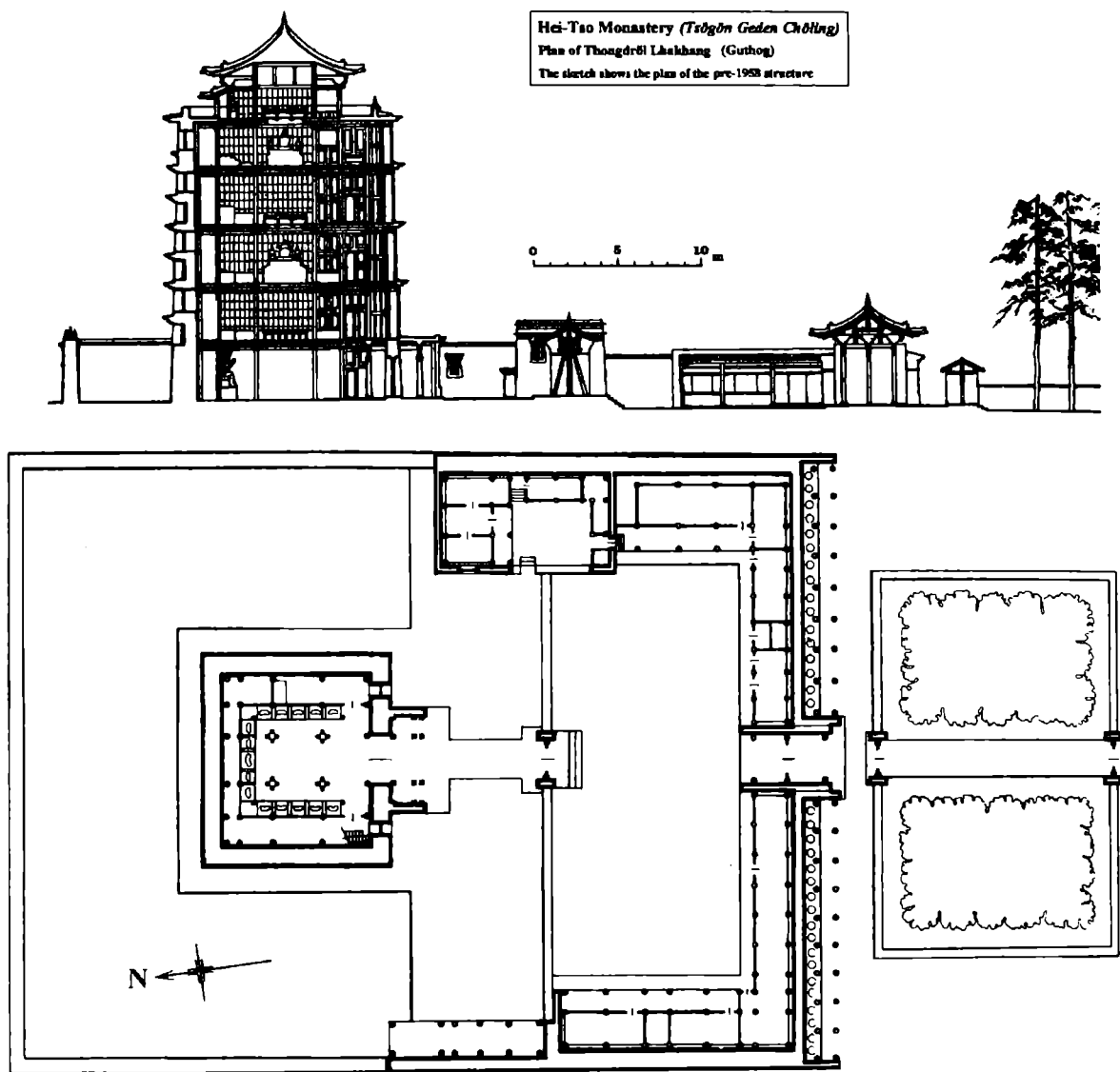
Map 8. Plan of the main assembly hall of Labrang Monastery



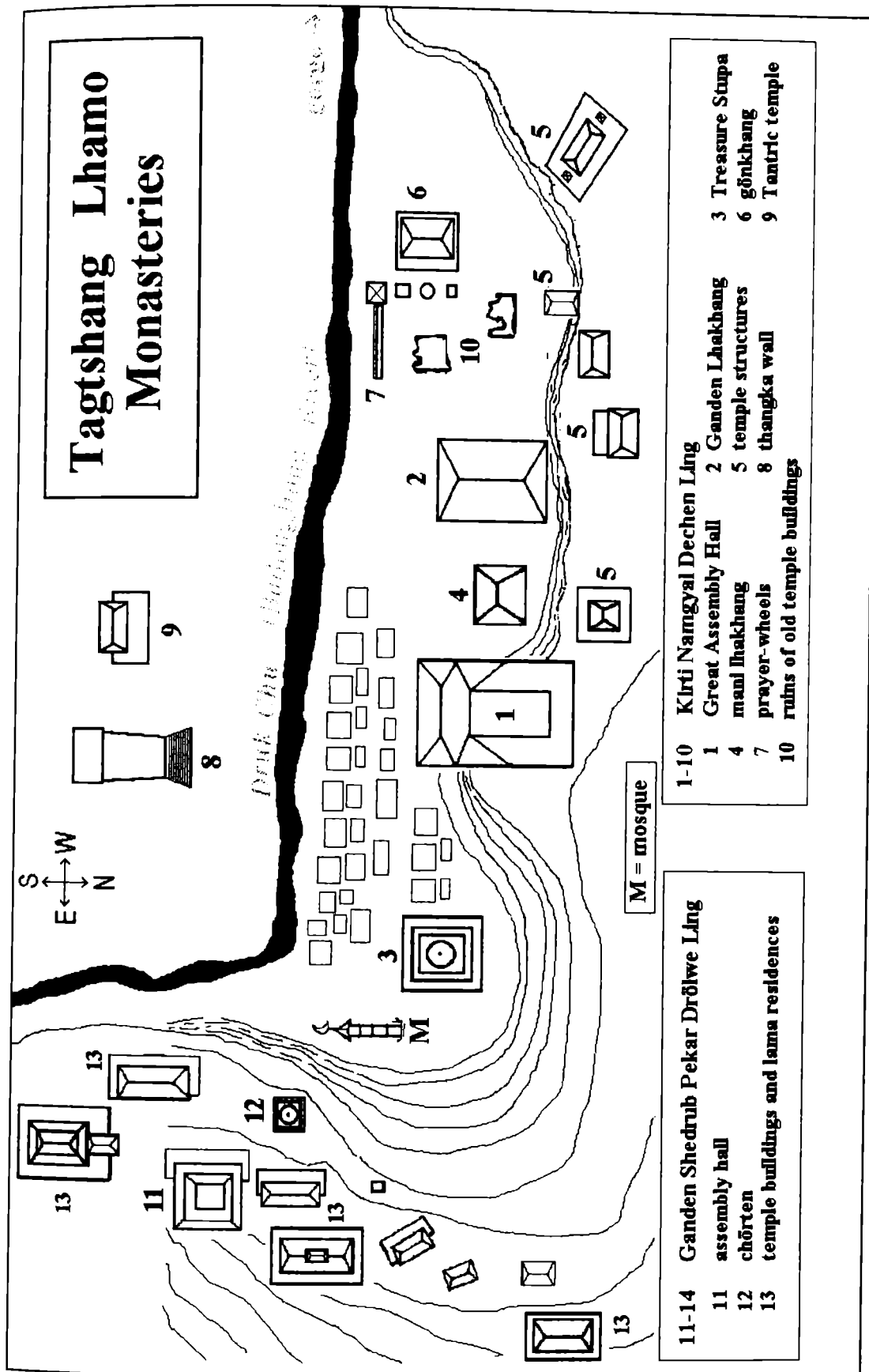
general lay-out of Labrang's Jampe Lhakhang
(Maitreya Temple)



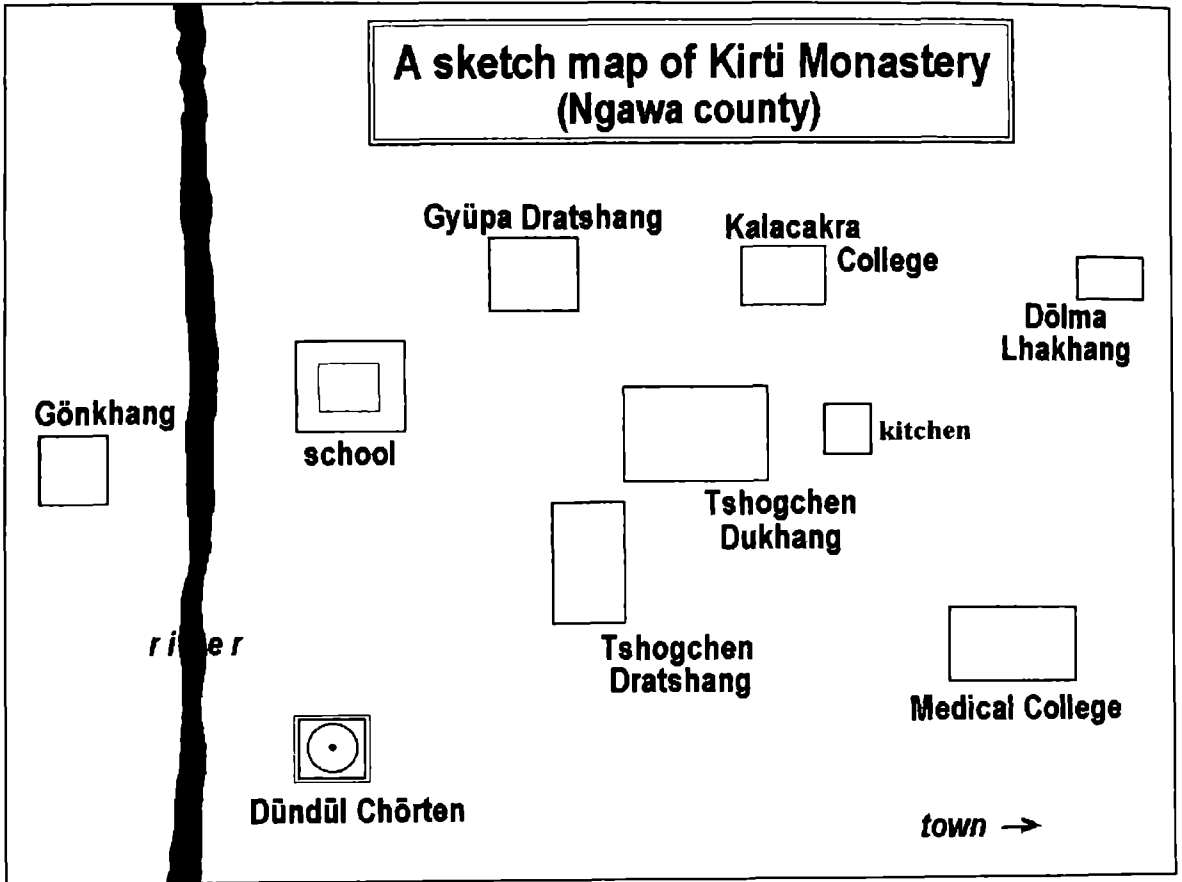
Map 9. Plan of Labrang's Maitreya temple



Map 10 . Plan of Heitso Monastery's Guthog Temple



Map 11. Sketch map of Tagtshang Lhamo Monastery



Map 12. Sketch map of Kirti Gompa in Ngawa

Notes

Foreword

¹ The progress of Tibetology in China has so far been recognized in the West. Cp. Tsering Shakya's introduction to Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner's *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, pp. 1-14.

² Here, the term *Chinese* is taken in the sense of citizen of the PRC and, in historical perspective, of its imperial and republican forerunners. This corresponds to the Chinese term *zhongguo ren*, in contrast to the ethnic designation of the *Han* (Han-Chinese) who are unfortunately called by the same term *Chinese* in Western languages. Cp. Introduction to Tibet's cultural provinces of Amdo and Kham, note 43.

³ *Nei di*, the 'inner land', in China is meant to designate the cultural core land of the Middle Kingdom, the areas mainly populated by Han-Chinese in contrast to the multi-ethnic periphery of the country.

Introductory Notes

¹ Khosla 1975, p. 71.

² Op. cit., p. 74.

³ Khosla 1975, p. 71.

⁴ M. Henss 1981, p. 29.

⁵ For ex. in Dowman 1988, p. 295; cp. Amdo, vol. 1, chapter 3.3.

⁶ Op cit. Smith 1999, p. 20.

⁷ Op cit. Smith 1999, p. 20.

Introduction to Tibet's Cultural Provinces Amdo and Kham

¹ Kessler 1982, S.IV. While this definition includes Tibetan tribes in northern Bhutan, Nepal, and India, it disqualifies Tibetans of Muslim faith, like the Balti of northern Pakistan.

² There are a multitude of toponyms designating

smaller regions, former principalities or kingdoms as well as landscapes that cannot be accurately associated with one of the regions named here. There is no need to name these explicitly here, as the problem of provinces, namely of Amdo and Kham, will be discussed later in this volume. As to central Tibet cp. Michael Henss (forthcoming).

³ The Nan Shan or Qilian Shan demarcates the borderline between the Tibetan highland and the desert land of the Gobi. Qilian Shan is transcribed *trilen* in Tibetan, and named 'red hills' (*gongbu dmar ru*) in old Tibetan sources. (Karmay 1998, p. 525)

⁴ Gruschke 1997a, pp. 279-286

⁵ It is different regarding the joint term *mdo khams*, which has been an administrative term on provincial level even during the Ming reign of imperial China, occupying the sphere of the Yuan military commission of Tubo (cp. Franke 1981, p. 296; Zimmermann 1998, pp. 10-14). It therefore seems that the use of the term *duo gansi* as an administrative unit only came into practice during the Chinese Ming dynasty, though it was surely based on the older Tibetan designation of *mdo khams*.

⁶ Fra Francesco Orazio della Penna di Billi, *Brief Account of the Kingdom of Tibet*, (1730), in: C.R. Markham, *Narratives of the mission of G. Bogle to Tibet*, London 1876, App. III, p. 309.

⁷ Orazio della Penna 1730, loc. cit. p. 313.

⁸ Orazio della Penna 1730, loc. cit. p. 313 and 318. As for this description, Amdo would not be including the Kokonor and (probably) Changthang areas—Chang, cp. della Penna, p. 311—but rather covering what nowadays is considered to be eastern and southeastern Kham plus northeastern Kham, Tebo, cp. loc. cit. p. 313, and the southernmost Ngawa resp. eastern parts of what is today's Amdo, loc. cit.: Tongor (Tangkar) and Kungbung (Kumbum) may represent the Tsongkha valley, Chenisungbua

is likely to be Chone.

⁹ Op. cit. Karmay 1998, p. 525.

¹⁰ Cp. maps in: Kessler 1983, pp. VI to XI.

¹¹ Kessler 1983, pp. 15, 81-84. Actually, there was a single attempt to establish an administrative unit of Kham, from 1927-1955, not by a Tibetan, but by the Chinese Nationalist government. The area of that province, called Xikang (cp. Samuel 1993, pp. 66, 71, 80) in Chinese, roughly covered what is considered to be Kham today, thus lying between Ü in central Tibet, Qinghai province to the north, Yunnan to the south and the foot of the highland's fringe mountains to the east. Although Xikang was given the status of a regular province in 1939, with the administrative centre at Kangding, theirs was just a more or less nominal authority, especially when approaching the Yangtse river from the east.

¹² Hermanns 1948, p. 6. The alpine steppes of the barren highland are periodically used by Mongolian and Tibetan nomads.

¹³ Cp. Gruschke 1993, p. 44, and 1997a, pp. 279-286; *Minzu zhishi jizui*, Chengdu 1991; *Jianming Qinghai Shouce* 1989, p. 15; GZZG 1986, p. 31; and GSM 1989.

¹⁴ Hermanns 1948, pp. Xiff.

¹⁵ Hermanns 1948, pp. Xiff.

¹⁶ Samuel 1993, pp. 39-41, 64-114.

¹⁷ First of all it should be noted that the so-called kings of Tibet were actually perceived as emperors (cp. Pelliot 1961, p. 143; Karmay 1998, p. 525), as the term *btsan po* designates a sacred ruler equivalent, in contemporary Chinese sources, to Chinese *tianzi*—son of heaven, i.e. emperor. The sacred character as well as the celestial origin is still reflected in old Tibetan myths (cp. Gruschke 1996, pp. 174-176). Beckwith (1987, p. 14) ascribes the consistent use of the term king to an inaccuracy of later Tibetan writers. It should be noted that this may not have been an accidental inaccuracy, namely because the title *btsan po* had fallen out of use. It is rather likely that the Tibetan word *rgyal po*, king, was chosen for its subsequent Buddhist connotation of a religious king, *chos rgyal*. Needless to say, an emperor rules over an imperial realm, yet we have to emphasize that his reign included the territory of completely foreign ethnic populations. As the recovery of those territories, later no longer controlled by Lhasa, was a political aim of the 5th and 13th Dalai Lamas, and even of the modern

government in exile, this policy may be labelled imperialist—at least to the same extent as China's traditional stance is judged this way.

¹⁸ The modern maps do not offer any help, as they do not show any borderlines (due to a very imprecise state of information, this was not very practicable till now) and the labelling of regions by inscribing names onto the maps rather indicates the heartland than the borders of those areas. Old written sources often include related territories where Tibetans never settled, or at least had not settled for centuries. Or else, areas belonging to neighbouring regions are also included, as in Lama Dragönpa's *Political and Religious History of Amdo* (cp. PRHA, p. 224) where he does not draw a line of demarcation between Amdo, Kham, and Gyarong. In order to find some dividing lines, besides making use of Tibetan sources (unfortunately in English, French, German or Chinese translations only), we also evaluate settlement patterns and, most important, the comprehension of the local populace as to these matters.

¹⁹ Cp. Ren & Tshe-dbang 1991, pp. 30, 34. The Chinese term is a conspicuous derivation from the Tibetan *mdo khams*, although this might not be manifest to amateurs. Chinese sources sometimes use different Chinese characters, which is imaterial as they have the same pronunciation. Slight variations are due to the problems of transcribing Tibetan, a language rich in consonants, by using Chinese characters, as these can only reproduce phonemes and syllables in the form of complete syllables. Still, Chinese language was capable of portraying historical changes of Tibetan articulation, which is also shown by the use of different Chinese characters.

²⁰ Cp. *bdsogs ldan gshon nu dga' ston*/Liu Liqian 1991; PRHA p. 3; Ren & Tshe-dbang 1991, pp. 35f; *rgyal rabs rnam ky'i byung tsvul gsal ba'i me long chos 'byung*/ Wang Yinuan 1949; Wylie 1962, p. 98.

²¹ Cp. Samuel (1993, pp. 65f), and a volume to be published soon, dealing with the Kham and Gyarong areas of eastern Tibet. (Gruschke, *forthcoming*)

²² Op. cit. Das 1902a [1989], p. 675.

²³ Op. cit. Teichman 1922, p. 4, n. 1.

²⁴ Ren & Tshe-dbang 1991, p. 34.

²⁵ Cp. Wylie 1962, p. 97. Lama Tsenpo: 'most of them [= many learned Skyes-bu dam-pa in the

countries of Mdo-Khams and Mongolia] obtained the rank of Mkhas-pa (Skt: pandita) after coming to Tibet.' (Op. cit. *ibid.* p. 97) Being lama of an important monastery in Amdo, it shows his distinct self-perception as an Amdowa and not as a Böpa or (central) Tibetan.

²⁶ *White Annals* by Gedün Chömpel (*dge 'dun chos 'phel*) acc. to Ren & Tshe-dbang (1991, p. 35). He cites *khams gyi rgyal' phrin* as 'a small borderland country'. See also Zhang Yisun 1993, vol. I, p. 223: *khams kyi rgyal po*, a 'king of a small borderland kingdom' (Chin. *bianjing xiaoguo guowang*). This might as well mean that *mdo khams* just designates the borderland of *mdo*, especially if we see how easily the terms are confused and mixed, thus creating paradoxes: 'Sangs-rgyas-dbon... was born in Mdo-khams... He went to Khams when he was 26'. (op. cit. Wylie 1962, p. 181, n. 607)

²⁷ Ren & Tshe-dbang 1991, pp. 31f. Another way of naming tripartite regions was by the terms inner, middle and outer. Cp. for instance the division of the early, rather mythical Tibetan empire of Shangshung, the westernmost part of which, upper or inner Shangshung, is located, according to the geographical descriptions, in Persia. (Cp. Gruschke 1996, p. 104)

²⁸ Das 1902a, p. 675. Cp. as well: Hua Kan & kLu-bum rGyal 1993, p. 290; Jäschke 1998, p. 273; TCD 1979, p. 447.

²⁹ This is supported by the circumstance that in the higher-up regions of Amdo in today's Qinghai Province *mdo stod* is still used as a regional toponym, while *mdo smad* is another designation for the Chamdo area in Kham. (Cp. Zhang Yisun 1993, vol. I, pp. 1383f) It would be further supported by Paltul who 'divides the whole region of K'am and Amdo into Dotöd and Domed but, while the greater part of K'am counts as Domed, the Nyingmapa *gompa* of Shech'en and Dzog'chen are counted as being in Dotöd.' (op. cit. acc. to Samuel 1993, p. 589, n. 1) The latter restriction is not too big a contradiction as those monasteries lie in a transitional zone between those areas which are attributed to either Amdo (Serta) or Kham (Dege).

³⁰ Thus *dbus* signifies both 'the middle, the centre' (cp. Das 1902a, p. 912) and the name of the central Tibetan province Ü (*dbUs*).

³¹ Cp. Samuel 1993, pp. 588f, n. 1. Samuel notes

the confusion about the delimitations of the toponyms, as they are not consistently applied. Tibetan sources refer to different areas of varying size. This may be due to the circumstance that when the term *mdo khams* was introduced, starting from the Yuan dynasty, it may successively, yet not definitely, have been substituted for the use of *mdo smad* and *mdo stod*.

³² Hermanns 1948, p. 2; and 1959, pp. 12f. While he realizes that sometimes parts of Amdo are mistaken as Kham, he subsequently seems to mistake lower *mdo* as southeastern Amdo—except there would exist a simultaneous use of this term for both Kham (*mdo smad*) and southeastern Amdo.

³³ Even at the end of the 18th century, only *mdo khams* was used and the independent toponyms Amdo and Kham were not yet utilized, as may be seen in the *Annals of Kokonor* (cp. Ho-Chin Yang 1969, p. 40), for instance.

³⁴ Cp. Das 1902a, pp. 140f: *khams*: I. appetite; II. health, condition, root; III. the six elements; IV. empire, realm, territory; V. world; VI. eastern Tibet.

³⁵ According to Jäschke's *A Tibetan-English Dictionary* (1998, p. 39), *yul khams* means empire, in a geographical sense. (Das 1902a, p. 141, *khams* IV.)

³⁶ In contrast to Ren & Tshe-dbang (1991, p. 34: 'The formation of the place-name *mdo khams* implies that it is a merger of two Tibetan nouns: *Amdo* and *Khams*.') I do not believe the toponym *mdo khams* to be a merger, but rather the two toponyms *Amdo* and *Kham* to be the result of the separation of that term.

³⁷ Wylie 1962, p. 104.

³⁸ Wylie 1962, p. 112.

³⁹ Hermanns 1948, p. 2; and 1959, p. 12f.

⁴⁰ Hermanns 1948, pp. 7f. According to Sarat Chandra Das 1902a, p. 878, this distinction of Bö-chen and Bö-chung is recognized in central Tibet, too.

⁴¹ Gruschke 1996, p. 130.

⁴² Wylie 1962, p. 113.

⁴³ Discussion of the relationship between old Tibet and China ordinarily meets a host of problems which do not just reflect imperialist inclinations of the Chinese side (and of Tibetans in olden times, too), but is a matter of concepts and definitions as well. (Cp. Gruschke 1993, p. 139.)

One basic problem arises from the Western concept of a nation state. This notion was born in Europe, and although true nation states on the basis of homogenous ethnic groups are hard to be found on our globe, it was carried all over the world and is decisive for political action. The other basic problem is one of denominations, or rather of definitions of terms. While denominations like China and Chinese are taken in the sense of a nation state, these terms should rather be understood as the description or representation of a culturally defined realm which nowadays is—by both the West and politicians of the PRC—inappropriately considered a nation state. But as a multi-ethnic country, China never was and never can be a nation state in a Western sense; and although Chinese took up that term, they still comprehend China as a culturally defined, historically grown country. This view makes it difficult to define exact borderlines. These could be drawn by an agreement that takes the common interests of all those ethnic groups as a basis for the formation of a common state. So far, the first moves have been made on paper—by the text of the Chinese constitution—but the reality of political life indicates that there is still a long way to go.

As we cannot discuss or solve these problems of definition here, it should be said that here the terms China and Chinese are used in a cultural rather than a political or ethnic sense. Han or Han-Chinese will be used for ethnic Chinese. In Western linguistic use two terms which are differentiated in Chinese language by the terms *hanzu* for the majority people of China and *zhongguo ren* ('people of the Middle Kingdom') as the citizens of China are both translated as Chinese. This root of mutual misunderstanding should be avoided here, as none of the historical depictions and interpretations here are meant as political statements, neither *for* nor *against* the independence of any part of the PRC.

⁴⁴ Hermanns 1948, pp. 23-25.

⁴⁵ Hermanns 1948, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Hermanns 1948, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Hermanns 1948, p. 26; Yang Zhiguo 1985, p. 13. The *tubo* pronunciation is rendered in *The Great Dictionary of Chinese Language* (Hanyu Da Cidian), Shanghai 1994, 3rd ed., vol.3, p. 89, and Shanghai 1994, 2nd ed., vol.9, p. 552.

⁴⁸ Or rather emperor: see note 17.

⁴⁹ Cp. Gruschke 1996, pp. 93f, 128f, 178f, and Hermanns 1965, p. 234.

⁵⁰ Ma Yin et al. 1990, pp. 190f.

⁵¹ Cp. map pp. 36f. of *The Historical Atlas of China*, vol.VI, Shanghai 1982.

⁵² Cp. Schram 1954, 1957 and Schröder 1952, 1953 (about the Tujen = Monguor = Tuzu).

⁵³ Hermanns 1948, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Schram 1954, p. 29.

⁵⁵ Ma Yin et al. 1990, p. 179; Hermanns 1948, p. 30; Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 590.

⁵⁶ Gruschke 1993, p. 44; Veit 1986, p. 400. By modern Tibetan historians this is not seen as a 'military invasion, but migration by their own compatriots that led them to settle on Tibetan land.' (Karmay 1998, pp. 526f) According to such an odd concept of settlement especially by martial tribes, as the Mongolian warriors were, there should not exist any kind of military expansion or colonization. It allows viewing this part of history in northeastern Tibet as a kind of altruistic reception of foreign tribes into the Tibetan realm.

⁵⁷ Hermanns 1948, pp. 29f.

⁵⁸ Ma Yin et al. 1990, pp. 184f.

⁵⁹ Hermanns 1948, p. 30.

⁶⁰ Gyurme Dorje 1996, pp. 558f.

⁶¹ They should not be confused with the Uyghurs (Chin. *Weiwu'er*) of today's Xinjiang who are closely related to modern Turkish peoples of central and western Asia. The Hui Muslims' past is recalled by their name, Hui, a remnant of the term *Huihu*, as the medieval Uyghurs were called in Chinese sources. As they played a major role in politics and state affairs during the late Tang dynasty (618-907) of the Chinese Empire, they underwent an early process of sinicization. They lost their own language centuries ago, and Chinese became a *lingua franca* among the various peoples all over northeastern Tibet. Sinicization was both a process of assimilation furthered by governments and acculturation entered upon by the respective tribes themselves. This was also the case with Tibetans in Tsongkha, and not, as modern Tibetan writers assume, just 'carried out by the Chinese Nationalists' (Karmay 1998, p. 528). Similarly we have good reason to believe that among Amdo-Tibetans considerable numbers of other peoples have been 'tibetanized' as well, thus becoming Tibetans.

⁶² Cp. Tafel 1914, vol. II, p. 292. Modern Tibetan historians seem to ignore that the Tibetans living in these areas partially moved into them only very late.

According to Karmay (1998, p. 527) it was rather internal quarrels that caused the Mongolian tribes to migrate further.

⁶³ Hermanns 1948, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Hermanns 1948, p. 31.

⁶⁵ Ma Yin et al. 1990, p. 233.

⁶⁶ It is often overlooked that many of the most impressive and famous religious personages of Tibetan cultural history originated from Amdo. By way of example here we may only mention the Kagyüpa scholar Urgyenpa Rinchen Pel (*u rgyan pa rin chen dpal*, 1230-1309), Kadampa master Döndrub Rinchen (*don grub rin chen*, 1309-1385), Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), the founder of the Gelugpa order, 14th Dalai Lama, and 10th Panchen Lama. Some of the most influential incarnate lamas at the Ming and Qing imperial court were Amdowas: Mindröl Khutuktu, Tukvan Khutuktu, Chankya Khutuktu, the 2nd Jebtsündampa Khutuktu in Urga, and the first three Jamyang Lamas of Labrang. (Cp. Yang Guiming & Ma 1992)

⁶⁷ Op. cit. Khosla 1975, p. 76.

⁶⁸ Op. cit. Khosla 1975, p. 78.

⁶⁹ See, for instance: Bell 1987; Hoffmann 1956; Li Anche 1994; Lopez 1997; Rhie & Thurman 1991, 1996; Tucci 1970. As for the symbolism in Tibetan monasteries we recommend an exposé by Khosla (1975).

⁷⁰ Karmay (1998, p. 528) only admits the existence of 'a few Sa-skyapa and bKa'-brgyud-pa monasteries before the arrival of the dGe-lugs-pa order'. The rich and varied monastic life of pre-Gelugpa Amdo is obscured by the circumstance that many of the later Gelugpa lamaseries had originally been established as Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, and Kagyüpa institutions. Many of these had been founded on the initiative of, or supported by, the Ming government of imperial China. Some of the Red sect monasteries can still be found in the more secluded parts of Amdo, be it in the barren mountains of the Yellow River canyon and the gorges of its tributaries, or in the far south of Amdo where the formidable Ngolok nomads (*ibid.*, p. 525) prevented the old orders from being obliterated.

⁷¹ In the southern and eastern part, Karmay (1998, p. 528) largely over-estimates the role of the Bön faith. While there are certain areas where the Bönpo still have a leading role, mostly in the gorges of northern Gyarong and neighbouring grasslands and

hills of Ngawa, Sharkhog and Thewo, the various Red sects of Tibetan Buddhism are still rooted much deeper in southern Amdo. Even the Jonangpa order which was believed to be extinct has survived the central Tibetan suppression since the 17th century.

⁷² Today (1999) more than 1000 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and temples exist in Amdo: about 600 in Qinghai (without Yushu prefecture which is seen as part of Kham), 370 in Gansu, and some 170 in Sichuan (Amdo share of Ngawa and Kandse). (Sources: AZZ, Pu 1996, Ran 1994, and own research findings)

1. Lamaist Temples on the Silk Road Margin

¹ As for the discussion on the imperial character of ancient mediaeval Tibetan rulers see Beckwith 1987. Cp. note 17 of the chapter on the Tibetan cultural provinces Amdo and Kham.

² Source for the entire sub-chapter: Pu 1990, pp. 553-563 and PRHA 1989, pp. 120-133.

³ In PRHA 1989, p. 128, Tethung is spelled *ta'i thung*. It is this Tibetan name from which the name of the river and towns of Datong are derived in Chinese.

⁴ Pu 1990, pp. 564f. Han-Chinese form the majority of the populace, while there are still some Mongolians, Hui and Tu people.

⁵ Sources: Cao 1987, pp. 3-10, PRHA pp. 143f, and Pu 1990, p. 565.

⁶ Cp. Gruschke 1996, p. 96, PRHA p. 144, and Roerich 1942, p. 302.

⁷ PRHA p. 143.

⁸ Cp. Schröder 1953, p. 256.

⁹ The remaining three monasteries were branches of another lamasery in Tsongkha, namely Serkhog Gompa (Guomang Si in Chinese). (Pu 1990, p. 564)

¹⁰ The seven grotto complexes are: 'Temple of the Golden Pagoda' (Chin. *Jinta Si*); Thousand Buddha Caves (*Qianfo Dong*); Upper, Central and Lower Avalokiteshvara Caves (*Shang, Zhong and Xia Guanyin Dong*); Southern and Northern Horseshoe Temple (*Mati Si Nan Si and Bei Si*). Cp. Cao 1987, pp. 3-10.

¹¹ Cp. chapter 5.4. of Amdo, vol. 1.

¹² Cp. DCF, p. 393; Ma Tiancai 1988, p. 136; Ye 1987, p. 92. Unfortunately the sources do not relate to the respective Tibetan spelling and often seem to be uncertain if their meaning should be taken as a

thousand Buddhas or hundred thousand Buddhas. This may be due to the common Chinese expression of Thousand Buddha Caves (*qianfo dong*), while the closest significant words in Tibetan are Bum Ling (*'bum gling*). These are also used by Lama Dragönpa in his *Political and Religious History of Amdo*. (Cp. PRHA pp. 216f)

¹³ Main sources are: ECF pp. 161-168 (plates 155-163), pp. 57-59 (explanations); Ma Tiancai 1987, pp. 136-138; PRHA pp. 216-218; and Ye 1987, pp. 91-94.

2. Labrang Tashi Chil

¹ The most important sources are: Duan et al. 1982, pp. 20-22; GZZG, pp. 24f; LAB; Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, pp. 1-15; PRHA pp. 351-511; Pu 1990, pp. 507-522; and Suo 1992.

² Labrang is the articulation in Amdo dialect, while in Lhasa dialect the term should be pronounced *Ladrang*. The Chinese transcription *labuleng* is derived from the dialect form of the monastery's abbreviated name, and *Si* added to express the meaning of 'temple, monastery'.

³ Filchner 1933, n. 47, and p. 333, according to Henss 1981, p. 238. Yet this name is mostly interpreted as 'Manjushri's laughing' or 'Manjughosa's smile', because the bodhisattva's image is said to have laughed at the lama's prostrations in Lhasa. (Cp. Rock 1956, p. 39)

⁴ Op. cit. Li Anche 1994, p. 127.

⁵ i.e., Erdeni Ju Nang, that is to say Prince Chahan Tendzin Pönjunang (*dpon ju nang*).

⁶ Op. cit. Li Anche 1994, p. 129.

⁷ Tashichil (*bkra shis 'khyil*) is said to be the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit term *Atha*, the initial letter of which (A) was considered to represent a monument of ancestor Gesar (*a mes ge sar rdo rtags*). In a prophecy of the 11th century, made by Machig Labdrön (*ma gcig lab sgron*), the place name's origin was otherwise identified as A, and it said that in the place called A a monastery would be built by a manifestation of Manjushri. The prophecy was therefore fulfilled by Jamyang Shepa's founding of Labrang in Tashichil. (Li Anche 1994, p. 130) This also somehow reminds of the origin of Drepung Monastery, which was founded by Jamyang Chöje at a place where he had a vision of the bodhisattva Manjushri. (Cp. Henss 1981, p. 177)

⁸ The Tibetan calendar is based on cycles which are always starting anew every 60 years. This is explained by the order defined in the Kalacakra Tantra, but the same cyclical system of referring to periods of time was known in China long before the Kalacakra was introduced in Tibet. The Chinese influence may also be recognized in the denomination of the respective years within a cycle designating them by combining the 12 animals of the (Chinese-Tibetan) zodiac to the five elements of Chinese geomancy.

⁹ Cp. Rock 1956, p. 40 and Li Anche 1994, pp. 129f.

¹⁰ Li Anche 1994, p. 130.

¹¹ Cp. chapter 2.2 of Amdo, volume 1.

¹² In 1890, Rgolong's Sumpa Khutukhtu had moved a Mongol girl to his branch monastery Sumpa Gompa. The case was brought to the court of the amban (imperial commissioner) and caused a sensation in the whole of Amdo and the prefectural city of Xining. Similar occurrences were reported of other incarnate lamas. Since two of three co-founders of Rgolong Monastery withdrew from its affairs, the Tuguan Khutukhtu became the actual omnipotent chief. As he had the best relationship with the lamas of Labrang, the shift of importance towards the latter was inevitable. (Cp. Schram 1957, p. 37)

¹³ Op. cit. Schram 1957, p. 37.

¹⁴ Rock (1956, op. cit. pp. 36-38) notes that Labrang's monks claimed to have had 100 incarnate lamas, but in reality there were only about 50. Among those were 'twenty incarnations ... who have not had a long line of reincarnations nor are they powerful enough, hence their status is like that of a common monk. At any rate the number of incarnations will increase rather than decrease, for any common monk (lama) who, after having obtained the degree of ge-she (dge-shes) or doctor, (...) is elected to the office of abbot. He may also become renowned through his ascetic life and thus has the possibility of being reincarnated after his death.'

¹⁵ Actually, this Sangtawa with a population of about 2,000 people (Henss 1981, p. 238) was a cluster consisting of villages named Upper (Chin. *Shang*) and Lower Tawa (Chin. *Xia Tawa*), Sahar, and Upper and Lower Thangnag. The seat of the Chinese county named Xiahe was located in former Tawa, and in 1940 consisted of about 42% Han-Chinese, 28% Tibetans, and 30% Hui Muslims. (Li

Anche 1994, pp. 234f)

¹⁶ Ma Tiancai 1988, p. 148; Miao Zishu et al. 1987, p. 4, Pu 1990, p. 508.

¹⁷ Cp., for instance, Rock 1956, p. 46.

¹⁸ Henss 1981, p. 237.

¹⁹ Of the larger temple halls, one has seven, another one six storeys; there are four structures with four, eight with three and nine with two floors. (Sources cp. note 16)

²⁰ Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 638) notes that '90 damaged temples have yet to be restored'. He must have been misled by the number of either the 84 chapels or the 139 'temples' which are sometimes cited (for instance in LAB p. 119). The latter designate the branch monasteries of Labrang Tashi Chil, mostly distributed in southern Gansu and neighbouring Qinghai Province. Its influence was reaching so far that it also had (or has, respectively) 21 branches in Sichuan, mostly in the Ngawa region, five in Tibet proper, seven in Inner Mongolia, one in Shanxi on the Loess Plateau and one in the Chinese capital city of Beijing. (Pu 1990, p. 518)

²¹ The space units (Chin. *jian*, 'room') are standardized according to the distance between two pillars. At Labrang's prayer-wheel corridors, these amount to approx. two metres width, thus giving a corridor length of around one kilometre or more.

²² With the exception of (at least) the upper Deyanggong (*bde yangs gong*, Chin. Deronggang) hall of the 1st Jamyang's residential palace, built in 1714 and restored through successive dynasties. Plate 90 in LAB clearly shows that it is entirely a brick structure.

²³ As many monasteries were destroyed during the Lobsang Tendzin Rebellion in 1723 and in the Muslim upsurges of 1862-1872 and 1895 as well, few have remained in their original shape. The oldest intact examples of old lamaseries—such as Qutan Si and Kumbum Jampa Ling—give the impression that the development of monastic architecture in Amdo started with Han architecture and later continued with a mixed Chinese-Tibetan style. Starting with the spread of Labrang's influence, Tibetan features became more and more prominent. This Tibetan style was also exported to Mongolia, where the youngest monasteries which escaped destruction have more Tibetan features than earlier lamaseries. Compare for instance Outer Mongolia's famous Erdeni Juu to Inner Mongolia's Bogotar Süme (Chin. *Wudang Zhao*). (Cp. Dars 1972; Robert James

Miller, *Monasteries and Culture Change in Inner Mongolia*, Wiesbaden 1959; Tsültem 1988)

²⁴ Duan et al. 1982, p. 21.

²⁵ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 9. According to Pu (1990, p. 508), there were 3424 residents after the communist take-over, with 68 tulkus and 564 monk officials among them.

²⁶ Seven tulkus among them, 32 monk officials, and 166 ordinary monks. (Pu 1990, p. 508)

²⁷ Official numbers tend to be too low, as novices below the age of 18 ordinarily may not be registered. Thus, in October 1988 we were given a number of 530 registered and more than 500 unregistered monks (including novices of all ages). Of the 1300 monks in 1990, 800 were registered. By then, there were 60 lamas with ten of them having the title of a *geshe*. In the meanwhile we know by hearsay of a monastic population exceeding 3,000 people.

²⁸ The funds for the reconstruction, twelve million Yuan, were given by China's State Council and the government of Gansu Province. (*Zhongguo Xizang* 1990 No.3, p. 61)

²⁹ The main occasions are the New Year's ceremonies of the Mönlam Chenmo and the monastic festival in July (*bdun pa'i rigs grva*). (Miao Zishu et al. 1987, p. 5)

³⁰ Miao Zishu et al. 1987, p. 10.

³¹ Dolonnor was the centre of Mongolian bronze artisanat, and a large pilgrimage site as well. It consisted of numerous monasteries, being a cluster of lamaseries rather than a formal city or town. Some remains can still be seen in today's Duolun county in the southeast of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. It lies due north of Beijing, around 250 km from the Chinese capital. At the time of the creation of Labrang's Singhanada image, Dolonnor was part of Zhili Province (Chih-li), which later was renamed Hebei. That is why it is sometimes said that the bronze artwork of Labrang's Manjushri Temple has been done by Hebei artisans.

³² The large Maitreya Temple of Tashilhünpo in Shigatse, that by now possesses the largest bronze image of the Tibetan Plateau (26.2 m high), was erected in 1914. Maitreya statues of six to eight metres height are a rather common feature of special temples in eastern Tibet, both Amdo and Kham.

³³ At its heyday, when there were nearly 4,000 monks in Labrang, some 3,000 monk-students were registered at the College of Exoteric Buddhism. (Li

Anche 1994, p. 147) Among those were some 300 geshes and 50 incarnate lamas. (Rock 1956)

³⁴ Op. cit. Li Anche 1994, pp. 188f.

³⁵ Thösamling, founded in 1710-1711, was enlarged in 1772 and 1946. After the blaze of 1985 it was rebuilt in the form and dimensions of its shape under the 5th Jamyang in 1946-1948. Gyümeпа Dratshang (*rgyud smad pa grva tshang*), the Lower Tantric College, was established as early as 1716, while the Upper one, Gyütöpa (*rgyud stod pa*) Dratshang, was the last of Labrang's six colleges, erected under 5th Jamyang in 1939-1941. In 1763, 2nd Jamyang had the Kalacakra College, Dünkhor Dratshang (*dus 'khor*), built, and Menba Dratshang, the Medical College, in 1784. Kyedor Dratshang or Hevajra Institute was established in 1878-1881 by the 4th Jamyang. In the 1940s most of them had about 100 to 150 students, with the exception of the large Thösamling and Hevajra College (25 students). (Cp. Li Anche 1994, pp. 147-152)

³⁶ Although in the West the term Tibet is generally used in a sense that implies an identity of a political realm of Tibet and the geographically limited Tibetan Plateau, in Chinese texts and in older Tibetan texts as well, Tibet (*bod yul*) ordinarily designates what we consider as central Tibet—the extent of the Dalai Lama's political authority. This is about the space that is described by the bounds of today's Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR, Chin. *Xizang Zizhiqu*). This view is not an outcome of the Chinese communist take-over, but of the Lhasa government in 1949 as well. Cp. Goldstein 1994, pp. 86f.

³⁷ Cp. Turner 1800 [1991], p. 294.

³⁸ Of course, it also has found its way into the Lamaist architecture of neighbouring peoples, such as Mongolians and Tu.

³⁹ In this count the hipped roof is counted as a floor of its own. As may be seen from a lateral projection of the temple building, its inside structurally consists of four storeys only.

⁴⁰ Ma Tiancai 1988, p. 149.

⁴¹ The Lower Deyang Palace does not exist any more. We assume that it was replaced by either the Thubten Phodrang Palace or the Hevajra College.

⁴² Plate [10] in Miao Zishu et al. 1987, p. [xvii]. Cp. Chinese text of the same title, p. 13.

⁴³ The roof being slightly smaller than the one of the Jampe Lhakhang, yet also covered with gilded bronze tiles, it is called 'Lesser Golden-Tiled

Temple', or *Xiao Jinwa Dian* in Chinese.

⁴⁴ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 6. Shantaraksita's Tibetan name is Shiwatsho (*zhi ba 'tsho*).

⁴⁵ The place Bumtö, meaning 'Upper Bum', could not be identified. It may be located in the Markham area of the far southeast of today's Xizang, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), as there exist some villages named Lower Bum (*'bum smad*) and Bumpa (*'bum pa*). (Wu 1995, p. 38) The meaning of the latter is interpreted as 100,000 households, hinting at a formerly important place.

⁴⁶ Lakho Rimpoche (*bla kho rin po che*) later also educated the 10th Panchen Lama.

⁴⁷ Li Anche 1994, p. 142; Pu 1990, p. 512; Rock 1956, p. 47.

⁴⁸ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 7; Miao Zishu et al. 1987, p. 14; Pu 1990, p. 512; Rock 1956, p. 47.

⁴⁹ *spyān ras gzigs phyag stong spyān stong*

⁵⁰ *Nangchen* (*nang tren*, Chin. *nangqian* or *angqian*) as an incarnate lama's residence (Miao Zishu et al. 1987, p. 3) seems to be a specific Amdo meaning of the term for one great in orthodoxy.

⁵¹ *zhabs brtan lha khang*. Cp. LAB p. 17; Miao Zishu et al. 1987, p. 14.

⁵² Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 639. Comparing the features of the reconstructed Changchub Chörten to its look on pictures taken at the beginning of the 20th century (Kozlow 1925, p. 203, for instance), it seems that the original shape and ornamentation were copied very well.

⁵³ Cp. Filchner 1933, pp. 310-312. Doubts should be expressed with this view, though, since Bhutan's Paro Festival offers another famous example where Milarepa has become a favourite topic of a mask dance scene.

⁵⁴ Cp. Rock 1956, p. 38. He noted as well that 'each college ... had its own treasury; the revenues and expenditures in these colleges are in their nature similar to those of the lamasery, but the sums expended are very small. Those lamas [i.e. monks] able to live simply can maintain themselves on the provisions furnished by the lamasery. It may be said that one year's provision supplied by the lamasery for each lama is sufficient for ten months.' Monks who wanted to have a somewhat better or more comfortable life, therefore, needed to do some business of their own.

⁵⁵ Op. cit. Rock 1956, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Li Anche 1994, p. 246.

⁵⁷ Rock 1956, p. 33

⁵⁸ Pu 1990, p. 508; Rock 1956, pp. 33f. According to Kozlow (1925, p. 203), Labrang maintained some 500 monk soldiers who were, at least partially, equipped with modern arms. This circumstance prevented Labrang from being looted or destroyed during Muslim rebellions and unrests.

⁵⁹ The Xining government had sold its provincial sovereignty over northern Kham (Nangchen in the Yushu region) to Labrang. As those areas were predominantly belonging to the Sakyapa and Kagyüpa orders, Labrang equipped a military expedition to bring Yushu under Gelugpa control. The expedition failed. (Cp. Tafel 1914, vol. II, p. 292)

⁶⁰ Op. cit. Li Anche 1994, pp. 248-250.

⁶¹ He is a member of the National Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), vice-president of the National Chinese Buddhist Association, vice-chairman of the Gansu provincial CPPCC, president of the Gansu Buddhist Association, vice-chairman of the CPPCC of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, amongst others. (Pu 1990, p. 520)

3. Monasteries of Heitso, Chone and the marshes of the Ma Chu

¹ Around 20-25 km, 'at the mouth of Ang-khor valley where it is joined by a smaller stream from the Northeast'. (Rock 1956, p. 26) On the other hand, there seems to exist another spelling of Jamkar, given as *gtsos rgya mkar dgon* by Ma Dengkun et al. (1991, p. 17), which may clear the confusion.

² Rock 1956, p. 28.

³ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 16 (*gtsos dgon dga' ldan chos gling*); PRHA 1989, p. 524; Pu 1990, p. 523; as well as Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 641: Tsogon Geden Ling).

⁴ PRHA 1989, pp. 526f.

⁵ Translated from Tafel 1914, vol. II, p. 310.

⁶ Op. cit. Rock 1956, p. 28. The same number of monks is also given by Li Anche (1994, p. 242).

⁷ *gser khri*, an incarnation of one who once was an abbot of Ganden monastery in Tibet (Li Anche 1994, p. 242). The first Serthri incarnation, Gyantshen Dege (*rgyal mtshan sde ge*), was the 53rd Ganden Thripa of Ganden (Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 19), and eventually founded the second Tagtshang Lhamo

Gelugpa monastery. (Cp. chapter 3.3., pp.46-48)

⁸ According to Li Anche (1994, p. 242) its power extended to the monastery of Tagtshang Lhamo on the Gansu-Sichuan border. The 4th Serthri Rimpoche was 'notorious for his violation of monastic discipline by having free relations with very many women. His Tibetan devotees had to besiege him carrying arms in order to secure from him a pledge that he would formally marry a few wives.' (Op. cit. *ibid.*) It is not unlikely that under such circumstances his power also came into conflict with the Muslim communities of the area, because they were not willing to accept the authority of a dignitary of a different religion who was subject to dispute even among his own followers.

Anyway, the social situation was described by Tafel (1914, vol. II, p. 310) as being full of tensions: 'Tso gomba is said to have, excluding the youngest trapas, two hundred monks, yet [the village of] Hei tso altogether ninety families, among them only two Tibetan families. (...) Hei tso is the trade concession of Chinese and Muslims for the entire Dohar valley district, at the same time it is the slaughter house and meat market of the monastery. (...) Yet, most of the Muslim Chinese were heavily complaining about the suppressive treatment from the Tibetan side, that is to say by the ruling lamas, who have established a police office here to collect taxes and rents from the traders, and to operate as partial judges of the many disputes, initiated by their quarrelsome tribal fellows.' For a small room of ten square metres the rent was 12 Tael a year, i.e. 20 to 60 per cent of their working capital. Still there were large profits all the same, otherwise 'the traders would have quit the place with pleasure, as no mandarin dares to deal as severely [with them] as do the abbot of Labrang and the lamas of his diocese.' (Op. cit./translated, *ibid.*)

⁹ Tafel 1914, vol. II, p. 311.

¹⁰ Op. cit. Rock 1956, pp. 31f.

¹¹ Pu 1990, p. 523. This implies the monastery's role as religious and political centre, as it functioned more or less like the seat of a county.

¹² Liu Dunzhen 1987, pp. 378f, fig. 196-2.

¹³ Sekhar Guthog (*sras mkhar dgu thog*; Tibetan spelling cp. Wylie 1962, p. 173, n. 540, and Ferrari 1958, p. 138, n. 384) is situated in the Lhodrag region, quite near to Tibet's border with neighbouring Bhutan. Cp. Henss 1997 (who is spelling it, for unknown reasons, Serkhar Guthog).

¹⁴ Chang 1977, op. cit. in Henss 1997, p. 16. For Milarepa's life story see Evans-Wentz 1928, Lhalungpa 1977, and—in short legends—Gruschke 1996, pp. 186-191, and 1997, pp. 35-41, 47-53.

¹⁵ *mtshong drol ma*: 'to see and [then] attain liberation' (*mtshong ba camgyis thar ba thob pa*). Cp. Wang Yinuan 1992, p. 364.

¹⁶ Biography of Milarepa, Lhalungpa 1977, p. 50; cp. Henss 1997, p. 18.

¹⁷ Cp. respective photos in Henss 1997, p. 16, fig.2 and fig.3. It should be noted though that these depict the tower having nine rows of windows to show off the nine stories. The original Guthog only has a few light-shafts and tiny windows up to the 8th floor.

¹⁸ Op. cit. Henss 1997, p. 18.

¹⁹ C. Gianotti, op. cit. after Henss 1997, p. 18.

²⁰ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, pp. 25f.

²¹ Op. cit. Henss 1997, p. 23.

²² In 1993, work was still in progress, and both the hall and the interior decoration were not finished at that time.

²³ By 1993, restoration work had hardly gone beyond the sixth floor, and as this was the year of our last visit to Heitso we have to end the description here.

²⁴ According to Pu (1990, p. 523) Tsögon Geden Chöling was not destroyed during the socialization in 1958.

²⁵ By August 1991; no figures were available on a short visit in 1993.

²⁶ A (w)önpo (*dbon po*) is a nephew of a lama or a Tibetan prince, 'in the case of an abbot or lama of a monastery the *dbonpo* is from his brother's side and is generally appointed to supervise the monastery' (Das 1902a, p. 913). Main sources for information on the Chone principality are: GZZG 1986, p. 73-75; Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 63-93; PRHA pp. 609-623; Rock 1928, pp. 569-619; Tafel 1914, vol.II, pp. 298, 305.

²⁷ Op. cit. Rock 1928, pp. 569, 572.

²⁸ Op. cit. Rock 1928, p. 572.

²⁹ Pu 1996, p. 530.

³⁰ Li Zonghua and Li Yankai 1992, p. 107; PRHA p. 610. Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 644) names the founder as Drogön Chogyal Phagpa.

³¹ *Tusi* is the Chinese term for aboriginal princes or chiefs who at least formally recognized the overlordship of the imperial court and therefore were bestowed titles and legal authority. This system of

appointing hereditary headmen of ethnic minorities was especially in use during Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties.

³² Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 66.

³³ Pu 1990, p. 531, Rock 1928, p. 576.

³⁴ Rock 1928, p. 581. Rock notes that 'the printing blocks of both classics are more than 500 years old'. Yet, several sources date the production of both the Kanjur and the Tanjur to the 18th century. (Cp. Henss 1981; Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 73; PRHA p. 611; Pu 1990, p. 531)

³⁵ Not including the time needed for the preparation of the paper. (Cp. Rock 1928, p. 581)

³⁶ From our sources it could not be elicited by what kind of armies it was destroyed in 1912. We cannot exclude some local unrest, if we read (Pereira 1912, op. cit. p. 420) about 'the Tibetan prince of Cho-ni, Yang-ching-Ch'ina by name, a youth of twenty-three, who is, however, more Chinese than Tibetan in his manners and descent ... owing to his injustice he is not popular in his principality.'

³⁷ Cp. Pereira 1912, p. 420; Rock 1928, p. 576.

³⁸ Rock 1928, p. 576. It seems to us that the ten chanting halls described by Rock include both assembly hall(s) and temples, as well as smaller sanctuaries within lama residencies. Thus we may assume that the reconstruction works of 1932-1937 covered the entire layout and built-up area that existed during Rock's visit. (Cp. Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 78)

³⁹ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 80; PRHA, p. 622; Rock 1928, p. 576.

⁴⁰ Cp. photo in Rock 1928, p. 580, and text p. 577.

⁴¹ Cp. Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, pp. 78-81; Pu 1990, pp. 532f.

⁴² Tibetan spelling of Chone, Lintan, Thewo and Drugchu is as following: *co ne (co ni), lin than, the bo, 'brug chu*.

⁴³ Khamtsen are residential sub-units of the greater monasteries' colleges, especially in Drepung, Sera and Ganden. Both colleges and khamtsen are corporate entities where loyalties of the monks were primarily rooted. For further reading see Goldstein 1993, pp. 24-33.

⁴⁴ Pu 1990, p. 534.

⁴⁵ Gyurme Dorje's spelling *Gerda Gompa* (1996, p. 642) follows the local Tibetan pronunciation which differs strongly from both Lhasa and central Amdo dialects. Lhamo Gompa, for instance, is often

articulated *Tamo* here, as ‘the Tibetans living in the valleys and mountains around the monastery form a tribe of their own, called Tawa. As do all the Mah’ah’kana and many Kuku nor Tibetans, here ... “lh” is pronounced like English “th” or just “t”, and that’s why starting from Sungpan I always heard Thamo gomba or Tamo gomba instead of Lhamo gomba, and now Tawa instead of Lha pa, as they say Tasa instead of Lhasa as well.’ (Tafel 1914, vol. II, p. 298)

⁴⁶ Thus, not only their naming and geographical situation is confusing, but also the fact that, although they have quite a long tradition, they were apparently not always well-known. While Lama Dragönpa’s *Political and Religious History of Amdo* discusses Lhamo Gompa on 15 pages (PRHA pp. 670-685), *The Geography of Tibet* of Lama Tsenpo (Wylie 1962) does not even mention it.

⁴⁷ *Bailong Jiang* is the Chinese name for the entire river system. It is called Druk-chu [Drug Chu] by Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 642), although the county of Drukchu (*Drugchu*, Chin. *Zhouqu*) is farther than the one of Thewo, after which the river was obviously named at the time of Tafel (1914, p. 297: Täwo kiang ts’a).

⁴⁸ PRHA p. 670.

⁴⁹ Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 642) claims the first monastery to have been ‘founded in 1413 as disciples of Tsongkhapa spread throughout Tibet’. This seems to be very unlikely, because the Gelugpa spread in Amdo not much earlier than the late 16th century. It also is not confirmed in Lama Dragönpa’s *Political and Religious History of Amdo* or even mentioned in any other source at my disposal. The mistake may be due to the circumstance that the first Kirti Lama, who studied in central Tibet for many years, had founded a monastery in Ngawa in 1412 (cp. PRHA p. 673). When asked about historical backgrounds and lama lineages, many monks often do not differentiate between the history of their own monastery’s construction and the history of the lama incarnation line—if they know at all. It should be noted that in AZZ (p.2552) it is mentioned that a Kirti Lama established a small ‘hidden’ temple at the place of today’s Tagtshang Lhamo.

⁵⁰ PRHA pp. 679f. Lama Dragönpa further reported: a Protector Temple, a hall for a thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, a Maitreya Temple with Amitayus and Maitreya images of one storey’s

height, a Thousand-Buddhas-Hall, Tshangla Lhakhang.

⁵¹ In Chökhorgang village (also Kadonggo or Kade’ugo) of today’s Shuangpan xiang (community). (Cp. Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 110 and PRHA p. 681)

⁵² Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, p. 111 and PRHA p. 681.

⁵³ Tafel (1914, II, p. 298) reported some 700 monks (Akkas) half of whom mostly lived with their families in tents among the nomads. This was a common sight in pastoral areas, and it is often the case today as well, especially during the summer vacation. By 1993, there were again about 800 monks, 500 of them belonging to Kirti Gompa.

⁵⁴ Before 1960 there were: Milarepa Temple, Arhat Hall, Thousand-Buddhas Hall, temple of the Medicine Buddha, Hayagriva Temple, the three-storeyed Treasure Stupa, two more unidentified temples and several labrang or lama-residences. (Pu 1990, p. 528)

⁵⁵ During my first visits in 1991 and 1992, the construction work was not yet finished, while a short call in 1993 ended in front of closed doors, as it is not open in the afternoon.

⁵⁶ In 1992 the monks said that they expected him to return to Tagtshang Lhamo soon.

⁵⁷ Cp. Gruschke 1997a, GSM 1989.

⁵⁸ Pu 1990, p. 504.

⁵⁹ Sources: personal interviews in 1993, and Pu 1990, pp. 528f.

⁶⁰ Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 640.

⁶¹ Pu 1990, p. 525.

⁶² Pu 1990, p. 525; Wylie 1962, p. 106.

⁶³ A picture is shown in Rock 1956, plate VIII.

⁶⁴ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, pp. 102-104.

⁶⁵ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, pp. 30-40; Pu 1990, pp. 523-525.

⁶⁶ Today’s Lintan county, although totally embraced by a Tibetan environment, has a Han and Hui majority. This is reflecting its history, since the township emerged from the old Chinese garrison and prefecture of Taozhou during the Song, Yuan and Early Ming dynasties. It developed to one of the main exchange stations of the famous tea-and-horse trade between Han-Chinese and Tibetans. The latter nowadays account for 6 % of Lintan’s population. (Cp. Pu 1990, p. 541; Zimmermann 1998)

⁶⁷ Pu 1990, pp. 537f.

⁶⁸ PRHA pp. 596-600; Pu 1990, pp. 542f.

⁶⁹ Pu 1990, pp. 546f.

⁷⁰ Nagdo Monastery (*nags mdo dgon blo bzang bde chen gling*, also *dga' ldan chos gling*) was established in 1676 near the mouth of Dayugou valley. Belonging to Duoba village, it is reached from Chone by following the Tao He river downstream for some 16 km and then turning south. The Chinese name of this small lamasery is *Qibu Si*. (Cp. Pu 1990, p. 535)

⁷¹ The Chinese name of this monastery is given as *Gangxiao Si* (in Pu 1990, p. 547).

⁷² Pu 1990, pp. 547f.

⁷³ Ma Dengkun et al. 1991, pp. 106-108; Pu 1990, pp. 539f.

4. The Dzöge area

¹ Spelling acc. to AZZ and Gyurme Dorje 1996, whereas Lama Tsenpo (Wylie 1962, pp. 105f) and Lama Dragönpa (PRHA, p. 536) write *mdzo dge*.

² Cp. Wylie 1962, pp. 105 and 190 n. 695; Rock 1956, p. 156.

³ Sources: personal visit in 1997, and Pu 1990, pp. 551f.

⁴ Acc. to Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 648. The Chinese name of this seemingly important Buddhist academy is *Wanxiang Dabei Falun Si*, the Dharma Temple of Ten Thousand Images of (the God of) Mercy.

⁵ This monastic institution was first founded in 1646 in the Kandse area of eastern Kham, and later moved here by Do Rimpoche Kasen Rilun Niba Dorje (born in 1890). (AZZ, vol. III, p. 2541)

⁶ AZZ, III, p. 2515. Not mentioned in DRM which notes 700 monks (circa 1992).

⁷ *stag tsha dgon kren*. Spelling acc. to AZZ, III, p. 2835, while Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 646) gives the name of the town as Taktsha Göndrong.

⁸ Op. cit. Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 646.

⁹ Spelling in AZZ, III, pp. 2835 and 2872 inconsistent (*stag tsha* and *stag rtsa*). Further information on this monastery is given on p. 2523, PRHA, pp. 536f, and in Gyurme Dorje 1996, pp. 646f.

¹⁰ Acc. to Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 646) there are only one Bönpo and three Sakyapa institutions among the 80 monasteries of Zoige county. The AZZ (III, pp. 2564, 2568f) names 31 Buddhist monasteries of which 19 are Gelugpa, 4 Nyingmapa, 3 Sakyapa,

and 5 Bönpo, while DRM (pp.742f) enumerates seven Bönpo institutions in Zoige county. Reliable information is difficult to obtain, it seems.

¹¹ Source: AZZ, p. 2523.

¹² These people, hired by the Tibetan management of the monastery, are carpenters, specialists in wood- and stone-carving. The paintings are done by Rebgong artists.

¹³ All information on this monastery is taken from: AZZ, pp. 2533-2536, and DRM, p. 742. The monastery's Tibetan name is, at the time of printing this edition, unknown to the author and therefore marked by an asterisk*.

¹⁴ DRM p. 742.

¹⁵ AZZ, pp. 2548-2550. The Tibetan name is explained as 'master of religion' (*fazhu*) or 'religious king' (*fawang*), and therefore it may be Chögyal Gompa in Tibetan. Its religious name is also written in Chinese only: *badan sizhou luo'erwu qupei lun* (probably *Pelden Shedrub Norbu Chöphel Ling*).

5. The Flourishing Monastic Life in Ngawa

¹ Literally the 'inside of Nga', i.e. the valley regions of Nga Chu river.

² Op. cit. Wylie 1962, p. 105.

³ e.g. Jules Dutreuil de Rhins and Louis Liotard (cp. Guibaut 1947, reprinted 1987).

⁴ Pamela Nightingale in her introduction to Guibaut 1987, p. xi.

⁵ Op. cit. Tafel 1914, vol.II, p. 292 (translated from German)

⁶ Tafel 1914, vol.II, pp. 284f.

⁷ Spelling according to PRHA, pp. 32f, 710-724, and AZZ, pp. 2871-2875. The regional differentiation of five *sde* does not appear here. The greater Ngawa area is rather differentiated according to tripartite divisions of Tibetan tribes living in respective riverine regions, such as the three parts of Tshawa, *tsha ba kha gsum*. (Cp. ditto, p. 33) The divisional five appears in the designation Ngakhog (*Inga khog*, the 'five interiors [of the river valleys]') itself, which is not used by Lama Dragönpa (PRHA). Since 'the five' are never explicitly named, we only can theorize which river systems are meant.

⁸ The Gyarong part will be dealt with in another volume regarding the Kham part of eastern Tibet (Gruschke *forthcoming*). For the northernmost counties of Dzöge and Hongyuan see chapter 4 of this volume.

⁹ The author was told that there are 43 monasteries spread throughout Ngawa county.

¹⁰ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, pp. 10f.

¹¹ Op. cit. Kvaerne 1995, p. 10. The practices of the Bönpo Order are particularly close to those of the Nyingmapa, with whom they share the important non-Tantric meditation tradition called Dzogchen.

¹² This is also indicated by the behaviour of most Tibetan Buddhists even today, who do not know much about Bön and behave in a somewhat hostile manner towards them, or are afraid of them. Cp. also note 21 of this chapter.

¹³ Op. cit. Kvaerne 1995, p. 10.

¹⁴ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 273.

¹⁵ That is to say, those folk-religious practices should not be called Bön or be considered as main part of the Bön Faith either—even though they may have played this role before the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet.

¹⁶ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 177.

¹⁷ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 610, n. 2.

¹⁸ As late as the early 9th century—i.e., long after Buddhism had become state religion according to Tibetan Buddhist chroniclers—Tibetans still called both Buddhist and non-Buddhist deities, including sun, moon and stars, to witness the Tibetan-Chinese treaty of 821-822. Chinese accounts of the conclusion of the treaty even go as far as to report that the principal Tibetan ceremony was non-Buddhist and accompanied by animal sacrifices. (See Snellgrove & Richardson 1986, p. 93).

¹⁹ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 458. For further reading see: Karmay 1972, Kvaerne 1995, Snellgrove 1967; Samuel 1993, pp. 10-11, 177, 273, 458, 610 n. 2.

²⁰ Bachen (*sbra chen*) is situated in the northern part of the TAR, the county seat being met with on the main highway leading from Nagchu to Chamdo.

²¹ Op. cit. Li Anche 1994, p. 45. This opinion is also generally expressed by Western scientists. Without maintaining a conflicting view I would like everyone to consider the common basis of Jewish religion, Christianity and Islam. Offering a similar situation as far as their original development is concerned, nobody doubts that these are different religious systems. Therefore it should not be forgotten that the overwhelming majority of Tibetan faithful view Buddhism and Bönism in the same way: 'Tibetan Buddhists insist on calling their own faith the religion (*chos*) as the antithesis to Bon. Thus Bon is often

called the Black Faith in contrast to the 'white' or pure faith of Buddhism.' (loc. cit., p. 31)

²² The Rime Movement was an attempt to create 'a synthesis of academic and shamanic aspects of Tibetan religion that maintained the academic tradition but retained a much more central place for the shamanic vision than the Gelugpa synthesis allowed.' (Samuel 1993, p. 542) Rime lamas stand up for overcoming the sectarian divisions among the various Tibetan-Buddhist traditions. They do not reject one path in search for enlightenment in favour of another, but tend to 'maintain all paths possible as options that might be suitable for particular students' and thus accept the Bönpo order's teachings as one of those paths as well.

²³ Tibetan spelling acc. to Kvaerne 1995, p. 21. It is the Narshi Gompa of Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 624); the name given to us in 1993 sounded somewhat like Na-y Gompa. Main sources, besides information during a personal visit (1993): AZZ, pp. 2539f, 2564f, 2834; DRM p. 743.

²⁴ AZZ, p. 2540, unfortunately has only the Chinese transcription which is *Xiegong Chiyi*.

²⁵ In Chinese: *Langyi Luozhou Jiamucan* (loc. cit.)

²⁶ It is looking a bit more like a duck or goose, while the shape of the pig might also be that of a goat.

²⁷ Cp. Kvaerne's (1995, pp. 143-147) discussion of a different Bönpo wheel of existence.

²⁸ Kvaerne 1995, p. 66. See also Gruschke 1996, pp. 246f.

²⁹ *kun bzang rgyal ba rgya mtsho*. Cp. Kvaerne 1995, pp. 31f, 62, 154.

³⁰ Cp. Kvaerne 1995, p. 37.

³¹ The toponym *Ngari* suggests a descent from western Tibet and thus may hint at Yangtön Rinchen Gyantshen, a Bönpo lama from Dolpo living in the 13th to 14th centuries (cp. Snellgrove 1967, pp. 4f).

³² Cp. Kvaerne 1995, p. 135.

³³ It may be as well Toepgyal Gompa, acc. to Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 624.

³⁴ There are said to be about 40 to 43 lamaseries in Ngawa county, inhabited by 8,000 to 14,000 monks. (Marshall and Cooke 1997, p. 1127) Out of 33 monasteries named in AZZ 17 belong to the Gelugpa. Other Buddhist sects met with are Nyingmapa (4), Jonangpa (4) and Sakyapa (3). (AZZ, p. 2564) The Kagyüpa order is not represented here as all their gompas had been converted into Gelugpa monasteries. (Marshall/

Cooke 1997, p. 1127)

³⁵ Gyurme Dorje gives the date as 1472, which may be a misprint. The PRHA clearly states the water-dragon year which could be either 1412 or 1472. As Lama Dragönpa connects the temple's founding to a visit (historically not manifest) of a lama who had been given a holy statue by Kädrubje (1385-1438), the year 1412 must have been meant by the PRHA (p.673).

³⁶ Main sources, besides own information during two personal visits (in 1993 and 1996): AZZ, pp. 2553; DRM, p. 723; Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 624; PRHA, pp. 673-675, 722f.

³⁷ PRHA, p. 723.

³⁸ In the initial phase of the monastery's reconstruction the local government funded 300,000 Yuan—which is exceeded 100 % by this single family's contribution.

³⁹ PRHA, p. 723.

⁴⁰ Main sources: two visits (1993, 1996); Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 623; PRHA, p. 32.

⁴¹ Main sources: AZZ, pp. 2553f; Baumann 1991, pp. 199-201; DRM 1993, p. 723; Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 625; PRHA, pp. 32, 717-719. The Amchog Monastery (*a mchog bde mo thang dga' ldan chos 'khor gling*) of PRHA, pp. 563-565, lies in Kanlho in the southern part of today's Xiahe county. It was founded in 1760 by the 2nd Jamyang Jigme Wangpo of Labrang and once had 600 monks. (Pu 1990, p. 526)

⁴² Baumann 1991, pp. 199-201, and PRHA, p. 717.

⁴³ Marshall & Cooke 1997, p. 1127.

6. Long-hidden and Unexplored Dzamthang

¹ Marshall & Cooke 1997, p. 1144.

² Cp. AZZ, pp. 2564-2568.

³ Aba tonglan (Overview of Aba), acc. to Marshall & Cooke 1997, p. 1143.

⁴ AZZ, pp. 2564, 2566-2568.

⁵ While in this way of spelling the name was written down by monks of the monastery, Marshall & Cooke (1997, p. 1169) give the name as Sermakhang Gompa (*ser ma khang dgon pa*).

⁶ There is some likeliness in this statement as no remark on this monastery was found, so far, in PRHA. Dzamthang is seldom mentioned there anyway.

⁷ AZZ, p. 2548.

⁸ Cp. Henss 1997.

⁹ Cp. Henss 1997, p. 23, and the similar structure of Hei-Tso Monastery in Gansu (chapter 3.1.).

¹⁰ *zangs mdog dpal ri pad ma 'od kyi shing khams* i.e., the paradise (or Buddha realm) of the glorious Copper-Coloured Mountain in the brilliance of the lotus flower.

¹¹ Besides Sirin Kar there are *Xiazha Xiqulin Si* * in Kamda community, *Yutuo Si* * and *Jiada* * *Si* in Dotö community (Upper Dokhog). (AZZ, pp. 2566-2568)

¹² Another interesting site probably is the Nyingmapa lamasery *Xiqiong Si*,* located in Dokhog valley, approximately 60 km upstream from Dzamthang county town. It was established in 1654, and its main assembly hall covering 447 square metres seems to have survived the Cultural Revolution, as it is recorded (AZZ, p. 2521) to be the original structure.

¹³ Spelling of Bathong Gompa uncertain. Sources: AZZ, pp. 2149f, 2524, 2566; DRM, p. 722; Zhang Lihe 1998a/b.

¹⁴ Spelling acc. to PRHA, p. 228. In Chinese this river is called *Ze Qu* in its upper reaches, while when flowing through the more heavily populated valley and emptying into the Mar Chu (coming from Qinghai's Ngolok Prefecture), it is called *Re'erka He*.

¹⁵ This is to say: Riwoche, Jonang, Gyang and Gyantse Kumbum. (Cp. Henss, *in press*; Vitali 1990, pp. 125-133)

¹⁶ Due to difficult access to most of the *chörten* (absent key-holders, dilapidated interior), only the lower storeys of the main *chörten* could be visited in 2000.

¹⁷ Zhang Lihe (1998a/b) even places the number of stone slabs as high as 300,000.

¹⁸ Wylie 1962, p. 104, for instance: 'I have heard it said however, that there are no Dge-lugs-pa monasteries within the area of Sde-dge itself.'

¹⁹ Op. cit. Wylie 1962, p. 104.

²⁰ Pu & Lamao (1993, p. 204) only state 34 Jonangpa lamaseries in the six counties of Dzamthang, Barkham, Ngawa (Ngawa prefecture: 26), Pema, Gande, and Jigdril (Ngolok prefecture: 8). Yet, the AZZ (pp.2564-2574) alone names 31 Jonangpa institutions in Ngawa prefecture, while Pu (1990, pp. 271, 282, 293; see also chapter 4.5. note 293) noted three in Ngolok's Gande, two in Pema and two in Jigdril counties (7 lamaseries altogether).

²¹ Also known as Jonang Phüntsholing (*jo nang phun tshogs gling*). For reference to this important cultural-historical site see Henss (*in press*).

²² Cp. Ferrari 1958, p. 155, n. 562; Snellgrove & Richardson 1986, p. 179; Tucci 1949, p. 92.

²³ Op. cit. Snellgrove & Richardson 1986, p. 179.

²⁴ Asanga lived in the 4th century and was one of the founders of the Yogacara school of Indian Mahayana Buddhism. Cp. Snellgrove & Richardson 1986, p. 179; Hoffmann 1986, p. 158.

²⁵ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 403.

²⁶ Samuel 1993, p. 403, who also notes that ‘this is a mode of approach much closer to the ‘shamanic’ end of the spectrum than is Madhyamaka philosophy, since for the practising yogin what is significant is the state to be attained, and the detailed study of the process of ordinary reality is a distraction rather than an aid.’ (op. cit. ditto)

²⁷ The Jonangpa’s differentiation between inherently empty mundane phenomena and the attributes of Buddha regarded ‘extraneously empty’ of mundane impurities was called ‘substantialism’ by Tucci (1970, p. 84) and Hoffmann. Cp. op. cit. Hoffmann (1986, pp. 158f):

‘According to the Jo-nang-pa doctrine, everything perceptible or phenomenal is non-existent; only the essence of the Tathagata exists, i.e., Buddhahood, which is also called the “Highest Truth” (*don dam*, Skr. *paramartha*) and is identical with the “Void” or “Thusness,” as in the doctrines of the other schools. This highest entity, called *rgyud*, is innate not only in the “Enlightened One” but also in the continuum of all sentient beings. Compared with the viewpoints of the other schools, this doctrine is certainly heretical. There is an identity of all the Buddhas, whether past, present, or future, in the so-called *Tathagatagarbha* or “matrix of Buddhahood”, and this primordial matrix is believed to be beyond time and space and identical with the *Dharmakaya* (the Body of boundless potentiality). The path to enlightenment may be called “cause” (*rgyu*) only verbally, and the “effect” (“*bras-bu*) is primordially immanent within the cause. Therefore there is no real purifying of the defilements (*klesha*) because these are in reality non-existent. Nothing is to be eliminated because an entity is absolute purity from the very beginning. This “absolute” may also be called “the Eternal Swastika”, a term which may have been borrowed from Bon-po mysticism.

In contrast to this, empirical and conditional truth is not real and the Jo-nang-pa therefore deduce that the unreal cannot be the cause of the defilements.

Thus in these teachings we find two “Voids”, exemplified by these similes: first, the phenomenal world is compared to a coiled-up rope which may be considered a snake though, of course, it is not; second, the innate highest truth is comparable to a garment which occasionally is stained, yet when the garment is cleaned all dirt disappears and it regains its original state of purity. If the defilements of the mind were innate, the mind itself would have to be eliminated. Thus the phenomena of the world are simply “names”, *nomina*, as in medieval European nominalism. Hence in the Jo-nang-pa there is a convergence of relative (*kun-rdzob*) and highest (*don-dam*) truth, so that the “Void” is not simply characterized by negation but by a negation of negation. It is not always easy to render Buddhist existential teachings in Western terms, and it must be remembered that these doctrines are not formal philosophy and are accessible only to meditative experience.’

²⁸ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 402.

²⁹ Cp. Samuel 1993, pp. 452f; Tucci 1970, pp. 27f.

³⁰ Tucci (1970, pp. 27f) noted that records of both the Jonangpa and Dzogchen traditions claim the victory of the Hvasang Mahayana tradition. The progress of the dispute at Samye seems to have been not as decisive as told in the *Blue Annals* or Butön’s *History of Buddhism*. Later Tibetan apologists ‘identified themselves with the Indian parties, and accused their opponents of continuing the mistaken doctrines of the Chinese party. Their attacks were aimed most generally at the Nyingmapa order, which claimed to go back to the time of the early kings. (...) It seems that in actuality Hvasang Mahayana’s position may not have been unequivocally dismissed, and that his arguments were in any case more subtle than later Tibetan scholars were prepared to allow.’ (op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 453) As these doctrinal disputes were meant to hit the Nyingmapa tradition (and some Kagyüpa schools) as well—at least—as the Jonangpa, it is not surprising that the Jonangpa could only ‘survive’ in a predominantly, if not exclusively, Nyingmapa environment.

³¹ Op. cit. Tucci 1949, p. 92.

³² Antagonisms of the two were less founded in their teaching principles, but in the circumstance that

the siddhas put more stress on certain practices of yoga and on magic (Tucci 1970, p. 26) which was to impress the less educated, i.e. the bulk of the people, more than learned disputations.

³³ Samuel 1993, p. 522.

³⁴ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 522.

³⁵ Op. cit. Snellgrove & Richardson 1986, pp. 179f.

³⁶ Tucci 1970, p. 26

³⁷ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, pp. 528f.

³⁸ Academy of Sciences 1990, p. 110.

³⁹ This happened, according to Dabringhaus (1997, p. 128, n. 50), in 1650 on the occasion of Taranatha's reincarnation in Lhasa. Cp. Academy of Sciences 1990, p. 448; Kaschewsky 1986, p. 93; Yang Guiming & Ma 1992, p. 190; Zeng & Guo 1996, pp. 227f. Acc. to a Mongolian tradition, upon his leave from Tibet Taranatha was given the title of Maidari by the 4th Dalai Lama Yönten Gyatsho, hinting at his being a manifestation of bodhisattva Maitreya. (Zeng & Guo 1996, p. 228) However, it is not commonly accepted that Taranatha lived in Mongolia at all. (Cp. Pu & Lamao 1993, p. 63; Schulemann 1958, p. 220)

⁴⁰ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, pp. 529.

⁴¹ In the meanwhile the number of 4053 given in Pu & Lamao (1993, pp. 221-223) may have increased a little, as on personal visits to Jonang monasteries of Gande, Pema, Ngawa and Dzamthang we were already told a higher or the same (Dzamthang) number of monks.

⁴² Cp. Dalai Lama 1990. Nobody would go as far as to say that the religious influence of the respective monastic community is negligible.

⁴³ See next chapter.

⁴⁴ The Tibetan spelling of Dzamthang in some sources (Awang 1992, Gyurme Dorje 1996, Pu & Lamao 1993) is given as *dzam thang*, while in others (AZZ, Yang Baiming 1993) as *'dzam thang*.

⁴⁵ The information given here is based on: Awang 1992, AZZ pp. 2167, 2177, 2520f, 2545f, Liu Liqian 1997, pp. 95-121, Pu & Lamao 1993, pp. 204f, Yang Boming 1993, pp. 228-243, and personal visits in 1997 and 2000. Information given in Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 622) seems to be not too reliable as he places the Jonangpa Monasteries in the Middle Do Chu Valley, but they are actually located in Dzikhog. Due to this error we assume that Tsangwa Gompa was not visited by Gyurme Dorje, most likely it was also out of bounds for him.

⁴⁶ *chos rje dgon*. Different Chinese transcriptions of *Cuo'erji*, *Que'erji Si*, and *Quji Si*, *Qujie Si* are derived from an early Tibetan pronunciation (*chörje*), which often is preserved in Amdo dialects, or the current Lhasa articulation (*chöje*), respectively. The full religious name is Sher Dzamthang Sangdrub Norbu Ling*.

⁴⁷ Different sources date the founding of the monastery to 1378 (AZZ, p. 2544), 1398 (Awang 1992, p. 194), or 1425 (Pu & Lamao 1993, p. 205). It is not clear whether the monastery *Jixiang Rangtang Da Si*, the foundation of which in 1365 is stated elsewhere (Awang 1992, p. 70), is meant to be identical with Chöje Gompa.

⁴⁸ He was born in Bozhi* village of *Kyomkyo* (Chin. *Jiaomuzu*) community, around 40 km to the northwest of Barkham, in the central part of today's Ma'erkang county. Another name of his is given as *Ratnashila* (*ratna shila*). Cp. Awang 1992, p. 193; Yang Boming 1993, p. 229.

⁴⁹ Cp. Zimmermann 1998, pp. 96f, 105, Sperling 1980, and Yang Guiming & Ma 1992, p. 115

⁵⁰ In 1408, acc. to Awang 1992, p. 194, and Yang Boming 1993, p. 229.

⁵¹ Particularly the Ming Emperor Chengzu (Yongle, 1403-1424), having understood the special politico-religious system of the Tibetans, continued the Yuan-Mongol strategy of granting imperial titles and offices to eminent lamas. This was to say that, at least on a formal level, the position of the Tibetan high monks was confirmed by the imperial court. It was the Ming Court's concern that the power balance in Tibetan areas remain more or less unstable, yet not as much so as to have one group (or Buddhist order) swallowed by a more influential one. (Cp. Zimmermann 1998, pp. 92, 97, 100, 108)

⁵² Yang Boming 1993, p. 230. As for the religious title see Zimmermann 1998, p. 102 n. 4.

⁵³ Cp. PRHA, p. 674.

⁵⁴ Cp. Awang 1992, pp. 196-198 ns. 478 and 488.

⁵⁵ Yang Boming 1993, p. 231.

⁵⁶ Cp. chapter 4.5., pp. 131-132. For the biography of the 32nd Tsangwa Lama Ngawang Tendzin Namgyal see Awang 1992, pp. 81-86.

⁵⁷ Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 622

⁵⁸ In 1997 the monks of Dzamthang Tsangwa Monastery explained to us that its name meant to express 'brought from [Tsang in] Tibet'.

⁵⁹ A second monastery, Tshebcu Gön (*tshes bju*

dgon, Chin. *Zebuji Si*, *Ceboju Si*), had been built by a disciple of the first Chöje Lama, Rinchen Dragpa. Thus it dated from between the late 14th to the mid-15th century. During the Cultural Revolution, it was levelled to the ground. By 2000 an assembly hall had been rebuilt. (AZZ, p. 2545, Pu & Lamao 1993, p. 206)

⁶⁰ Cp. Yang Boming 1993, pp. 221-226.

⁶¹ Qing Kangxi, 1662-1722; cp. AZZ, p. 2521.

⁶² Pu & Lamao 1993, p. 204.

⁶³ This was explained by the accompanying Jonangpa monk who seemed to be of a certain proficiency. Yet, Pu & Lamao (1993, pp. 204f) state the existence of a gilded image of the 8th Vajracarya Ngawang Könchog Dargye, and bronze statues of Shakyamuni as well as of Manjuvajra (*mi bskyod rdo rje*). Furthermore they note that a group of statues depicting Shakyamuni and Dolpopa, accompanied by a thousand small images of the 9th Chöje Lama Jigme Wangpo*, are kept in the old structure of Chöje Gompa's dukhang. As this is similar to what I have seen in 1997, I am not sure whether the assembly hall visited belonged to Tsangwa or Chöje Gompa. The situation is further complicated by the circumstance that most people consider the entire monastic city as Tsangwa Gompa; that we do not have detailed information on which parts of the three monasteries in Middle Dzamthang survived the Cultural Revolution, and to what extent they were hit by the destruction. As my visit here in 1997—accompanied by a dozen interested sightseers for whom I had the responsibility—was restricted to a mere hour (which we extended to nearly two hours, which is still very far from being sufficient), there was not much opportunity to obtain adequate data. Even when having an official permit (in our case issued by the provincial-level Department of Interior) local authorities are still extremely dismissive. This lightning-like visit to the monastery was barely achieved even after some seven hours of discussion with the authorities of Dzamthang county and a night's reflection by the persons in charge. We see this in the light of a long history of rejecting outsiders, perhaps a pre-condition for the survival of the Jonangpa order. Keeping these difficulties in mind, I am more than grateful for having had a second chance to see the place in 2000, when prefectural authorities supported our visit.

⁶⁴ Other cultural relics that Awang (1993, p. 205) mentions include: 30 thangkas, altogether 600 bronze

statues, 120 stucco images, 420 prayer-wheels, 400 Buddha figures, 40 silver and 10 bronze chörten. In the AZZ (p.2167) several hundred thangka paintings of the Yuan, Ming, Qing [dynasties] and modern time.

⁶⁵ Cp. Gruschke 1996, pp. 98-102; Hermanns 1965, Stein 1959.

⁶⁶ In AZZ, p. 2167, it is mentioned that the historic residence of successive chief lamas in Chöje Monastery (*Cuo'erji Si*) shelters 31 square metres of murals, which were painted during the 15th through 18th centuries ('early Ming to middle Qing'). Their contents are not specified, neither is the exact location of the residency. It is not unlikely though that the residence is located within the building described in this section.

⁶⁷ Cp. Pu & Lamao 1993, pp. 165f.

⁶⁸ Cp. Yang Boming 1993, pp. 240-242

⁶⁹ Unfortunately the source (Yang Boming 1993) does not cite the Tibetan spelling of the terms given in Chinese transcription: *wenbu*, *nancan*, *guige*, and *wengzhe*. They may represent the respective Tibetan functions of a *dbon po* (nephew of a lama appointed as supervisor), *nang bzhan pa* (clerks or ministerial officers), *dge skyos* (supervisor or director of monks, a sort of 'provost-sergeant' who keeps strict order and punishes transgressors; Das 1902a, p. 269), and *dbu mdzad* (the leading monk when reciting the scriptures), or may well be only locally used terms not common in central Tibet.

⁷⁰ Yang Boming 1993, p. 241; cp. Das 1902a, p. 913

⁷¹ Yang Boming 1993, p. 243

⁷² For a comparative survey of Jonangpa lamaseries in Dzamthang and neighbouring areas and the number of their respective monks see Pu & Lamao 1993, pp. 221-223.

⁷³ Called Setenling Gonpa by Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 624). Additional sources, besides personal visit in 1996: Awang 1992, p. 209 n. 566; AZZ, p. 2543f; Pu & Lamao 1993, pp. 213f,222.

⁷⁴ Pu & Lamao 1993, p. 166

⁷⁵ Taranatha's full Tibetan name is: Künga Nyingpo Tashi Gyantshen (*kun dga' snying po bkra shis rgyal mtshan*) or Napel Sangpo (*na dpal bzang po*). (Cp. Awang 1992, p. 238)

⁷⁶ Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 625

⁷⁷ Acc. to Pu & Lamao 1993, p. 222. The AZZ (p.2564) notes only four Jonangpa gompas.

7. Serta and the world's largest Buddhist Academy

¹ This may be one of the reasons for the uncertain spelling of the region's name, ranging from *gser rta*, *gser thar* (Marshall & Cooke 1997, p. 424) to *gser thal* (Gyurme Dorje 1996, p. 619) and *gser thang*. The county's Chinese designation *Seda Xian* is derived from the first spelling's pronunciation.

² Translated by Wylie 1962; cp. p. 104, where the She-chu valley of today's Serxu County (*stong khor sde* of Wylie 1962) in Kham is said to pass into Dzamthang and Ngawa to the east. The Serthang plain is in between.

³ Even among Tibetans the Ngolok tribes had a very bad reputation, as it is documented by Combe (1926, reprint 1975, p. 107): 'The Golok are all robbers. Every year the Golok, in different parts of their country, ... meet together to discuss a suitable date for starting on the Lojag, the annual robbing expedition.' See also introduction to the preceding chapter.

⁴ According to some unconfirmed information (<http://www.khamaid.org/>) the area is said to be open in the meanwhile, as is the entire Sichuan part of eastern Tibet with the exception of Dzamthang.

⁵ When I was in Dharamsala in 1997 I had an interview with the secretary of His Holiness, during which we touched on the topic of Jigme Phüntshog and his academy. Both are well-known. In Germany, I found that at least some practitioners of Buddhism who adhere to the Nyingmapa order have met him in person.

⁶ It should be observed, though, that the academy was noticed by Tibetologists, resulting in an accurate and comprehensive study of Jigme Phüntshog's initiative, objective, and success: see Germano 1998.

⁷ Op. cit. Germano 1998, p. 61. He mentions that Khempo had his own residence built on the location of a former hermitage, namely of the 19th century Tertön Dudjom Lingpa (1835-1904, *khrag thung bdud 'jom rdo rje*) whose incarnation Dudjom Rimpoche (1904-1987) became famous in the Western world as well. (Cp. Coleman 1993, pp. 214f)

⁸ It is not clear whether that monastery was situated at the same place or in the nearby area, nor could its name be found. A Chinese student of Khempo Jigphün, coming from Singapore, said that there were still some monks before the Cultural Revolution.

⁹ Germano (1998, p. 55) specifies as reasons for this situation: the loss of several generations of scholars to death, exile, or the absence of opportunity; the consequent absence of decent study programmes; the escape into exile of many of the most prominent religious figures of all traditions; the material devastation of temples, monasteries, stupas, as well as a multitude of realities of modern Tibetan life, such as the cultural chauvinism of Han-Chinese living in their neighbourhood. The latter is an enduring problem that only can be solved by educational measures taken by the state. The situation of the first-mentioned complexes has strongly improved, with thousands of monasteries and temples rebuilt, a number of specifically Buddhist academies set up in both eastern Tibet and China (as in Beijing), and many refugee lamas visiting their home lamaseries on visits or some having come back for permanent residence. When touring Amdo and Kham for two months in the summer of 1996, we met almost daily tulkus from India or America, in Amdo even two or three different tulkus every day. This circumstance still may not obliterate the subjective feeling mentioned above, as most of the monks, and laymen, do not recollect the fact that during Tibet's 'glorious past', many of the inhabitants in the monasteries did not have a real chance to obtain a decent education either. Cp., for instance, Germano 1998, p. 166 n. 11, or Goldstein 1993, pp. 21-22, 816.

¹⁰ Germano (1998, p. 56f) emphasizes this item, especially as 'the Ter ['treasure-finding'] movement had not for the most part been successfully transplanted in refugee Tibet.' It is the revitalization of this Ter tradition, the contemporary treasure movement in eastern Tibet, that Germano made the main objective of his interesting study.

¹¹ Op. cit. Germano 1998, p. 57. For those interested in Khempo's objective of strengthening the Tibetan nationalistic sentiment by 'stemming the flow of authority and value toward Chinese modernity, on the one hand, and refugee Tibetan communities, on the other', Germano's study is highly recommended.

¹² Op. cit. Germano 1998, p. 58.

¹³ Nyala Lerab Lingpa lived from 1856 to 1926 (Tulku Thondup 1986, p. 200).

¹⁴ Sogyal Rimpoche is a native of Trehor Kandse in Kham, the neighbouring region of Serta to the south. Born in 1950, he was recognized as Tertön Sogyal's reincarnation, a famous master of the practice of

Dzogchen, by Lama Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. In 1954, he was taken to central Tibet and later to India where he continued his studies. Cp. Coleman 1993, p. 217.

¹⁵ *gser thar bla rung ngo sprod*, p. 1; Germano 1998, pp. 62f.

¹⁶ Germano 1998, p. 61.

¹⁷ Cp. chapter 4.6.2. of Amdo, volume 1.

¹⁸ Germano 1998, p. 63.

¹⁹ Longchenpa (*klong chen pa*) is considered to be the greatest scholar of the Nyingmapa tradition (Coleman 1993, p. 335), while the patriarchs of the Sakyapa school, Sakya Pandita, and Tsongkhapa of the Gelugpa are authoritative of their respective orders.

²⁰ Germano 1998, pp. 171f, n. 71.

²¹ Germano 1998, p. 62.

²² Germano 1998, pp. 64f.

²³ This is the number given by Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 620) who reported over 2,000 monks and 1,000 nuns. As he notified that 'there are no temples as such, since the lama has registered the institution as an educational establishment rather than a monastery', we believe that he must have visited the place in the early 1990s. When we came to Serta the first time in 1996, the institution already possessed a number of temple buildings and assembly halls. The number given to Germano (1998, p. 65) in 1990 was 'a revolving population of about 2,000 in winter and 1,400 in summer, with an expanded population of up to 10,000 during major initiatory rituals.'

²⁴ When arriving at Serta in 1996, we first were informed that 1,500 monks and 2,000 nuns resided in Larung Gar. During the visit to the institution proper, a Chinese student from Singapore, Mrs. Esther Ho, guided us around the complex. It was her second visit by then, and she was at Larung Gar for a six-month term—without a respective official permit, yet tolerated by local authorities. According to this woman, who seemed to be well-informed on the institution's matters, there were 2,000 monks and 3,000 nuns living within its compound, educated by approximately 100 tulkus (Chin. *huofo*). In a short encounter with the Khempo he confirmed this number. Our second visit to Serta brought us to Larung Gar in late 1997, when monks and nuns told us that in the meanwhile there were some 7,000 resident nuns and monks. Yet,

during the summer season when a great many lay and monk students from all over Tibet and China add to the monastic population, the number may exceed 8,000. As far as the built-up area is considered, a considerable extension could be noticed, both in construction of temple buildings and living quarters of monks and nuns. Irrespective of the factual total of residents we can definitely acknowledge that 1. an important monastic institution originated at a place where formerly only a tiny and insignificant, if any at all, monastery existed, 2. its phenomenal growth happened extraordinarily quickly, and 3. by now, it certainly is the largest Buddhist monastic institution world-wide, not only of Tibetan Buddhism. We doubt that there is any academy on our globe which is both entirely religiously oriented and of a similar size.

²⁵ Op. cit. Germano 1998, p. 65.

²⁶ *gser thar bla rung ngo sprod*, p. 2.

²⁷ The term khempo originally designated a 'professor employed to teach' (Das 1902a, p. 179), derived from the Sanskrit term *Upadhyaya*. Adopted by Buddhists of Central Asia the term signified 'the ecclesiastics of the older ritual' (Eitel 1904, pp. 186f), but in Tibet developed as a designation customarily given to the head of a monastery or, in larger lamaseries, of a particular college attached to a monastery. The highly esteemed position of the khempos historically made them monk officials subordinate only to Tibet's highest incarnate lamas, such as the Dalai or Panchen Lamas (ZHCD, p. 116). In Amdo Chinese influence was stronger than in other Tibetan areas and the lamas were more heavily involved in Chinese politics; thus, the title of a khempo became known by the Chinese term *fatai* (Master of the Doctrine, literally 'Dharma platform'; cp. CRM, p. 737; Zimmermann 1998, p. 20 n. 68).

²⁸ Schram 1957, p. 61. He wrote lamas, yet he meant monks.

²⁹ Cp. Germano 1998, pp. 68-71.

³⁰ *gser thar bla rung ngo sprod*, p. 2.

³¹ Germano 1998, p. 66; *gser thar bla rung ngo sprod*, p. 2.

³² Cp. Germano 1998, pp. 63f.

³³ The spelling was given as *mi mtsho rin po ches dgon pa*.

³⁴ Cp. Hummel 1960.

³⁵ The institution is sometimes also referred to as

Khempo Gar—the ‘Khempo’s military, i.e. training—encampment’. While in its military sense the term *sgar* infers some fortification, the context here may point at the initial stage when the institution had the character of a camp rather than of an academy.

³⁶ As those doors were closed during my two visits and windows draped with cloth, the use of the chambers is not clear. It seemed they were to become different chapels, like in a Kumbum chörten, but most likely work was not in progress to furnish them already with images. It was not clear how the upper floors of the chörten can be reached either (by 1997).

³⁷ *zangs mdog dpal ri pad ma ‘od kyi shing khams* i.e., the ‘paradise (or Buddha realm) of the glorious Copper-Coloured Mountain in the brilliance of the lotus flower’. Cp. chapter 4.5. of Amdo, volume 1.

³⁸ Germano 1998, p. 80.

³⁹ Op. cit. *ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴⁰ *gser thar bla rung ngo sprod*, pp. 3f.

⁴¹ In 1996 it was said to be inhabited by 30 monks, which corresponds to the number of the 1940s, when Liotard and Guibaut (1987, p. 93) have been there.

⁴² Op. cit. Guibaut 1987, pp. 92f, 95.

⁴³ A photo of the edifice of 1940 is shown on plate 19, inserted between pp. 22 and 23 of Guibaut 1987.

⁴⁴ According to DRM 1993, p. 722. In giving the measures of the chörten, we follow this Chinese source.

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the sanctuaries were not generally accessible during our visits in 1996 and 1997, although a friendly monk opened three of the main chapels to us.

⁴⁶ Op. cit. Guibaut 1987, p. 75 and p. 194.

⁴⁷ Concerning the richness of monasteries in the area, Guibaut (1987, p. 194) described his experiences as follows: ‘It is unusual to travel more than three or four miles without finding a monastery of several hundred lamas [i.e., monks], erected usually on mountain spurs, in sites chosen both for their beauty and for their strategic position.’

⁴⁸ Gyurme Dorje (1996, p. 621) names not less than ten Nyingmapa monasteries in the valleys of Likhog and Tsang Chu alone (in the eastern part of Drango county, Chin. *Luhuo Xian*). Yet, Drango’s main monastery in the county seat is one of the largest Gelugpa institutions in eastern Kham. Cp. the separate volume on cultural relics in Kham

(forthcoming) to be published by White Lotus.

⁴⁹ Cp. Wylie 1962, p. 104: ‘To the east of those [i.e. Kandse, Drango, Dawu and Dzachuka] is the *sde* called Stong-skor, and past that, one comes to the region of Mdo-smad A-mdo.’ With Tongkor being drawn, on Wylie’s map, between today’s Serxü Xian (Sershül) and across the northern parts of Dege and Kandse counties into Serta county, we have to take this eastern part of Tongkor and the west of Serta as the border area between Kham and Amdo, with the latter belonging to Amdo and the first to Kham. Teichman (1922, map, and p. 70) still marks this area as ‘unexplored nomad country’.

⁵⁰ Gruschke (forthcoming).

Amdo and Tibet: common cultural features and differences

¹ According to the view elucidated from classical sources, the Tibetan term *mdo khams*, that is to say both Amdo and Kham, did not really distinguish between areas populated by Tibetans within the highland frame and the lowlands extending to the foot of the marginal mountain ranges of the Tibetan Plateau. Therefore the Silk Road—which belonged to the Tibetan Empire during the time of the *tsempo* (emperors) Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen and Rälpacen—often seems to be considered as forming part of Amdo. In this sense the term Amdo preferably should not be interpreted as a toponym referring to a cultural province of Tibet only; we therefore restrict ourselves to the Tibetan and Tibetan Buddhist realm in northeastern Tibet.

² The kind of expression (integral part) recalls the Chinese argument concerning Tibet. Unfortunately, we cannot discuss this highly political issue here. The topic will remain an extremely explosive matter as long as the so-called Tibet issue remains unsolved. Goldstein 1994 reminded us of the fact that the Tibetan Lhasa government in 1949-1950 was aware that its political power did not reach much farther than what is today’s TAR (Tibetan Autonomous Region, Xizang), that is to say Amdo was not under Lhasa control. This is also reflected in the circumstance that Amdowas, i.e. Tibetans from the highland’s northeast, only make up about 5 % of the refugee community, although they represent about a third of the Tibetan Plateau’s space and more than 25 % of all Tibetan tribes. The liberal omission from official claims by the Dalai Lama’s government in exile, of culturally Tibetan areas within the

boundaries of Nepal, Bhutan, India, and Pakistan (the Balti can be seen as Islamicized Tibetans) can only be understood in view of the guest status of the refugees in those countries. The central Tibetan claim on Amdo and all of Kham, instituted during the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama, was renewed by the 13th Dalai Lama, thus forming the foundation for the policy of the government in exile.

³ Having regularly visited various parts of the Tibetan Plateau since 1985 (some 30 visits from 1985 to 2000) the author has the impression that hanging prayer-flags, putting up *mani*-stones, and erecting lhathos was brought forward at a slower pace than rebuilding monasteries. This is particularly true for central Tibet and may be due to the highly symbolic character the monasteries have gained for Tibetan nationalism. (Cp. Goldstein & Kapstein 1998; Schwartz 1994) In Amdo, we have seen the features of this popular belief manifested before the monastic boom had started.

⁴ Cp. Das 1902a, p. 1197, 1902b, p. 149; Rockhill 1891a, p. 77; Samuel 1993, p. 193; Zhang Yisun 1993, p. 2737.

⁵ Spelling uncertain. Excluding uncertainties due to Amdo dialects, we have, among others, the following possibilities: *kyog dar*, i.e. flags (*dar*) which are arranged in winding (*kyog*) manner; *skyo dar*, i.e. mourning (*skyo*) flags, as many pilgrimage sites marked by stone cairns and chörten which are not situated at certain landmarks like mountains, passes etc. once originated at burial places of holy men, i.e. ancestors, local saints or alike; *skyobs dar*, i.e. protection (*skyobs*) flags, which is the main application of prayer-flags anyway, asking for protection, defence, help, assistance (*skyobs*) by the gods or spirits (cp. for instance Combe 1926, p. 51); '*gyog dar*, i.e. ascending ('*gyog pa*) flags. The word given by ordinary pilgrims may as well have meant to say '*phyar dar*, hoisted flag, in their local Amdo dialect.

⁶ We know one single example in Kham in the Minyang region. It is situated in Kangding county on the way from Kangding to Pel Lhagong (Chin. *Tagong Si*). In Kham there are other peculiar forms of arranging prayer-flags: the Kandse area has nothing but large fields of reddish prayer-flags, all suspended along strings hung up in parallel order.

⁷ One example is near Tsogyenrawa (Chin. *Huashixia*) in Matö county, where the road to Machen and Pema separates from the main Xining

- Yushu Highway. A smaller example is to be seen besides a *mani*-wall near Donggyü Dokha Monastery of Gande county (see chapter 3.4., of Amdo, volume 1).

⁸ Impressive examples are seen below Pema county, in a village in the easternmost part of Matö county (can be spotted from the main road leading to Pema) in Qinghai, and adjoining to Dündül Chörten of Serta county in Sichuan (though the latter is not at a sky burial site).

⁹ CMCR, p. 178, records 16 ha for the charnel ground with 10 ha being covered by prayer-flags. The prayer-flags are printed using wooden printing blocks of 2.5 - 3 m length.

¹⁰ This is a topic that is popular even today, as horses are still robbed by gangs of nomads. It seems that ordinarily the robbers do not rob people of the same tribe; groups of 'Sichuan Tibetans' may go to raid in Qinghai (this is what was suspected during a case that we witnessed in 1997) or the other way round.

¹¹ According to a deceased's family members, who invited the author to have a closer look, it took some 30 vultures about half an hour to consume the dismembered corpse. We had this opportunity accidentally in 1996; it was the author's first close sight of a sky burial after twelve years of touring in Tibet. Ordinarily, as tourists, we should rather stay away from such events.

¹² CMCR, pp. 178 (5-G₁ Chalang tianzangtai), 169 (88-G₂ Shana tianzangtai), 165 (245-G₃ Shanglanjiao tianzangtai), and 137 (139-G₂ Xishan tianzangtai).

¹³ Named after nearby Huo'erjia village; cp. CMCR, p. 137 (138-G₁ Huo'erjia huozangtai).

¹⁴ Spelling according to Tucci 1970, p. 272, but other spellings can also be found: *la btsas* (Stein 1989, p. 241), *la rtse* (Das 1902a, p. 1201 = 'summit of a mountain pass'), *la rdzas* or *bla rdzas* (ibid., p. 1202).

¹⁵ Stein 1989, p. 240.

¹⁶ Thread-crosses called *nam mkha'* which are made for the *mdos* rites (cp. Tucci 1970, pp. 196-203). Although these are still found in Tibet, they are nowadays more commonly seen among Tibetan and related tribes in the Himalayas than in Tibet proper, let alone in Amdo. During the *mdos* ceremony the lamas trap the spirits in the thread-crosses which are subsequently removed from the villages and destroyed. There is a large example of a *nam kha'* in the small Kagyüpa monastery of Riwo Ritro west of Riwoche county town in Kham.

¹⁷ Op. cit. Samuel 1993, p. 183. Cp. also Hummel 1960a.

¹⁸ Hermanns 1965, pp. 328f.

¹⁹ CMCR names several of these sites by their Mongolian designation (*obo*, Chin. *e'bo* or *aobao*). First and most famous are the obos on the Sun and Moon Pass (Chin. *Riyue Shan*, CMCR pp. 151f) in Gonghe county, where in two Chinese pavilions modern murals tell the story of princess Wencheng going to marry Emperor Songtsen Gampo in Tibet. Others listed are Heimahe Obo on the southwestern shore of Lake Kokonor (p.152), Quejia Obo, Shanglanjiao Obo and Zhoutun Obo in southern Guide county (p.164f), and Longqu Obo (p.169) near the place called 'One Hundred and Eight Springs' in Xinghai county (all in Qinghai province).

²⁰ Op. cit. Li Anche 1994, pp. 235f.

²¹ This contrasts with Samten Karmay's statement that the secular worship of the warrior-like mountain deities 'is found to be an exclusive affair of the laymen in most parts of Tibet' (Karmay 1998, p. 432). We assume that his commentary is accurate even for most parts of Amdo, with some significant exceptions such as Labrang or Ngawa. Cp. also Karmay 1994.

²² A description of such a secular festival honouring a mountain god in Sharkhog (north of Songpan in Sichuan's Ngawa Prefecture) is given by Karmay 1994.

²³ Hummel 1955, p. 79

²⁴ Spelling uncertain, yet the term was pronounced in a way that clearly articulated the s of the word, thus leaving unclear whether it comes from an archaic pronunciation of the word *chos* (as 'chös') or it is derived from an initial s of the second syllable. In the first case the explanation of the nomads would probably just have meant chörten.

²⁵ DRM, p. 737; cp. Das 1902a, pp. 123, 702.

²⁶ For Tshowar Karche Dokha see chapter 4.5.1, pp. 117f, and Donggyü Dokha Gön see chapter 3.5, of Amdo, volume 1.

²⁷ See chapter 3.5. of Amdo, volume 1, and 6.1.2.

Concluding Remarks

¹ Karmay 1998, pp. 427, 524.

² See chapter 4 on the Dzöge area in the marshes of the Ma Chu.

³ Gruschke (*forthcoming*).

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Glossary

- Abhishekana Imperial Tutor** (*guanding guoshi*), imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas during the Chinese Empire
- adibuddha**, or primordial buddha, naming of the idea of an eternal omnipresence of the Buddha conception, developed in the 10th century in North India
- Aksobhya** (Tib. *mi bskyod pa*), Dhyani Buddha 'The Imperturbable', Tathagata Buddha of the East
- amban**, imperial commissioner during Qing dynasty of the Chinese Empire; in 1728 began to represent the emperor in Lhasa
- Amdowa**, an inhabitant of northeastern Tibet, habitually referring to ethnic Tibetans only
- Amitabha** (Tib. *'od dpag med*), Dhyani Buddha 'Of Infinite Light', Tathagata Buddha of the West where he resides in his 'Blissful Paradise of the West' (Sukhavati)
- Amitayus** (Tib. *tshe dpag med*), 'Buddha of Eternal Life', another iconographic depiction of the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha
- Amoghasiddhi** (Tib. *don yod grub pa*), Dhyani Buddha 'The Infallible', Tathagata Buddha of the North
- ani**, Tibetan term designating a Buddhist nun
- appliqué-thangka**, thangka made by appliqué technique, put together from coloured pieces of silk cloth
- arhat** (Tib. *dgra bchom pa*), 'Venerable', wise and holy man attaining nirvana in this life; the first 16 arhats were disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni
- Avalokiteshvara**, Tib. Chenresi (*spyen ras gzigs*, also *thugs rje chen po*), most important transcendent bodhisattva and protector deity of Tibet, the most typical of his 108 depictions being the 11-headed and 1000-armed form; the Karmapa Lamas are believed to be a manifestation of his; starting from the 5th Dalai Lama this latter incarnation line is seen as Avalokiteshvara's manifestation as well.
- ba dang**, colourful brocade festoons, decoration in temple halls of Tibetan monasteries
- baihu** (lit. 'a hundred households', also *baihusuo*), a military and administrative division of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, designating a command of one hundred households and the related administration
- banner** (Chin. *qi*), a military division introduced by the Qing Manchu Empire and based on the *ulus* unit of the Mongol socio-military structure, being a tribal group within a defined territory
- Barbarian**, English translation of several different Chinese designations of border tribes or ethnic minorities unwilling to assimilate in historic time
- Barkhor** (*bar 'khor*), the middle one of three rings of circumambulation paths around a sanctuary, temple or monastery, explicitly used for the one around the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa
- bhavacakra**, the wheel of life and death, symbolizing the eternal succession of birth, death and rebirth
- bhiksu**, Skt. term for a fully ordained Buddhist monk (Tib. *dge slong*); represents only a minority of the monastic residents in Tibet, most of whom are called *trapa* (*grva pa*)
- bla**, the 'life-energy' of a person or tribe, or other beings
- Blue Annals** (Tib. *deb ther sngon po*), an important historic work written by Gö Lotsawa Shönnu Päl in 1476-1478
- Böchenpa** (*bod chen pa*), Tibetan name for an inhabitant of 'Greater Tibet'
- bodhisattva** (Tib. *byang chub semps dpa*), 'Enlightened Being', he has attained the state of enlightenment, but renounces entering nirvana as long as there are suffering beings
- bod pa** (pronounced *böpa*), Tibetan name for an inhabitant of central Tibet
- bod chen pa** → Böchenpa
- Bökhe** (*bod khas*), the Tibetan language
- Bön** (*bon*, 'invocation'), pre-Buddhist faith of old Tibet; in present day Tibet a non-Buddhist religious order that has developed very near to the characteristics of Lamaism
- Bönpo**, an adherent of the Bön religion
- Bönpo order**, a non-Buddhist religious monastic community that developed very near to the characteristics of Lamaism, particularly to the Nyingmapa
- Böpa** (*bod pa*), inhabitant of central Tibet
- Böyül** (*bod yul*), Tibetan name for central Tibet, the greater region on both sides of the Tsangpo river

Buddha (Tib. *sangs rgyas*), 'the Enlightened'

bumpa (*bum pa*, Tib. for Skr. kalasa, 'vase'), the round and bellied part of a stupa (chörten) (plate 12)

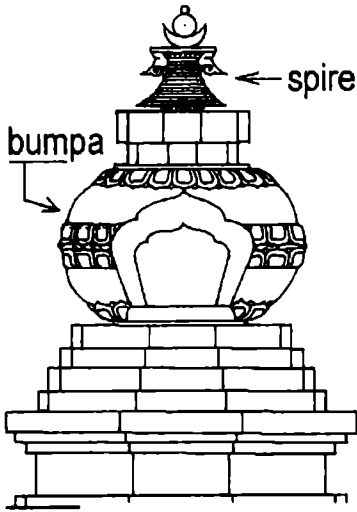


Plate 12. Bumpa

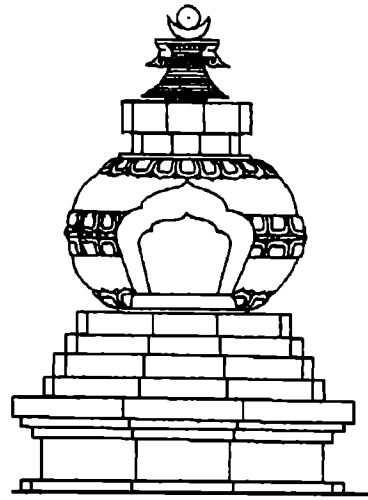


Plate 13. Chörten

büriyenshat (*bürijen-ü šatu*), invocation tower of Mongolian lamaseries

butter flowers (Chin. *suyou hua*), artistic sculptures mainly formed of butter, made and exhibited at monasteries during certain Tibetan festivals

Cakrasamvara (Tib. '*khor lo bde mchog*), an esoteric text as well as the related deity, a wrathful meditational buddha

Central Tibet (*Ü-Tsang*), the southern region of Tibet traditionally considered to be the core of Tibetan culture

Cham dances, ritual mask dances demonstrating the powerful effects of (the Buddhist) religion

Chan Buddhism, a Chinese form of Mahayana Buddhism, propagated by the monk Hwashang who taught a sudden awakening of the Enlightenment state through the absence of mental activity

chanshi (Chin., 'dhyana-teacher, master of meditation'), imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas

Chasak Lama, Mongolian title of a specific lama in Amdo

Chenresi (*spyän ras gzigs*), Tib. for → Avalokiteshvara

chiliarchy (lit. 'a thousand households', Chin. *qianhusuo*, or *shouyu qianhusuo*), a key structural element of the Yuan military organization, a command of one thousand households, also a military and administrative division of the Ming dynasties

Chögyal (*chos rgyal*), Tib. for → Dharmaraja

chörten (*mchod rten*), Tibetan-style stupa (plate 13)

chösi nyidrel (*chos srid gnyis 'brel*), Tib. 'religion and political affairs joined together', historical system of religious rule in Tibet

cintamani jewel, wish-fulfilling jewel

college (Tib. *grva tshang*), study faculty in a lamasery

cultural province, a culturally and not administratively defined area

da guoshi (Chin., 'Great Teacher of the Nation'), imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas

dakini (Tib. *mkha' 'gro ma*), female deity, wrathful form of a yogini; angelic beings, dakinis mediate the Buddha's wisdom to the earthly sphere

Daoism, Daoist, more adequate spelling of Taoism, Taoist, from the Chinese term *dao*, meaning 'way, path, principle'; the 'Way of Nature which cannot be given a name'

dar, (prayer-) flag

dar chen, flag-pole

Dharma (Tib. *chos*), the 'Law', i.e. the Buddhist faith, law, principles, religion and canon

Dharmakaya (Tib. *chos sku*), see trikaya

Dharma Master of Universal Aid (Chin. *puji fashi*), imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas

dharma-pala (Tib. *chos skyong*), 'protector of the Buddhist faith', a class of principal tutelary deities

Dharmaraja (Tib. *chos rgyal*, Chin. *fawang*), 'King of the Buddhist faith', designation of the early Tibetan emperors (tsenpo) Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen

and Rälpacen as 'religious kings', honouring their merit propagating Buddhism; also title of high lamas in imperial China

Dharmaraja Dashan Fawang, Chin. imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas

Dhyani Buddha → Five Dhyani Buddhas

Dipankara (tib. *mar me mdzad*), the past Buddha

dishi (Chin. 'imperial tutor'), imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas

dokha (*rdo kha*), Tib. 'vein in a stone', ritually significant spots of popular belief, marked by placing stones; in time heaps of them are amassed

Dölma (*sgrol ma*), Tib. name of → Tara

Dorje Chang (*rdo rje 'chang*), Tib. name of the adibuddha Vajradhara

Dragon King, snake or dragon-like spirits residing in water bodies; term typical for Chinese and related mythologies

dratshang (*grva tshang*), college of a lamasery

Drigung sect, Drigungpa (*'bri gung bka' brgyud pa*), an important sub-order of the Kagyüpa school

Drogpa (*'brog pa*), Tibetan nomads

dukhang (*'du khang*), assembly hall

Dünkhor Dratshang (*dus 'khor grva tshang*), Kalacakra college of a monastic institution

durthrö (*dur khrod*), sky burial site, charnel ground

Dzöge (*mdzod dge* or *mdzo dge*), Tibetan pastoral tribes in southeastern Amdo (Gansu and Sichuan)

dzong (*rdzong*), castle, fortress, and attached district

Dzungar, western Mongols, Mongolian tribes of northern Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) who invaded central Tibet in 1717-1718

Eight Mahasattvas, the eight major bodisattvas Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya, Manjushri, Vajrapani, Samantabhadra, Akasagarbha, Ksitigarbha, and Sarvanivaranaviskambhin

Erdeni Nomun Khan (Mong., 'Precious Master of the Dharma'), imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas

fatai, fa-t'ai (Chin., Pinyin: *fatai*, Tib. → khempo)

Five Dhyani Buddhas, also Transcendent Buddhas (Tathagatas), peaceful meditational buddhas forming the Buddha-body of perfect resources (Sambhogakaya), i.e. Aksobhya in the East, Amitabha (West), Amoghasiddhi (North), Ratnasambhava (South) and Vairocana (Centre)

Flower Festival (Chin. *Hua'er Jie*), a major multi-ethnic festival in central Amdo

Four Guardian Kings → Lokapalas

Four Harmonious Friends, Tibetan legend, often depicted on murals, about an elephant, a monkey, a hare and a pheasant; the harmony among them is symbolized by their co-operation in harvesting the peaches of a tree they have grown together (plate 14)



Plate 14. Four Harmonious Friends

Four Heavenly Kings → Lokapalas

gabled and hipped roof (Chin. *xieshan wuding*, Tib. *rgya phibs*, plate 15)

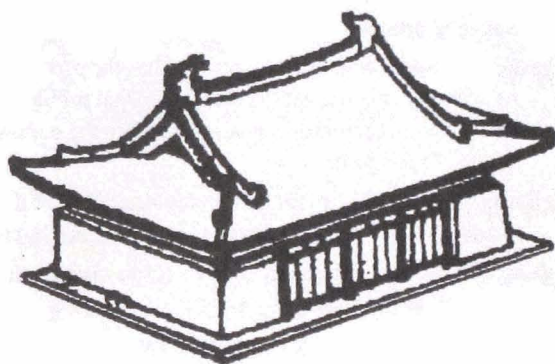


Plate 15. Gabled and hipped roof

Ganden (*sga' ldan*), Tib. for Tushita, the 'Joyful Heaven' of Buddha Maitreya, often forms part of names of lamaseries

Ganden Thrizin (Ganden Thripa), formally the highest hierarchical position of the Gelugpa order, patriarch of Ganden Monastery

ganjira (Tib. *mdsod bdang*, plate 16) 'treasure vessel', decorative element in the middle of the roof, formed in the shape of a vase or stupa and generally filled with prayer texts, mostly gilded, ending in a spire



Plate 16. Ganjira

Garuda (Tib. *khyung*), celestial being in the form of a mythical, snake-eating bird

gelong (*dge slong*), fully ordained monk in the first grade, obeying 253 rules; Skr. bhikṣu

Gelugpa (*dge lugs pa*), the youngest reformist order of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Tsongkhapa in 1409 and came to power during the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama

geshe (*dge shes*), title of a scholar of the Gelugpa and Sakyapa orders

geshe lharampa, title of a scholar who has the privilege to take part in the great debates on logical problems or even to direct these; may also preach to the monks of the 'Three Seats'

ghanta (Tib. *dril bu*), ritual bell; in tantra symbol of the wisdom of the void, the female, and the clear light

gling, Tib. 'continent, island', often forms part of the name of monasteries

gökudramsa (*gos sku bgram sa*), wall for unveiling and hanging the huge thangka for festival celebrations

gompa (*dgon pa*), literally 'solitary place', monastery (from the size of a hermitage to a big lamasery)

gönchen (*dgon chen*), Tib., 'large monastery'

gönkhang (*mgon khang*), temple or chapel of the tutelary deities (protectors' temple)

guanding guoshi, Chin., 'Abhishekana Imperial Tutor', imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas

Guomindang, modern Pinyin spelling of the Chinese Nationalist Party's Chinese designation; also seen as KMT (= Kuo Min Tang, Wade-Giles spelling)

Guru Rimpoche, Tib. honorific title for → Padma-sambhava

Guthog (*dgu thog*), 'nine roofs', or 'nine floors', nine-storeyed temple building, reminding of the Milarepa Tower in Sekhar Guthog

gyaltshen (*rgyal mtshan*), armorial flag or banner of victory of Buddhism, gilded round standards on the roofs of Tibetan temples (plate 17)



Plate 17. Gyaltshen

gyodar, a special pattern of prayer-flag arrangement

gyatsho (*rgya mtsho*), Tib., ocean

Han (dynasty), period of imperial Chinese rule (206 BC-220 AD)

Han (nationality), or Han-Chinese, the 'ethnic Chinese' (with changing definitions throughout Chinese history) as distinguished from the term *zhongguo ren*, i.e. 'people of the Middle Kingdom' = Chinese nationals

harmika, originally the body of the stupa where relics are kept, generally a cube-like block on top of the protruding part of the stupa (chörten)

Hayagriva (Tib. *rta mgrin*), tutelary deity, one of the eight major dharmapalas

hip roof (plate 18), hipped roof

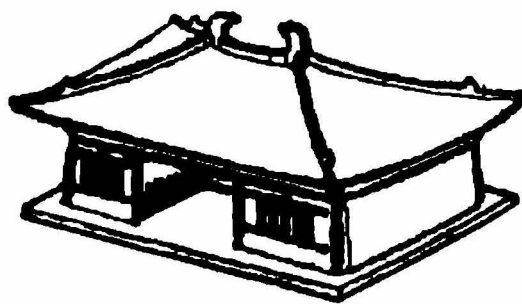


Plate 18. Hipped roof

- hongjiao chanshi**, Chin. 'Meditation Master, Promoter of the Doctrine', imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas
- Hongwu period**, Ming Emperor Taizu's reign (1368-1398)
- Hor**, not well defined Tibetan ethnic term relating to either Mongolian, Turkic or other populations
- Horpa**, herdsmen of northern Tibet
- Hua'er Jie**, or **Huar Jie**, Chin. for → Flower Festival
- Hui** (Hui-Muslims), ethnic Muslim minority in China and in many parts of eastern Tibet; descendants of the mediaeval Central Asian Uyghurs
- Hutukhtu**, or → Khutukhtu
- Jambudvīpa** (Skr., Tib. *dzam bu gling*), in Buddhist cosmology the southern continent of those surrounding mythical Mt. Meru, the temporal world of mankind
- Jampe Lhakhang** (*byams pa'i lha khang*), temple of Maitreya
- Jasakh Prince**, imperial title bestowed upon high incarnate lamas during the Chinese Empire
- Jataka stories**, about the Buddha's previous lives
- Je Rimpoche** (*rje rin po che*), Tib. honorific title for → Tsongkhapa
- jian**, Chin. 'room', a bay = a space unit standardized according to the distance between two pillars
- Jobo Rimpoche** → Jowo
- Jokhang** (*jo khang*), important temple dedicated to Buddha Shakyamuni, most famous is the Tibetan Jokhang temple in Lhasa
- Jonangpa order**, may be considered as a sub-sect of the Sakyapa school of Tibetan Buddhism
- Jowo** (*jo bo*), 'Lord, master, venerable', Tib. honorific term for Lord Buddha, habitually used for Jowo Shakyamuni—most famous the one of Lhasa's Jokhang Temple—although not explicitly determined for the historic Buddha only
- Kadampa** (*bka' gdams pa*), early Tibetan Buddhist reform order, later absorbed by the Gelugpa
- Kagyüpa** (*bka' brgyud pa*), a Lamaist Red Hat school, divided in many sub-groups
- Kalacakra** (Tib. Dünkhor, or *dus kyi 'khor lo*), a major Tantric system that originated in ca. 1000, of primary importance for the Gelugpa
- Kalacakra college** (or study faculty, *dus 'khor grva tshang*), of astronomy, astrology etc.
- Kangxi period**, Chinese Emperor Qing Shenzu's reign (1662-1722)
- Kanjur** (*bka' 'gyur*), compilation of Buddhist canonical scriptures 'of the words of Buddha', generally in 108 volumes; tripitaka—the 'three baskets'—of Buddhist doctrinal books, works on ecclesiastical discipline and philosophical works, in Tibet this is to say of Hinayana, Mahayana and Tantra texts
- Karma-Kagyüpa** (*kar ma bka' brgyud pa*), important sub-order of the Kagyüpa school
- Karmapa** (*kar ma pa*), title of one of the highest Tibetan Buddhist incarnations of the Red sect orders; believed to be a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara
- Kashag**, the official name of the Tibetan cabinet
- kha**, Tib., part of toponyms meaning 'origin, source'
- khamtsen**, residential sub-units of large monasteries' colleges
- khatag** (*kha btags*), ceremonial scarf for presentation or salutation, symbol for a polite social intercourse and reverence
- khempo** (*mkhan po*, Chin. *fatai*), originally a 'professor employed to teach', derived from the Sanskrit term *upadhyaya*; later in Tibet customarily the head of a monastery or, in larger lamaseries, of a particular college attached to a monastery
- khora**, circumambulation path, Tib. *khorwa* ('*khor ba*), to circumambulate
- khoram** ('*khor lam*), circumambulation path, for Buddhists in Tibet in clockwise direction
- Khutukhtu** (also: Hutukhtu, Tib. spelling *ho thog thu*), Mongolian term for 'incarnate lama' (Tib. *sprul sku*)
- kyung**, Tib., originally a mythical bird (Roc bird), in Buddhist context a Garuda
- KMT** (Kuo Min Tang, Wade-Giles spelling), Chinese Nationalist Party (Pinyin spelling: → Guomindang)
- Kubera**, important Tibetan god of wealth, sometimes in the retinue of the lokapala Vaishravana; also portrayed as a dharmapala
- kumbum chörten** (*sku 'bum mchod rten*), a monumental stupa that offers to the pilgrim the possibility of visualizing the sacred path that leads to enlightenment by viewing the divine images (paintings and sculptures) arranged in the form of a mandala
- Künsang Gyalwa Gyatsho** (*kun bzang rgyal ba rgya mtsho*), name of a Bön deity in standing posture with eleven faces, a thousand arms and four feet; the expression of the limitless activity of one of the four transcendent lords' compassion
- Kyanggön** (*skyangs mgon*), a most august title used for the Dalai, Panchen, and Jamyang Lamas
- Kyedor Dratshang**, Tib., Hevajra college
- labrang** (*bla brang*), abbr. of lama phodrang, residence or palace of a lama
- lama** (*bla ma*), Tib., learned teacher, master (guru)
- Lamaism**, term signifying the Tibetan form of Buddhism
- lama phodrang** (*bla ma pho 'brang*, abbr. labrang), the residence or palace of a lama

lamasery, mostly a large Tibetan Buddhist monastery
lam rim, the gradual Path to Enlightenment
Lantscha, a kind of ornamental Tibetan script used by calligraphers for religious inscriptions and titles of (holy) books (plate 19)

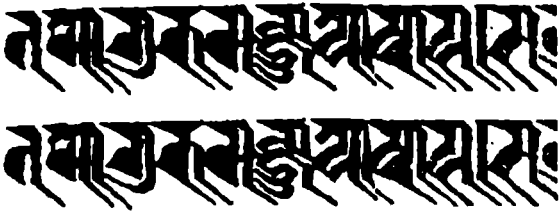


Plate 19. Lantscha script

latse (*la btsas*, *la rtse*, *la rdzas*, or *bla rdzas*) → **lhatsé**
lha, Tib., deity, spirit
lhakhang (*lha khang*), temple, temple hall, chapel, shrine; serves for revering of cult images
lharampa → geshe lharampa
lhato, or **lhatho** (*lha mtho*), stone votive cairns, large square-built altars, surmounted by substantial bundles of brushwood with prayer-flags or large arrows, sometimes like monolithic square chörten
lhatsé (*lha btsas*), also: **latse** (*la btsas*, *la rtse*, *la rdzas*, or *bla rdzas*), stone cairn, rough heaps of mostly white stones to which sticks or brushwood with prayer-flags are added
lingkhor (*gling 'khor lam*), the outer path around a monastery or sacred place for ritual circumambulation
Living Buddha, translation of Chin. *huofo*, meaning an incarnate lama
lobnyer (*slob gnyer*), students in a monastic college
Lokapalas (Tib. *rgyal chen bzhi*), the Four Guardian Kings, guardians of the four directions
Loseling college (*blo gsal gling*), exoteric college of a monastic institution, faculty of Buddhist logics
lungta (*rlung rta*), the 'wind-horse', prayer-flags (plate 20)
Madhyamaka, philosophical system developed by Nagarjuna
Mahakala (Tib. *nag chen mgon po*), tutelary deity, one of the eight major dharmapalas
Mahakarunika, the eleven-headed form of Avalokiteshvara
Mahasattva → Eight Mahabodhisattvas
Mahavairocana (*rnam par snang mdzad*), adibuddha
Maitreya (Tib. *byams pa*), bodhisattva and future Buddha

makara (Skr. 'sea-monster'), composite beast, with a body part fish and a head part elephant or crocodile (plate 21)
Manchu Empire (1644-1911), the realm of imperial China during the Manchu-Chinese Qing dynasty
mandala (Tib. *dkyil 'khor*), mystic circle, a centred diagram for the purpose of meditation and reveration as well as offering (sand mandala for instance), depiction of the Tibetan Buddhist cosmos
manikhang, small chapel or temple-like hall with prayer-wheels, serving the devout for turning the wheels and ritual circumambulation
mani stone, flat or round stone carved with mantras ('prayers'), scriptures, or images of deities
mani wall (Tib. *men dong*, *sman thang*), extended regular heap of mani stones
mantra (Tib. *sngags*), mystical syllable and magic formula
mantrin (Tib. Ngagpa), a Buddhist faithful (mostly elder men) who have received some religious education and taken bodhisattva and mantra vows, but just a limited number of vinaya vows
mchod pa (Tib., 'offering, sacrifice'), in Kumbum Monastery wooden scaffoldings of ca. 15 m height used to exhibit artistic butter sculptures on the 15th day of the first Tibetan month
mda' rgod, Tib., arrow
mdo, often taken as toponym identified with Amdo, mdo just means 'lower lands', namely the lower part of a valley where it merges into the plain

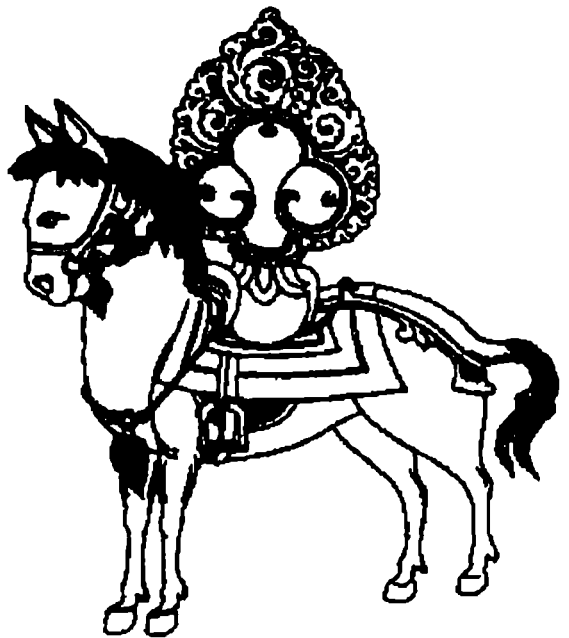


Plate 20. Lungta



Plate 21. Makaras

myriarchy (*wanhusuo*) meaning a command of as many as ten thousand households, the key structural element of the Yuan military organization. It was used to administer the entire empire and as such Tibet as well, and was further used by Ming emperors.

namchuwangden (*rnam bcu dbang ldan*), a mystical emblem of the 'ten powerful syllables' (plate 22)

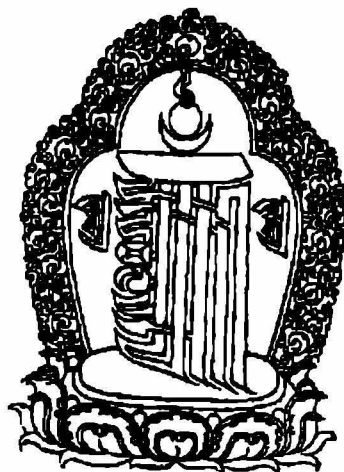


Plate 22. Namchuwangden

mdos, ceremony during which lamas trap evil spirits in thread-crosses which are subsequently removed from houses and villages and destroyed

Medical college (or study faculty, *smān pa grva tshang*)

meditational buddha → Five Dhyani Buddhas

mendong, Tib., mani stone wall

Menla (*smān bla*), Tib. name of Bhaisajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha

Menpa Dratshang (*smān pa grva tshang*), medical college of a monastic institution

Mentsikhang (*smān rtsis khang*), Tib., Tibetan hospital

Meru, Mount Meru (Sumeru, Tib. *ri rab lhun po*), the cosmic mountain of Indian cosmology; Buddhist axis mundi surrounded by four major continents, of which the Southern, Jambudvīpa, is our earthly sphere

Milarepa Tower, type of nine-storeyed temple building modelled after the one in south Tibet's → Sekhar Guthog

Ming dynasty, ruled imperial China 1368-1644

Ming Taizu, Chinese emperor who reigned 1368-1398

Mönlam Festival (*smōn lam chen mo*), the great prayer ceremonies at the Tibetan New Year, initiated by Tsongkhapa in 1409 to commemorate the wonders done by Buddha

nam mkha', thread-crosses which are made for the mdos rites

Nampar Gyalwa (*rnam par rgyal ba*), emanation of Bön founder Shenrab who 'radiates the concentrated power of Shenrab, the subduer of demons'

nangchen (*nang tren* or *nang chen*, Chin. *nangqian* or *angqian*), a tulku's residence

nangkhor, also khora, Skr. parikrama, innermost of three kinds of circumambulation paths around a sanctum (the others are barkhor and lingkhor)

Nechung (N. Chöje, *gnas chung chos rje*), official title of the Tibetan state oracle

ngagpa, Tib. for → mantrin

Nine-storeyed Hall (Guthog), temple hall modelled after the famous tower of Milarepa in Sekhar Guthog

Nirmanakaya (Tib. *sprul sku*) see trikaya

nirvana (Tib. *myang 'das*), state of existence free from suffering, void of all feelings and sensations; a state of supreme peace and bliss, of perfect happiness due to liberation from rebirth

Nomun Khan, title for high lamas

Nyingmapa (*rnying ma pa*), the first Tibetan Buddhist order, the 'School of the Elder'

obo, Mong. word for lhatse

Olmolungring, mythical kingdom of the Bön religion, an earthly paradise in western or to the west of Tibet

- Padmapani**, bodhisattva holding a lotus, one form of Avalokiteshvara
- Padmasambhava** (Tib. *pad ma 'byung gnas*, or Guru Rimpoche), holy and wise religious teacher, mystic and magician; ca. from 763 to 767 he instituted Samye, the first monastery in Tibet
- parikrama** (Tib. *khorwa*, '*khor ba*'), devotional circumambulation, circumambulation path around a holy site or sacred place
- Pehar** (*pe har rgyal po*, *dpe kar*, *pe dkar*), special protector of the Nechung oracle
- Pelden Lhamo** (*dpal ldan lha mo*), name of an important wrathful female tutelary deity riding on a mule; special protector of Lhasa and the highest Gelugpa lamas
- Phagmodrupa**, sub-order of the Kagyüpa
- phodrang** (*pho brang*), Tib., 'palace, residence'
- pönlop** (*dpon slob*), Tib., a local ruler
- Potala**, mythical sacred mountain to the south of India where the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara is supposed to be residing; name of the Dalai Lamas' winter residence in Lhasa
- pradakshina** (Skr.), Tib. → *khorlam*
- primordial buddha**, → *adibuddha*
- Prajñāparamita**, perfect or transcendent wisdom
- prayer-flags** (Tib. *dar*, *dar lcog*), white or coloured pieces of cloth printed with the wind-horse (*lungta*), holy scriptures or mantras; they are added to stone cairns or hung up on mountain passes and at sacred sites as offerings to spirits and deities
- prayer-wheel** (Tib. *ma ni 'khor lo*), cylinder-like object filled with scripture and written with a mantra, to turn the ~ corresponds to the reading of its contents
- qianhusuo** → *chiliarchy*
- Qianlong**, reign period (1736-1795) of the Qing dynasty Emperor Gaozong
- Qing dynasty**, ruled imperial China 1644-1911
- Rebgong art**, art school in central Amdo
- Red (Hat) sect(s)**, indefinite term distinguishing the non-Gelugpa orders from the Gelugpa (Yellow sect)
- reincarnation**, rebirth. Certain holy persons, of whom some may be manifestations of divine beings (like bodhisattvas), are deliberately reborn—the reincarnate lamas (incarnate as manifestations of divine beings)
- religious kings** → *Dharmaraja*
- Rime Movement**, attempt starting in the 19th century, to overcome the sectarian divisions among the various Tibetan-Buddhist traditions
- rimpoche** (*rin po che*), 'jewel, venerable', Tib. honorific title for a learned high lama, particularly an incarnated one
- rin po che**, Tib. spelling of → *rimpoche*
- rlung rta** → *lungta*
- sa bdag**, Tib. 'earth-owners', class of pre-Buddhist spirits populating the ground
- Sakyapa** (*sa skya pa*), one of the four major orders of Tibetan Buddhism, established in 1073
- Sangdog Pelri** (*zang dog dpal ri 'i zhing bkod*), 'Copper Mountain Paradise', the paradise-realm of Padmasambhava
- sangha** (*samgha*), the Buddhist community
- Sengge Naro** (Singhanada), 'Buddha of the Lion's Roar'
- Shakyamuni** (Tib. *sha kya thub pa*), the historic Buddha
- Shambhala** (Tib. *bde 'byung*), mythical kingdom of Tibetan Buddhism, an earthly paradise assumed to be located 'somewhere to the north of Tibet'
- Shenrab** (*gshen rab myi bo*), legendary founder of the Bön religion
- shunyata** (Sanskrit, Tib. *stong pa nyid*), 'absolute vacuity', a concept which says that every entity and every component element of that entity is absolutely void of any inherent self-nature
- Si**, Chin. for 'temple', 'monastery'
- siddha**, a saint scholar, ascetic yogin, or enlightened wise man who propagated Buddhism; Indian itinerant ascetics of the 7th to 10th centuries
- Singhanada** (Tib. *Sengge naro*), the 'Buddha of the Lion's Roar'
- Sitatapatra** (Tib. *thug khar*) → *Usnisasitapatra*
- Snowland** (*gangs yul*), another designation for Tibet
- Song dynasty**, ruled imperial China 960-1127 (Northern Song) and 1127-1279 (Southern Song)
- stupa** (Tib. *chörten*, *mchod rten*), architectonic term for a reliquary shrine, at first of Buddha's remains, later also of other saints, finally just a consecrated symbol and object of reverence
- suburgan**, Mongol. word for → *stupa*, *chörten*
- Sumeru** → *Meru*
- su ru**, Tib., black section of shelf that imitates or is made of cut brushwood
- sutra**, compilation of 'the words of Buddha' as canonical scriptures, the teachings of Buddha
- swastika** (Tib. *gyung drung*), symbol of infinite creative energy, in Bönism symbol of endurance and continuity. In Tibet a swastika turning anti-clockwise is associated with Bönism, and a clockwise turning one with Buddhism
- Tang dynasty**, ruled imperial China 618-908
- Tangut**, Turko-Mongol word originally used for Tibetans in general, yet specifically referring to the Amdowas

- in northeastern Tibet
- Tanjur** (*bstan 'gyur*), compilation of literary works, mostly consisting of 255 volumes of Kanjur commentaries, and various treatises of religious and general nature; mostly translations into Tibetan from Chinese and Sanskrit texts
- Tantra** (Tib. *rgyud*), tradition of practice according to a certain revelation, mostly laid down in a 'root text' (tantra); the objective is to invoke Sambhogakaya deities and thus the experience, or state of being, ideally brought about when the invocation succeeds
- Tantric college** (*rgyud pa grva tshang*), esoteric study faculty of a lamasery
- Taoism, Taoist** → Daoism, Daoist (according to the Pinyin spelling of the key term *dao*, pronounced 'dao' rather than 'tao')
- Tara** (Tib. *sgrol ma*), major female bodhisattva
- Tatar**, old designation for Mongolians
- Tathagatagarbha**, Buddhist Tantric concept, theory of perceiving the identity of the nature of Buddha as being one with the nature of all the creatures
- tent camp monastery**, lamasery set up in tents, moved when following the campsites of itinerant herdsmen
- terma** (*gter ma*), revelations, texts regarded as having been originally composed by Padmasambhava or at his instigation, then hidden, and later revealed by a tertön
- Terma tradition**, tradition of miraculous treasure-finding, particularly related to the Nyingmapa tradition
- tertön** (*gter ston*), charismatic Buddhist teacher (mostly Nyingmapa) who finds Buddhist treasures and reveals hidden texts related to Padmasambhava
- thangka** (*thang ka*), portable icon, usually painted on cotton, framed by brocade, and easily rolled up when stored or transported
- thangka-wall**, Tib. → gökudramsā (*gos sku bgram sa*)
- thangmoche ceremony**, Tib., 'sunning the Buddha', a ceremony of unrolling the huge appliqué thangkas at certain religious festivals
- Thösamling** (*thos bsam gling*), exoteric college of a monastic institution, faculty of Buddhist logics
- Three Bodies** → trikaya
- Three Jewels** → triratna
- Three Seats** (*gdan sa gsum*), the three main Gelugpa monasteries in and near Lhasa, i.e., Ganden, Drepung and Sera, formerly playing a major role in old Tibet's politico-religious system
- Tönpa Shenrab** → Shenrab
- torma** (*gtor ma*), decorative offerings moulded from barley flower and butter
- trapa** (*grva pa*), 'disciple', 'pupil', a monk-student in a Tibetan monastery before graduation
- trikaya**: the inconceivable state of Buddhahood analyzed into Three Bodies (trikaya), a Truth Body (Dharmakaya), a Beatific Body (Sambhogakaya) and an Emanation Body (Nirmanakaya); though generally called body, they represent the ultimate development of ordinary mind, speech, and body.
- Trikaya Buddhas**, Buddhas of the Three Ages (past, present and future)
- triratna**, the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma (his teachings) and sangha, the Buddhist community
- Tshennyi Dratshang** (*mtshan nyid grva tshang*), exoteric college for the study of Buddhist philosophy and logics
- tsenpo** (*btsan po*), designation for the emperors of the 7th to 8th centuries' Tibet, more often called 'king' or 'king of religion' (Dharmaraja)
- tshatsha** (*tsha tsha*), small votive clay sculptures made in moulds, in the form of a miniature stupa or an image depicting Buddhist (or Bönist) deities
- tsho** (*mtsho*), Tib., lake
- Tshogchen Dukhang** (*tshogs chen 'du khang*), also Tshogchen Lhakhang (*tshogs chen lha khang*), 'Great Assembly Hall' (→ Tsuglakhang)
- tshogshing** (*tshogs shing*), an 'assembly tree of deities and saints'. It portrays, roughly in the form of a genealogical tree, the main teachers, dharmapalas and yidams of the respective Tibetan-Buddhist school, arranged around a major teacher or the founder of the order.
- Tsuglakhang** (*gtsug lag khang*), originally meaning an entire temple or monastery; now applied to the chief and mostly large assembly hall of lamaseries
- Tubo** (or Tufan), old Chinese designation of Tibet, later used for a part of the Tibetan realm only
- Tufan**, Chin., potential pronunciation of → Tubo
- tulku** (*sprul sku*), incarnate lama
- Tushita** (Tib. *dga' ldan*), the 'Joyful Heaven' of Buddha Maitreya
- tusi** (Chin., Wade-Giles spelling: T'u-ssu), indigenous rulers in tribally organized areas of imperial China
- upasaka vows**, the vows of a faithful layman
- Usnisatitapatra** (Tib. *gdugs dkar*), name of a female deity resembling the 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara, though having 1000 heads instead of the latter's eleven
- Usnisavijaya** (Tib. *gtsug tor rnam par rgyal ma*), goddess of longevity, wrathful female deity with three faces and eight arms, often depicted together with

Amitayus and White Tara

Vairocana (Tib. *rnam par snang mdzad*), primordial buddha in the centre of the mandala, symbol of the origin of all phenomena

Vaishravana (Tib. *rnam thos sras*), one of the four Lokapalas, guardian of the northern direction

vajra (Tib. *rdo rje*), 'diamond, thunderbolt', ritual instrument annihilating ignorance; symbol of the indestructable nature of the enlightened consciousness; in tantra symbol of compassion, having become great bliss consciousness, also the male organ and the magic body.

Vajradhara (Tib. *rdo rje 'chang*), adibuddha, symbol of the pure Buddha nature

Vajrakila (*rdo rje phur ba*), name of a wrathful meditational deity, particularly of the Nyingmapa and Sakyapa orders

Vajrapani (Tib. *phyag na rdo rje*), bodhisattva of energy, one of the Eight Mahasattvas

Vajrasattva (Tib. *rdo rje sems dpa'*), adibuddha, symbol of the pure Buddha nature

Vijaya (*rnam rgyal ma*), short for → Uśnisavijaya
wanhu(-suo), Chin. → myriarchy

Western Qin dynasty (385-431), Chinese named dynasty of a proto-Tibetan population

Wheel of life and death (Skr. *bhavacakra*, Tib. *srid pa'i 'khor lo*), depicts the eternal succession of birth, death and rebirth

(w)önpo (*dbon po*), nephew of a lama or a Tibetan prince; in the case of an abbot or lama of a monastery the önpo is from his brother's side and the supervisor of the monastery

wudian-style roof, a curved hipped roof (plate 23)

xieshan-style roof (Chin. *xieshan wuding*, Tib. *rgya phibs*) → gabled and hipped roof

Yama (Tib. *gshin rje*), the wrathful master of Death, a major dharmapala

Yamantaka (Tib. *gshin rje gshed*), major dharmapala, special protector deity of the Gelugpa order

yamen, Chin., government office in imperial China; in Amdo a princely residence of the Kokonor Mongols

Yarlung dynasty (*yar klungs, yar lung*), common designation of the first Tibetan empire, which arose in the south Tibetan Yarlung valley

Yellow [Hat] sect, term distinguishing the → Gelugpa from other Lamaist orders (Red Hat sects)

yidam, personal tutelary deity

Yogacara, a school of Indian Mahayana Buddhism

yogin, wise man, generally living in seclusion, having attained a high degree of knowledge

Yongle, reign period (1403-35) of Ming Emperor Chengzu

Yongzheng, reign period (1723-35) of Qing Emperor Shizong

Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), the Mongol-Chinese dynasty of imperial China

zhengjiao heyi, Chin., 'religion and political affairs joined together', Tib. → *chösi nyidrel*

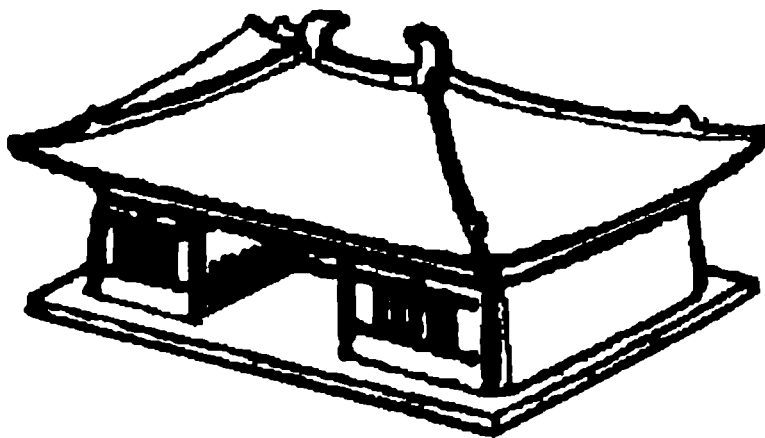


Plate 23. Wudian-style roof

Index-gazetteer

Remarks concerning the spelling of technical terms and toponyms

The transcription of foreign names and terms offers some major problems which may, sometimes, give way to despair. As regards the spelling of Tibetan words, the first decision to be taken is the choice between a scientific *transliteration* and a phonetic *transcription*, for instance of writing either *khri srong lde btsan* or *Thrisong Detsen*. Our guideline for spelling standard written Tibetan is the Wylie system (1959). Even then, there exist, once in a while, different spellings of a word (*lde btsan* or *lde'u btsan*) even in Tibetan written sources. For better comprehension we chose a transcription system (the scientific transliteration put in parentheses or in italics), including letters which are hardly heard in articulation (like *r* in Drepung, '*bras spungs*). As a transcription tries to render the pronunciation of a word, it depends heavily on the dialect of the Tibetan speaker, and the language into which it is to be transcribed. Inconsistencies may easily occur using sources written in various languages. The transcription used here is rather oriented at the articulation by locals, i.e. speakers of the respective dialects, which may differ considerably, as the case may be, from standard Lhasa language. The latter is used if the local pronunciation is not available. Some words—such as Gompa, Kanjur, Rimpoche, Tanjur, Tashi—are used in the form they mostly occur in Western sources. Other variations, and also inconsistencies, may be due to different informants or sources, and the fallibility of the author during composition of this volume. The reader is asked to excuse any shortcomings.

For Chinese words we generally apply the official Hanyu *Pinyin* which has become widely used during the last two decades. Only some more familiar westernized forms are continuously used, such as *Yangtse river* instead of *Chang Jiang* or *Yangzi Jiang*, for example. *Pinyin* will not be applied to Tibetan or other non-Chinese ethnic terms, except in case the correct spelling could not be figured out.

It should be noted that Hanyu *Pinyin* also attempts to give an adequate transcription of ethnic designations. Chinese transcriptions are often misunderstood when naming places, alleging the latter being re-named. This misapprehension is due to the ignorance of transcription rules (and sometimes to the ignorance of the articulation in both Tibetan and Chinese as well). Chinese scholars are aware of the difficulty of expressing other languages' names in Chinese characters, and therefore have adopted certain adaptations in *Pinyin* spelling (for instance: *Doilungdêqên* instead of *duilongdeqing* for Tölungdechen, *stod lung bde chen*, near Lhasa) to adjust to Tibetan, Uyghur language, or others. It seems that their way of transcribing place-names is oriented at the local pronunciation level rather than from the Lhasa dialect. Thus, Chinese transcriptions sometimes tend to be closer to the actual pronunciation in situ than are many Western transcriptions. In some cases, especially of Buddhist terms and deities, Sanskrit names are given, yet without diacritic marks.

Spellings in cited passages are left in their original form, as in the given context it would help the reader to recognize which different forms of writing are used to designate the same term or name. This problem is met with anyway when checking the extensive literature on Tibet, and may be best dealt with in a coherent context. However, within the scope of this work, it is not possible to include all the various forms of spelling encountered. References from Chinese and Mongolian designations to the corresponding Tibetan terms or names are quoted, though, because of the bewildering complexity of naming places in the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural realm of northeastern Tibet.

Index-gazetteer

Northeastern and eastern Tibet have, to our knowledge, never been comprehensively presented in a western language; therefore, many place and personal names, ethnic and cultural features as well

as historical events are hardly known in the West, if ever heard of. This is why this book offers a kind of brief gazetteer for quick reference. The index therefore includes all those technical terms, personal and place-names, titles, and whatever the author deems crucial for the understanding of the cultural, religious and historical development, social and political life and the outgrowth of cultural monuments in eastern Tibet.

All designations, also personal names of Tibetans, are alphabetized according to the first syllable of their transcription. Names made up of several separate syllables are treated like one single word. Transliterated terms are only exceptionally entered. Toponyms (place names) are written as captions in italics. The glossary included generally explains terms which are often used in the text, yet cannot always be defined there, and therefore may not always be referred to with page numbers. An asterisk * is added to names of which the Tibetan spelling remains uncertain, while terms also appearing in the glossary are marked by *Gl.*

Aba, Chin. for Tibetan → *Ngawa*, area in southern Amdo (Sichuan) - (vol. 2) 8, 9, 59, 60-65, 67

Achonggya Monastery, or *Dongag Shedrub Ling* (*a skyong rgya dgon pa mdo sngags bshad sgrub gling*), Jonangpa lamasery in southern Amdo's Ngolok region (Pema, Qinghai) (vol. 1) 89f, 178-181 - (vol. 2) 75

Achonggya Rimpoche (18th century), incarnate lama (vol. 1) 89

Achung Namdzong (or *An chung gnam rdzong*; Chin. *Aqiong Nanzong Si*), sacred mountain and complex of monasteries in Qinghai (vol. 1) 64f

Achung Rimpoche, head lama of Semnyi Monastery, religious and political leader of Pari (vol. 1) 101

Ahandalai Monastery, or *Geden Shedrub Namgyal Ling* (*bong stag dgon pa dge ldan bshad sgrub rnam rgyal gling*), lamasery in the eastern part of Qinghai's Tsaidam Basin, Chin. *Ahandalai Si* (vol. 1) 98f, 188f

Alashan, small Mongolian principedom in the western part of present day Inner Mongolia (vol. 1) 23

Alike Si, Chin. name of → *Arig Ganden Chöphel Ling*

Altan Khan (1507-1582), Mongolian prince who adopted the Gelugpa doctrine and introduced the title of Dalai Lama (vol. 1) 14, 22, 33, 47f, 61 - (vol. 2) 14, 73

Ama Tama, a female bodhisattva-like image in Serkhog Monastery (vol. 1) 38

amban 99, *Gl.* - (vol. 2) 198

Amchog, village in southeastern Amdo (Gansu) - (vol. 2) 45, 47, 126

Amchog, village in southern Amdo (Sichuan) - (vol. 2) 66

Amchog Lama, incarnate lama line - (vol. 2) 66

Amchog Tshennyi Gompa (*a mchog mtshan nyid dgon pa*), lamasery in Sichuan - (vol. 2) 66

Amdo (*a mdo*), in present day signifying the northern part of eastern Tibet (*mdo khams*); this culturally defined region of the Tibetan realm occupies the northeast of the plateau (vol. 1) 2-17, 201 - (vol. 2) xvii-xix, 1-17, 24f, 27, 30, 38, 62, 71, 76, 83, 91-98, 193, 195-197, 199, 203, 210-213

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- Baihu Si*, Chin. name of → Pehu Gompa monastery
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- Yarlung Zangpo*, commonly used, yet incorrect western transcription of Chin. *Yalu Zangbu* (Tib. → Yeru Tsangpo)
- Yarmothang* ([*g.*] *yar mo thang*), eastern expanses of the inner Tibetan Plateau's highland of steppes (vol. 1) 10, 12, 81f, 91, 99, 102, 112 - (vol. 2) 10, 12
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- Yellow sect, Yellow [Hat] Sect → Gelugpa
- Yellow Temple* (*Huang Si*), lamasery in China's capital Beijing, since the 1980s Tibetan Buddhist Academy (vol. 1) 95 - (vol. 2) 74
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- Zamthang* → Dzamthang
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- Zhouqu*, Chin. name of → Drugchu
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The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces. Volume 2. The Gansu and Sichuan Parts of Amdo reveals that Tibetans have rebuilt their economy and revitalized their traditional way of life. Despite Tibet being an issue, east Tibet has not until now been thoroughly researched, though it comprises about two thirds of the Tibetan Plateau. It is astounding, therefore, that the West knows hardly anything about it. This book makes up this deficit, providing interested readers with comprehensive information about unknown sites in Amdo, which are fascinating and puzzling, as well as their role in history.

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Serta, the world's largest Buddhist academy, virtually unknown, has impressive architectural features such as the Jonang chörten and temple towers seen nowhere else in Tibet. These add to the hidden treasures of Amdo's living and revitalized Buddhist tradition. The region presented in this book is one of diversity in a highland realm that for long was neglected in respect of its historic and cultural importance.



Front cover: Tagtshang Lhamo Monastery: going up main street of Kirti Gompa, the assembly hall is reached

Back cover: Ngawa Gomang Monastery: a Maitreya statue in a sanctuary behind the sutra hall

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