CIVILIZED
SHAMANS

Buddhism
in
Tibetan Societies

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PART TWO
9. The Ritual Cosmos and Its Inhabitants 157
10. The Folk Religion and the Pragmatic Orientation 176
11. The Karma Orientation, Rebirth, and Tibetan Values 199
12. Tantra and the Bodhi Orientation 223
13. The Lama and the Tantric Deities 244
14. Tantra and the Pragmatic Orientation 258
15. Lamas, Monks, and Yogins 270
16. Folk Shamans, Terrön, and Crazy Siddhas 290
17. Tibetan Religious Communities (Gompa) 309
18. Some Recent Lamas 336

PART THREE
19. From Structure to Process 359
20. India: Buddhist Beginnings 367
21. India: Mahāyāna Schools 388
22. India: Tantra and the Buddhist Siddhas 406
23. Tibet to A.D. 841 436
24. Tibet: The Local Hegemonic Period 457
25. Tibet: Mongol Overlordship 481
26. Tibet: Gelugpa Synthesis and Shamanic Reaction 499
27. Tibet: Gelugpa Power and the Rimed Synthesis 525
28. Conclusion 553

Epilogue: The Tibetans and Tibetan Religion Today 574
Appendix 1. The Monastic Population of Tibet 578
Notes 583
Guide to Tibetan Spelling 617
References 635
Index 693

Preface

This book has been a long time in the writing. My initial fieldwork with Tibetans in India and Nepal took place in 1971–1972. The first version of the book was written during nine months I spent at the University of California in Berkeley in 1981–1982 as a research associate in the Department of Anthropology. In the subsequent years, the plan of the book has undergone several drastic changes, and three chapters that originally formed part of it have grown into a separate work on anthropological theory (Mind, Body and Culture, Cambridge University Press), which was published in 1990.

The nature of the project has also changed significantly over the years, in part because of the enormous growth in Tibetan studies since the mid–1970s. My primary objective throughout has been to present a coherent interpretation of Tibetan religion, but I have also tried to provide an overview of the present state of research, and a baseline from which other interpretations can begin. This survey aspect applies particularly to the overview of Tibetan societies in Part One, but I have tried throughout the book to give the reader an orientation towards the current literature. This has not been attempted since the
This book is an account of the nature and evolution of religion in premodern Tibetan societies. The author is an anthropologist, and the approach is that of social and cultural anthropology, in a wide sense, although I have made extensive use of the work of historians of religion and of other specialists on Tibetan society, as well as of indigenous Tibetan scholarship. The plural usage, Tibetan societies, is intended both to stress the diversity of these societies, and to emphasize from the beginning that central Tibet, the Dalai Lama's government and the great monastic institutions around Lhasa, form only part of the context within which Tibetan Buddhism, and Tibetan religion as a whole, took shape and operated. Part One of the book (Chapters 3 to 8) consists of a survey of Tibetan societies and a critique of some aspects of the anthropological literature on these societies.

The term 'premodern' indicates, roughly speaking, the period to 1950, when the status of most Tibetan societies was changed drastically as a result of Chinese military intervention and occupation. Elements of the picture presented in this book still operate, both in Chinese-occupied regions of Tibetan population and among Tibetans.
CIVILIZED SHAMANS

living in India, Nepal, and Bhutan, but my primary intention is to
describe Tibetan Buddhism as it developed until 1950.

The term 'religion' has been used in narrower and more extended
senses; the sense intended here is a wide one. As an anthropologist, I
assume that the history of 'religion' in Tibetan societies cannot be
separated from the history of modes of consciousness or from the his-
tory of political and social structures within those societies. For Tibet-
ans, the vocabulary and modes of thinking deriving from Indian Bud-
dhism came to pervade many areas of experience that we do not
necessarily think of as 'religious,' while the concepts of Tibetan folk
religion, such as the maintenance of good luck and good fortune, con-
tinue to underlie virtually all facets of life. Understanding Buddhism
in Tibetan societies means understanding the total picture within
which Buddhism took shape. Among other things, this book is in-
tended as a case study in the history of cultural patterns, a term which
I use in this book as an equivalent to the 'modal states' of my previous
book, Mind, Body and Culture (Samuel 1990, and see Chapter 19,
below).

The history of cultural patterns within Tibetan societies has some
unusual and characteristic features. The complex monastic, scriptural,
and philosophical traditions of Buddhism link them to the centralised
states of South and Southeast Asia. The limited presence of a state
apparatus, however, suggests analogies with stateless societies such as
those found among the 'tribal' populations of South and Southeast
Asia or even in sub-Saharan Africa. The importance of what may be
called a 'shamanic' mode of operating (see Samuel 1990:106–120) in
Tibetan societies, which have highly developed and sophisticated
techniques for the employment of nonordinary states of conscious-
ness, points in the same direction.

As a consequence of these features, Tibetan societies, and espe-
cially their religious institutions, have presented considerable diffi-
culties for conventional approaches in both anthropology and religious
studies. Religion in Tibetan societies needs understanding in its own
terms, and these are quite different from those of societies such as
Burma, Thailand, or Sri Lanka where most early anthropological work
on Buddhism was carried out. This point is developed at length in
Chapter 2. Buddhism in Tibet may have the same ultimate aim as
Buddhism in other Asian societies but it operates within a very differ-
ent social context. Anthropologists are only beginning to arrive at an
adequate picture of that social context, which is why Part One of this
book provides a general picture of Tibetan societies in the premodern
period. This picture emphasizes the diversity of those societies, a di-
versity that went along with the limited extent of state authority
throughout the region.

In Parts Two and Three of the book, I present my analysis of
Buddhism in Tibetan society. In Part Two, Tibetan Buddhism is de-
scribed synchronically as it was in the premodern period and as it con-
tinues to be, to varying degrees, among Tibetan populations today. In
Part Three, I look at Tibetan Buddhism diachronically, describing its
evolution from the Buddhism of India and the indigenous spirit-cults
of Tibet up until the first half of this century. In this account, I inter-
weave the development of new modes of consciousness with the his-
tory of the social and political institutions that provided the context
for their development and was in its turn directed by their develop-
ment.

It will be apparent in the course of the book that I am sympa-
thetic towards my subject. I am more inclined to view Tibetan Bud-
dhism as one of the great spiritual and psychological achievements of
humanity than as an ideological justification for the oppression of Ti-
betan serfs by their overlords. This is an anthropological study, how-
ever, rather than a work of advocacy. My intention is to present Ti-
betan religion as a whole, with its cultural, social, and religious
background. Through the activities of refugee lamas, the methods and
techniques of the Buddhism of Tibet are becoming part of the world's
cultural heritage. That process can only be aided by a better under-
standing of the origins of those methods and techniques and the soci-
ety within which they were developed.

SHAMANIC AND CLERICAL BUDDHISM

BASIC CATEGORIES OF THE BOOK

Buddhism, as one of the world's major spiritual traditions, centers
about the pursuit of Enlightenment or bodhi, 1 a goal of personal (and,
for the Tibetans at least, collective) salvation that lies outside the com-
pass of ordinary social life. I refer to this aspect of Tibetan religion in
the book as the Bodhi Orientation. Much of the complexity of religion
in Buddhist societies, as in other societies where such salvation-
oriented religions prevail, derives from how people come to terms
with conflicts, real or perceived, between the salvation orientation and the ordinary social life.

Such conflicts form a major theme, for example, of Max Weber’s sociology of religion, and they have been a recurrent interest of anthropological studies of Theravāda Buddhist societies. More recently, Stan Mumford has used a framework derived from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to discuss these issues for a society on the fringe of Tibetan settlement in Nepal; Mumford speaks of the growth of individual subjectivity and eventually of a sense of historical becoming that leads to the break-up of the ‘ancient matrix’ or shamanic world view (Mumford 1989:168f). We can overstate the uniformity of the ‘ancient matrix,’ which corresponds closely to what I have elsewhere referred to as the shamanic mode of operation (Samuel 1990). The relationship between these phases is best understood as logical (and dialectical) rather than chronological; the ‘ancient matrix’ in Tibetan societies was constantly under attack, either overtly or implicitly, by Buddhism, but it continually reconstituted itself. Throughout Tibetan history, it provided a background against which Buddhism took shape and in terms of which it had to justify itself.

Salvation traditions such as Buddhism often originate in moments of antistructure and opposition to established power and hierarchy. Historically, however, they have rapidly been taken up and used by centralized states. Consequently, we are most familiar with Buddhism, as with Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity, as subordinate to, and closely integrated with the political order of the society in which it is found. This was not the case in premodern Tibet, and it is mainly for this reason, I believe, that the relationship between the Bodhi Orientation and the other components of Tibetan religion differs markedly from that characteristic of other Buddhist societies.

Briefly, in other Buddhist societies, the Bodhi Orientation has become subordinate in many ways to a second, explicitly ethical orientation. This orientation, the Karma Orientation, centers around the principle of karma, or of the linkage between an action and its result, which manifests in a subsequent life of the same individual. This karma-complex predated Buddhism and forms part of the philosophical background within which early Buddhism developed. The emphasis on morality and correct behavior, and the idea that the rich and powerful were well placed to secure a fortunate afterlife through generosity to the Buddhist clergy doubtless appealed strongly to rulers of Indic societies.

A third religious orientation, the Pragmatic Orientation, is concerned with this-worldly goals such as health and prosperity. Its relationship to Buddhism is complex and will be considered further in Chapter 2.

The ‘ancient matrix’ and its shamanic practices were generally less appealing to the rulers of Buddhist states than the karma-oriented aspects of Buddhism. Shamanic practitioners might offer the possibility of magical control over the problems of everyday life, but they also represented potential sites of rebellion against the order imposed by the state (see Chapter 2). They were generally tolerated in premodern Buddhist states, but they were kept firmly subordinate to state power, and were seen as inferior and marginal in relation to the Buddhism that reinforced that state power (see Samuel 1990:131–133). I refer to the Buddhism of such states in general as clerical Buddhism. Such state-sponsored clerical Buddhism was typical of Theravādin societies such as Sri Lanka, Burma, or Thailand in the precolonial period.

The general weakness or absence of state power in premodern Tibetan societies went along with a different situation. Clerical Buddhism was present, but it coexisted with and was in many ways subordinate to what I shall refer to as shamanic Buddhism. Within the Tibetan context, shamanic and clerical Buddhism refer to two modalities or orientations within the Buddhist and Bönpo teachings, rituals, and practices of Tibet. Clerical Buddhism will be the more familiar modality to most readers, since it resembles more closely the monastic and scholarly Buddhism found in other Buddhist societies. Shamanic Buddhism is a more specifically Tibetan modality, although it has, as we shall see in Chapter 2, equivalents in Theravādin Buddhist societies such as Thailand, where it corresponds to the Buddhist expression of the marginalized ‘ancient matrix.’ The Tibetan version of shamanic Buddhism is, however, unlike that in Theravādin Buddhist societies, closely integrated with the goal of Enlightenment and the Bodhi Orientation. It is in no way a marginal phenomenon.

These two terms, shamanic Buddhism and clerical Buddhism, are a major subject of this book, since an exposition of their nature and of the relationship between them forms the basis of my analysis of Tibetan religion. They are, of course, no more than conceptual tools,
but they have the advantage of a lesser weight of prior associations than other available conceptual tools, such as Sūtra, Tantra, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or Bön. As a result, they help to provide a fresh look at the true nature of Tibetan religion.

I use the term ‘shamanic’ as a general term for a category of practices found in differing degrees in almost all human societies. This category of practices may be briefly described as the regulation and transformation of human life and human society through the use (or purported use) of alternate states of consciousness by means of which specialist practitioners are held to communicate with a mode of reality alternative to, and more fundamental than, the world of everyday experience.

The term ‘shamanic’ has been used in a variety of ways within the anthropological literature, of which this is only one. I have discussed my usage at length elsewhere and provided some theoretical justification for it (Samuel 1990:106–120, 144–147). Here I will simply note that (1) ‘shamanic’ in my usage is not restricted to the ‘Siberian’ shamanic complex, (2) it may involve any of a variety of specific vocabularies and techniques, including spirit-possession and spirit-mediumship as well as soul-flight, and (3) the term is in no way at all derogatory. In fact, I believe that the sophisticated body of shamanic practices within Tibetan Buddhism probably constitutes Tibet’s most important single contribution to humanity (see Samuel 1989).

If we use the term ‘shamanic’ in this sense, Tibetan religion has two distinct, if overlapping, shamanic complexes: Tibetan folk religion (to adopt Tucci’s term, 1980:163–211) and shamanic Buddhism. Few would dispute that many ‘folk-religion’ practices in Tibet, in particular the employment of spirit-mediums to communicate with local deities, may be described as ‘shamanic’ in my sense. By shamanic Buddhism I mean something rather different, which is certainly related to these folk-religion practices but is not a simple derivative of them and needs to be treated separately from them. My contention (which is not particularly original) is that certain aspects of Vajrayāna (Tantric) Buddhism as practiced in Tibet may be described as shamanic, in that they are centered around communication with an alternative mode of reality (that of the ‘Tantric deities’) via the alternate states of consciousness of Tantric yoga. I shall argue that this communication forms the basis for much of the Tibetan lama’s role in relation to Tibetan society.

This formulation reverses the usual Tibetan presentation of Vajrayāna Buddhism. A Tibetan lama, asked to define the Vajrayāna, will normally describe it in terms of the Bodhi Orientation, as a technique for attaining Enlightenment or Buddhahood. The spiritual power generated by Vajrayāna practice and used for the benefit of the lama’s lay following is a by-product. If lamas employ the power of Vajrayāna ritual for the welfare of their lay followers, this is held to be an expression of their compassion or their skilful means, a way of drawing their followers on towards the ultimate goal of liberation from suffering through the attainment of Buddhahood. At the same time, lamas are well aware that many of their followers are primarily concerned with the utilization of Vajrayāna power for this-worldly benefits or for securing a good rebirth in a future life rather than with the attainment of Buddhahood. Buddhahood as a goal is of immediate significance for a minority, although that minority is of vital importance to the system as a whole.

To put this in another way, the Vajrayāna’s techniques for attaining Buddhahood function in practical terms as a means of training shamanic practitioners. Lamas in Tibet function as shamans, and they do so through the techniques and practices of Vajrayāna Buddhism. The specific form that Buddhism has taken in Tibet is bound up with this nexus between the pursuit of Enlightenment by a minority and the desire for shamanic services by the majority. This point will be elaborated on at length in later chapters.

Given all this, we can consider an initial formulation of the contrast between shamanic and clerical Buddhism:

Shamanic Buddhism works in terms of a relationship with an alternative mode of reality (defined by the divine forms of the Saṃbhogakāya and the Tantric mandala). This alternative mode may be evoked through Vajrayāna (Tantric) ritual for the achievement of ultimate Enlightenment or Buddhahood, conceived of as a potentiality present within all individuals. It may also be evoked in order to bring about effects within this mode of reality, such as long life and health, protection from misfortune, or a suitable rebirth in one’s next life. The primary mode of activity of shamanic Buddhism is analogy and metaphor. Its typical figure is the Tantric lama, who undergoes a prolonged retreat in order to gain the shamanic power of the Vajrayāna, and subsequently utilizes that power on behalf of a lay population. The textual base of shamanic Buddhism is made up of the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Tantric scriptures and commentaries and of the terma revelations of later Tibetan visionary-lamas.

Clerical Buddhism shares with shamanic Buddhism the goal of ultimate
Enlightenment. It dismisses activity within the cycle of rebirth as irrelevant, however, with the exception of the acquisition of merit through virtuous action, and the avoidance of nonvirtuous action. Its primary mode of activity is scholarship, philosophical analysis, and monastic discipline. Its typical figure is the scholar-monk studying texts or engaged in philosophical debate. Its textual base is made up of the Vinaya or monastic disciplinary code, the Sūtras of the Hinayāṇa and Mahāyāṇa, and the writings of Indian Buddhist philosophers and of their Tibetan followers.

These capsule summaries will be filled out as the argument proceeds. The contrast between shamanic and clerical aspects of Buddhism is a complex one, in part because the two are closely interwoven in practice. Virtually all Tibetan Buddhism, whether that of the Gelugpa scholar with his geshe diploma or that of the Nyingmapa yogin in his or her mountain hermitage, contains elements of both shamanic and clerical orientations. In addition, the subde scholarly development of the lamas has developed all sorts of ways of reconciling the two modalities, culminating in the two major syntheses whose development is described in the later chapters of Part Three: the Gelugpa synthesis originating in the work of Tsongkapa (1357–1419) and the Rimé synthesis created by a group of nineteenth-century lamas in east Tibet.

The shamanic and clerical aspects are, nevertheless, rooted in fundamentally different orientations towards the world and towards human experience and behavior. Cross-culturally, one or the other orientation predominates in most human societies or social groups. By and large, small-scale preliterate societies had and have a dominantly shamanic orientation, while premodern states with developed literacy and centralized, bureaucratic government have been predominantly clerical with shamanic elements present in subordinate contexts (see Samuel 1990:93–133). Tibetan societies are unusual in that the shamanic complex has a strong and autonomous role within what is undoubtedly a literate and sophisticated culture.

A NOTE ON BÖN AND THE 'BÖN RELIGION'

Previous discussions of the shamanic aspects of Tibetan religion have often been confused by indiscriminate references to the so-called Bön religion. 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 mentioned above. Such usage conflates so many different things under the one label that serious analysis becomes impossible.

A major influence here has been Helmut Hoffmann's Religions of Tibet, first published in German in 1956 and subsequently translated into English in 1961 (Hoffmann 1979). Hoffmann reconstructs, on admittedly fragmentary evidence, a pre-Buddhist 'Old Bön Religion' (1979:17–27). This was a form of 'animism' (for example, 1979:21, 84) centered on a reverent and submissive attitude to the "powers and forces of the wild highland landscape whose divinities were reflected in the idea of numerous good and evil spirits the Tibetans thought to see all around them" (1979:17). The main practitioners of this 'Old Bön Religion,' the shen, were "[t]hamans... very similar to their colleagues of north and central Asia" (1979:23). They practiced soul-flight in a state of trance, and undertook elaborate funerary rituals for the Tibetan kings.

Subsequently, in Hoffmann's account, a deviant form of Buddhism, which he calls 'Padmaism' or 'the Padmaist religion,' was created under court patronage by a "strange holy man and sorcerer" from India named Padmasambhava (1979:47, 50–65). The 'old, primitive Bön religion and customs' survived among ordinary Tibetans but anti-Buddhist Tibetan nobles sponsored the creation of a new, 'Systematized Bön religion'. This Systematized Bön was a "syncretic system with a developed doctrine and a sacred literature," influenced by Buddhism, perhaps also by Persian and Manichean teachings (1979:85). After the collapse of the Tibetan kingdom in the mid-ninth century, Buddhism (i.e., Padmaism), along with the new Systematized Bön, went into a period of degeneration and was largely absorbed by the old Bön religion. The religious revival of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the subsequent 'Reformation' initiated by Tsongkapa, founder of the Gelugpa tradition, are explained by Hoffmann primarily as attempts to purge and purify Tibetan Buddhism and to return it to something like the Buddhism of the Theravādin countries (1979:121, 160, 165–167).

Given the limited sources available in 1956, Hoffmann's work was a praiseworthy attempt at understanding the historical evolution of Tibetan religion, and a notable advance on the crude caricatures of its best-known predecessor, L. Austine Waddell's The Buddhism of Tibet.
or Lamaism, first published in 1894 (Waddell 1967). Hoffmann's work is misleading, however, in many respects. His 'Old Bön' is created from fragmentary evidence and dubious parallels with north and central Asia, and his 'Pādmasam' is an ahistorical mélange of material from very different historical contexts. It is significant that while Hoffmann discusses Vajrayāna (Tantric Buddhism) at length, it has no real place in his explanatory scheme. Vajrayāna emerges in Hoffmann's writing as a compound of gnostic, magical, and erotic oddities to which the Tibetans are inexplicably attached despite the best efforts of their la-mas to wean them away from it. Yet any real attempt to understand the religion of Tibet has to recognize that the Vajrayāna is at the center of Tibetan spiritual life.

Unfortunately, Hoffmann's work was adopted uncritically by several anthropologists (for example, Funke 1969), and his views have also been propagated in popular texts on the history of religion. To make matters worse, while Hoffmann carefully distinguishes between what he calls Old Bön and Systematized Bön, following the contrast made by Tibetan scholars, many of those who have borrowed from him tend to collapse the two together, losing a vital distinction.

While there are some grounds for using the term Bön for the early religion of Tibet (see Chapter 23), there are few for applying it to the cults of local gods and spirits as they exist today, and I shall avoid using Bön to refer to this contemporary 'folk religion.' In this book, for all contexts after the ninth century A.D., Bön and Bönpo refer exclusively to the religious order of Bön* and its adherents. This order is similar in form and nature to the religious orders of Tibetan Buddhism, but claims to derive from the teachings of the pre-Buddhist master Shen-rab Mi-bo rather than from the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. This modern Bön religion has shamanic and clerical aspects similar to those of modern Tibetan Buddhism and will be mentioned frequently in subsequent chapters.

Tibetan folk-religion, then, is 'shamanic;' in my sense, but it is to be distinguished from the shamanic aspects of Tibetan Buddhism (and also of the modern Bön religion, which is essentially, in this context, a variant of Buddhism). It is the interplay between the shamanic and clerical aspects of Buddhism (including Bön) that provides the interpretive framework of the present book. The remainder of this chapter is intended to give some substance to the two terms, shamanic Buddhism and clerical Buddhism, which will play an important part in the remainder of the book. A convenient approach to these two terms is a comparison of how the Bodhi Orientation, the explicit central goal of Tibetan Buddhism as of all Buddhism, appears within these two modalities.

Enlightenment (bodhi) or Buddhahood is variously defined in different schools of Buddhism but it is nevertheless accepted to be beyond verbal definition. It involves the transcendence of the normal condition of humanity (the cycle of rebirth or samsāra), thus reaching the state of freedom from suffering referred to as nirvāṇa, and the attainment of a condition beyond any mental or physical limitation, accompanied by omniscience and immense magical power.

This was the attainment of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni and it is the highest goal of all Buddhist practice. How does the path to Enlightenment appear within the shamanic and clerical modalities? The following examples will also introduce some of the principal concerns and modes of expression of Tibetan Buddhism.

A SHAMANIC APPROACH TO ENLIGHTENMENT: THE ASPIRATION OF KUNTU SANGPO

Here is a typically shamanic statement of how to go about the attainment of Enlightenment. This is the opening section of a short or 'discovered' text, the Kunsang Mōlam ('Prayer of Kuntu Sangpo' or 'Aspiration of Kuntu Sangpo'). Lamas who discover texts of this kind through visionary techniques are known as tertön. This text was found by one of the best known of all tertön, Gödemchen (1337-1409, see Schuh 1985:xxx-xxxviii).

HO! The phenomenal world and all existence, samsāra and nirvāṇa, All has one foundation, but there are two paths and two results— Displays of both ignorance and Knowledge. Through Kuntu Sangpo's aspiration, In the Palace of the Primal Space of Emptiness Let all beings attain perfect consummation and Buddhahood.

The universal foundation is unconditioned, Spontaneously arising, a vast immanent expanse, beyond expression, Where neither 'samsāra' nor 'nirvāṇa' exist.
I have suggested in the previous two chapters that the forms taken by
Buddhism in Tibetan societies need to be understood in terms of the
specific characteristics of those societies. In particular, the 'shamanic'
aspects of Tibetan Buddhism only make sense in terms of the rela-
tively 'stateless' nature of most Tibetan societies up to and into the
'premodern' period.

As I pointed out at the start of Chapter 1, the use of the plural
form for 'societies' is deliberate. Premodern Tibet contained a greater
variety of social and political formations than is often appreciated
(Map 1). Certainly, it makes little sense to think of Tibet as a strongly
centralized state ruled by a theocratic government at Lhasa, although
this caricature is still quite widely believed in, particularly among non-
Tibetanists (see Chapter 8). The Dalai Lama's regime at Lhasa was
only one, if in recent times the largest, of a variety of state formations
within the Tibetan region. This variety of political forms, and the
general vulnerability and fragility of centralized power of any kind
through most of Tibetan history, are vital elements for understanding
the nature of Tibetan religion.
Chapters 3 to 6 present the major regions of Tibetan population. For each region, I shall describe the various political structures and give an outline of their history. In Chapter 7, I look at the kinds of local communities (agricultural, pastoral, and urban) that existed within these regions in the premodern period. Chapter 8 also presents some general conclusions about premodern Tibetan societies, conclusions that form the background for the discussion of Tibetan religion in Parts Two and Three of the book.

Tibetan societies and Tibetan religion have been in a process of continuous change for as far back as we can trace. There was no such thing as a 'static' society in Tibet in the premodern period, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were periods of particularly rapid change in many respects. Consequently, both in the survey we are now undertaking, and in the account of Tibetan religion in Part Two (Chapters 9 to 18), we are dealing with a social and religious field that was continually transforming. This process of transformation worked differently in the various regions, and social and religious forms belonging to the past in some areas were still recognizably present in others into the early twentieth century. In addition, any picture of Tibetan society or Tibetan religion has to depend on sources of information of varying quality and date for different aspects of the overall picture. We are much better informed, for example, about the social structure of Tibetan populations in northern Nepal, where there has been a substantial amount of modern anthropological research, than about populations in K'am or Amdo, where our main sources are reports by early travelers, the accounts of contemporary refugees, and such information as can be gathered from Tibetan literary sources. It is still possible, however, to present an overall view of Tibetan societies as they were in recent times.

BASIC CONSTITUENTS OF THE TIBETAN ECONOMY

There were two primary modes of subsistence in premodern Tibet, pastoralism and agriculture. Most of the Tibetan population were agriculturists (shingpa). Some (called samadrog) maintained herds of animals alongside an agricultural base. The pastoralists proper (dropga) were a substantial minority. They were found throughout the region. In some areas, such as the northern uplands (Chang'ang) or the south
and west of Amdo, almost the entire population was (and still is) made up of pastoralists. The *droapa* are distinctive in dialect, dress, and cultural style, although fully integrated into the general economic and cultural system of the Tibetan plateau (see Ekwall 1956).

Pastoralism in Tibet is based on cattle, including yaks and yak-cow hybrids, along with horses, sheep, and goats (see Downs and Ekwall 1965). Agriculture in the premodern period involved a variety of grains and vegetables, with the altitude-tolerant barley as the most widespread basic grain. In recent years the potato has become a major subsistence crop for some Tibetan communities in the Himalayas (for example, the Sherpas), but in the premodern period it had not yet had a substantial impact on most Tibetan populations.

Pastoralists and agriculturalists have always been mutually dependent. The staple food of Tibet, roasted barley-flour moistened with buttered tea, includes both pastoral and agricultural products. It also involves salt, which is produced in Tibet by the pastoralists and was in the premodern period one of the region’s main exports to India, and tea, which was imported along long-distance trade routes by yak-caravans from China.

Travel through the Tibetan region in the premodern period was slow and arduous. Along with the Tibetan mode of subsistence, the sheer physical nature of the Tibetan landscape has had a strong influence on the nature of Tibetan politics. As is well known, the Tibetan population lives at among the highest altitudes of any human populations. The highest permanent Tibetan settlements are at around 4,000–4,500 meters, while the lower limit of the Tibetan cultural adaptation is at around 2,000–2,400 meters in the Nepal Himalaya and at similar altitudes in east and northeast Tibet. The high altitudes, the dramatic nature of the landforms, and the frequently treacherous climate made travel around Tibet slow, difficult, and often dangerous.

Tibetans nevertheless traveled extensively for purposes of trade and religion (the two were frequently combined). The importance of long-distance trade within the region in the premodern period was such that it should perhaps be counted as a mode of subsistence in its own right. The long-distance trading journeys in which many Tibetans were involved resulted in continuing contact among the various Tibetan populations, despite their being distributed over a vast area within which communications were more than ordinarily difficult.

These trading journeys also kept the Tibetans in close contact with the various other ethnic groups to their east, south, and west. Links among the far-flung populations of Tibet were also maintained, in the premodern period, by the extensive practice of pilgrimage and by the regular journeys of Tibetan monks from outlying regions to study in the large teaching monasteries of central and eastern Tibet.

This is perhaps one reason for the marked contrast that exists between the relative cultural unity of the Tibetan plateau and the high degree of ethnic diversity found in the uplands of Yunnan, Burma, Laos, and Thailand to the south. Tibet was built on long-distance trade. At the same time, the existence of major long-distance trade routes created a differentiation between populations that were close to such routes and those that were not.

Agriculture in most of Tibet was (and still is) confined to river valleys. Many of these valleys are quite small, containing only a few villages each. Traveling from one valley to the next in the premodern period could involve an arduous traverse by foot or with pack-animals over high mountain passes where the traveler was exposed to the extremities of the Tibetan climate. In the more open pastoral regions, the threat of bandit attacks often made travel risky. In many parts of Tibet, travel was impossible during certain periods of the year and communities were isolated for the winter months.

Only along a few major rivers are there larger tracts of arable land, and these areas have consequently been of great importance in Tibetan history. Chief among them are the heartlands of the two central Tibetan provinces of Ü and Tsang, made up of the arable lands along the Tsangpo River and some of its major tributaries. Other major agricultural areas are along the lower parts of the four main river valleys of K'am, the eastern province of Tibet, and along the eastern borders of the northeastern region of Amdo. The major long-distance trade routes naturally tended to run between these more populous regions, where there were medium-sized towns such as Lhasa, Gyantse, Shigatse, Leh, Kangding, or Kandê, with merchant and artisan communities, as well as local political authorities who could help ensure the security of traders.

The contrast between these relatively prosperous and productive agricultural areas, with direct access to long-distance trade routes, the more marginal agricultural areas away from the central regions, and
those areas which support only pastoralism, is, as we will see, a basic factor within Tibetan society. Significant Tibetan political units have always been centered within major agricultural areas, which provide a tax base to support the state apparatus, while the marginal agricultural areas and the pastoral regions have never been more than partially incorporated into Tibetan states. However, shifts in the pattern of trade, as well as probable long-term shifts in the climate and ecology, have meant that areas that were at one time relatively central, such as the region south and west of Mount Kailash, later became much more marginal.

A NOTE ON TIBETAN POPULATION

There are no reliable population estimates for the premodern period, but the 1982 Chinese census figures give a detailed breakdown of the Tibetan population for that date. These figures are presented diagrammatically in a recent Population Atlas of China (Li Chengrui 1987:26, 33). Assuming that they are reliable, we can estimate the present Tibetan population of central Tibet, i.e., the prefectures of Lhasa City, Xigazê (Shigatsé), Shannan (Lhok’a), and Nagqu (Nagqu), as about 1.25 million (see Map 2). This corresponds to a considerably larger area than that of traditional central Tibet or Ü-Tsang.

We can estimate the Tibetan population of K'am, including the Qamdo (Ch'amdo) prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region, as about 1.53 million, and of Amdo as about 1.03 million. The areas of western Tibet within the Tibet Autonomous Region, administered as the prefecture of Ali (Ngari) have a Tibetan population of about 55,000. Altogether this makes a total of 3.87 million Tibetans living within the People's Republic of China, according to the 1982 census.

The Tibet Autonomous Region corresponds approximately to the premodern Tibetan state governed from Lhasa. Its Tibetan population, according to the 1982 census figures, is around 1.79 million. As can be seen, this is less than half of the total Tibetan population of the Chinese People's Republic, with the remainder living in traditionally Tibetan areas that have been incorporated into the provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan (the so-called Inner Tibet of the 1914 Simla Convention). This should be emphasized because sev-
eral authors (for example, Goldstein 1989) use 'Tibet' to refer to the premodern Lhasa state and its modern equivalent, the Tibet Autonomous Region.

It is difficult to judge how much these figures for central Tibet, K'am, and Amdo have been affected by the period of Chinese rule from 1950 onwards. Many people undoubtedly died either in combat with the Chinese, through ill-treatment in prisons and camps, or as a result of the widespread famines of the early 1960s consequent to Chinese agricultural reforms. The Dalai Lama's Secretariat in India has published estimates that 1.28 million Tibetans died as a result of Chinese rule (Tibetan Review, March 1984, p. 7): 427,478 in central Tibet, 482,261 in K'am, and 299,648 in Amdo. The majority of these are listed as killed in fighting or as dying as a result of famine. There are also substantial numbers of deaths in prison, through torture and through execution, as well as 9,000 suicides. While there may be some exaggeration and duplication in these figures, they are, it is now clear, of the right order of magnitude.

The exodus of refugees in and after 1959 must also have had a substantial demographic impact, particularly on areas such as Dingri and Kyirong close to the Nepalese and Indian borders. The total number of refugees who left Tibet was around 70,000. Most of them settled in India and Nepal, where their population has since grown to around 100,000.

The culturally Tibetan component of the population of Bhutan was between 0.5 and 0.8 million in the 1960s (see Karan 1967). The various Tibetan-speaking regions of northern India (Sikkim, Lahul, Ladakh, etc.) and of Nepal would have added perhaps another 200,000 people to the total Tibetan population at that time. Because there are many partly Tibetanized 'tribal' populations along the edges of the Tibetan region, such as the Mon, Lepcha, Qiang, or Naxi, the question of exactly who is a Tibetan can be arbitrary. A large part of the culturally Tibetan population of Bhutan, for example, speaks languages not mutually intelligible with Tibetan (see Aris 1979:xiv–xviii; Imaeda and Pommaret 1990). These figures, however, suggest a total Tibetan population in 1982, including the refugees, of around 4.7 to 5 million.

For a note on the monastic population of Tibet, which I believe has been substantially exaggerated, see Appendix 1.

CENTRAL TIBET: GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The remainder of this chapter is concerned with central Tibet (see Map 3) and with the Dalai Lama's government at Lhasa, which from 1642 to 1959 included all of this region as well as parts of western Tibet (Ngari) and K'am. The Lhasa government was known as the Ganden P'odrang ('Tushita Palace') or, less formally, as the Depa Shung ('Central Ruler's Government'). It was closely linked to the Gelugpa religious order of which the Dalai Lama, while not the titular head, is the most senior incarnate lama. The three large Gelugpa gompa of Gaden, Drepung, and Sera, all close to Lhasa, have played an important role in the history of the Lhasa government.

At the center of the Lhasa state were the two provinces of Ù and Tsang, both containing wide and fertile agricultural valleys along the Tsang River (Brahmaputra) and its tributaries. The regions of Lhok'a, Lhodrag, and Dagpo to the south and Kongpo to the east, although distinguished by Tibetans from the two central provinces of Ù and Tsang, are culturally and historically closely linked to them and may be considered part of central Tibet. To the north lies the Changt'ang ('Northern Plain'), a vast area inhabited by pastoral nomads and without permanent settlements. The population of central Tibet in the 1982 census was around 1.25 million.

This was the most centralized region of Tibet in the premodern period. Its social structure, at least in the agricultural heartlands, was highly stratified, and characterized by large estates owned by aristocratic families, gompa, individual lamas, or the central government. Agricultural families were attached to the estates and were liable for extensive tax and corvée obligations in exchange for their right to work the land. This is what I refer to as the centralized agricultural pattern (see Chapter 7).

Ù had one large urban center at Lhasa, in the flat plain formed by the Kyid River, a northern tributary of the Tsang River. Lhasa was the capital of the Tibetan kings from the seventh to ninth centuries and it was the capital of the Dalai Lamas from the seventeenth century until 1959. At its center today there still lies the Jok'ang temple or Tsuglagk'ang, which houses the famous image of the Buddha Skas-yamuni traditionally brought by the Chinese wife of a seventh-century Tibetan king, "without doubt the most sacred temple in Tibet"
(Batchelor 1987:79; Z. Taring 1980). The Bark’or or inner pilgrimage-circuit, with its hundreds of market-stalls, still runs around the Jo-kang, and around that are the surviving aristocratic residences and merchants' houses of old Lhasa (Z. Taring 1984). The population of Lhasa in the premodern period was around 20,000 to 30,000 people. The Dalai Lama’s principal residence, the Potala, still towers above the Lhasa plain at about 1.5 kilometers to the west of the city center, while his summer palace, the Norbu Lingka, lies another 2 kilometers to the west. The three great Gelugpa monastic centers of Ganden, Sera, and Drepung, the first of which was to be totally destroyed and the others seriously damaged in the course of the Cultural Revolution, all lay close to Lhasa. The other urban centers in Ü, such as the Neudong-Tset’ang area, all seem to have been much smaller than Lhasa.

Tsang in the modern period had two large urban centers at Shigatse (the modern Chinese Xigazê) and Gyantse, with populations of around 10,000 to 15,000 each. Shigatse had been the capital of the Tsangpa kings who ruled central Tibet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The large Gelugpa gompa of Taashi Lhunpo, seat of the Panch’en Rinpoche from the seventeenth century onwards, was situated close to Shigatse. There were smaller urban centers at Dingri, Nyelam, and Kyirong, along the trading route to Nepal and India.

Ü and Tsang also contained most of the original gompa of the other religious schools (Sakyapa, Nyingmapa, Kagyüpa, Bönpo) although with the growth of Gelugpa power in central Tibet from the seventeenth century onwards, these gompa waned somewhat in importance in comparison with the large eastern Tibetan teaching gompa of the same schools.

CENTRAL TIBET: HISTORY AND PRESENT SITUATION

Ü, the more easterly of the two central provinces, has long been at the heart of Tibetan politics. It was the basis of the seventh- to ninth-century Tibetan empire. Its ruling dynasty originated in the Yarlung Valley on the south side of the Tsang River, the main river of central Tibet. Namri Lonts’en or Namri Songtsen, a local ruler from the Yarlung Valley, gained control of much of central Tibet in around A.D. 600 as the leader of an alliance of petty rulers (Kirkland 1982; Beckwith
His son, Songtsen Gampo (c. 618–649) completed the conquest of the adjoining non-Tibetan kingdom of Shangshung in what is now western Tibet.

This kingdom of Shangshung, again probably a confederation of local chieftains headed by the Ligni dynasty, had ruled much of present-day western and central Tibet for some centuries. The Bön religion of the royal period (seventh to ninth centuries) is said to have come from Tagzig (Iran?) via Shangshung, and Shangshung is the probable source of other early components of Tibetan civilization (N. Norbu 1981, and see Chapter 23).

Songtsen Gampo moved his capital to Lhasa and built a palace on the site where the Dalai Lama's palace, the Potala, would later stand. He also entered into an alliance with the Chinese and Nepalese courts. The later tradition associated him with the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet but it is clear both that there had been previous contacts with Buddhism and that the large-scale introduction of Buddhism did not take place until the late eighth century in the time of Tri'song Detsen. It was during the reign of Tri'song Detsen that Samyé, the first Tibetan monastic gompa, was built on the northern shore of the Tsang River.

While Ü was the original center of state power, the next large-scale regime in Tibet, the Sakya government installed with Mongol (Yuan) support in the late thirteenth century, was centered in Tsang at the monastic gompa of Sakya. After the collapse of the Sakya regime in the mid-fourteenth century, it was replaced by the P'agmodrupa dynasty, centered at Neu dong in Ü. The next two central Tibetan states were centered in Tsang (at Rimpung and Shigatsé). Thus Tsang and Ü alternated as centers of power from the seventh century onwards, until the 5th Dalai Lama's Mongol supporters defeated and subsequently killed the last of the Tsangpa kings of Shigatsé. The 5th Dalai Lama moved the capital back to the old imperial capital of Lhasa but Shigatsé remained an important center of power, and the Panchen Rimpoché, the reincarnate abbot of Trashi Lhunpo monastery outside Shigatsé, was the most senior reincarnate lama within the Gelugpa order after the Dalai Lama himself.

The Dalai Lama's regime was recognized by the Manchu (Qing) Emperors of China. While the Chinese government regarded the 5th Dalai Lama as a subordinate ruler, the Tibetans regarded the relationship as a reestablishment of the 'priest-patron' relationship that had existed between the Sakya lamas and the Mongol (Yuan) Emperors of China. The complex subsequent history of the Lhasa state will not be given here in any detail, although some aspects are summarized in Chapter 27 (see also Ahmad 1970; Dhondup 1984, 1986; Goldstein 1989; Pethick 1973a; Richardson 1984; Shakabpa 1967). The 5th and 6th Dalai Lamas ruled through lay regents or desid. After the deposition of the 6th Dalai Lama by the Dzungars and the installation of the 7th with the support of a Manchu army (1720), this system was changed, and a cabinet or council of ministers (k读后), was introduced. This council later became known as the kashog and continued to exist until 1959. From 1728 the Manchus stationed two officials (the Ambans) and a small garrison at Lhasa.

After 1728, effective power in Tibet was in the hands of one of the ministers, a Tsang noble named P'olhané, until his death in 1747. The 7th Dalai Lama took over as formal head of government in 1751 but died in 1757. The five following Dalai Lamas all died before or shortly after becoming old enough to rule. Consequently, while the Dalai Lama was the official head of state, the Lhasa government was headed by a regent (desid) for all but a few years between 1757 and 1895. The desid was usually a reincarnate lama from one of four gompas within Lhasa city. The 13th Dalai Lama was the first since 1757 to rule in his own right (Goldstein 1973).

In 1788–1792 a second Manchu army came to Tibet during the Gurkha-Tibetan war. The Qianlong emperor raised the status of the Ambans and introduced a system of control over the appointment of the Dalai Lama and other high reincarnate lamas (Lessing 1942:60–61; Shakabpa 1967:172); however, with the decline of the Manchu government in China in the nineteenth century the Ambans came to have little effective power at Lhasa.

A British military expedition reached Lhasa in 1903–1904 and imposed a trade agreement on the Lhasa government. The Manchus responded with a new and more interventionist policy in 1903 (see Sperling 1976; Teichman 1922), culminating in the invasion of central Tibet by a Manchu army and the flight of the 13th Dalai Lama to India. After the Chinese revolution, the remaining Chinese troops were expelled from central Tibet, and the region, along with the portions of K'ám west of the Yangtze, remained entirely independent of China, under the control of the 13th Dalai Lama and his successors, until 1950.
The period of rule of the 13th Dalai Lama is of particular significance. Much of our information about the Tibetan state dates from this period and subsequently; however, in evaluating this material, we need to be aware that the 13th Dalai Lama had embarked in the early 1920s on an ambitious and, in the short term at least, effective campaign to create a more centralized and powerful state (Burman 1976). A number of examples will demonstrate the nature of this campaign:

1. The Dalai Lama’s government created the first Tibetan standing army, paid for by a tax on all estates within Tibet. This provoked a confrontation (see below) with the estate of the Panch’en Rimpoch’e, which was the most powerful single subunit within the Dalai Lama’s realm. The Lhasa government won this confrontation, and the Panch’en Rimpoch’e fled to China in 1923 (Mehra 1976; Goldstein 1989);

2. The Dalai Lama’s government sent several young men to British schools to receive a Western-style education, and also attempted to institute a Western-type school within Tibet (see Dhondup 1984, 1986:155–162);

3. In the religious sphere, the 13th Dalai Lama tightened up considerably the system of monastic degrees leading to senior administrative posts within the Gelugpa hierarchy. These posts were from now on only open to monks from the three major Gelugpa monastic centers near Lhasa, and not, for example, to monks from the Panch’en Rimpoch’e’s monastic center at Trashi Lhunpo (Sherpa 1977);

4. Again in the religious sphere, the lama P’awongk’a Rimpoch’e, acting in association with the Dalai Lama, instituted a campaign to convert non-Gelugpa gompa in K’am to the Gelugpa school, by force where necessary (see, for example, Beyer 1973:239; Kapstein 1989:231 n. 40).

These innovations combined direct increases in state power (through the institution of a standing army), attempts at modernization (through Western education), and greater control over the gompa. The effects of these changes were in part lost during the two regencies following the 13th Dalai Lama’s death in 1933, and the conservative influence on the Lhasa regime of the large Gelugpa monastic centers was reasserted. Much of our material on the Lhasa regime nevertheless reflects the exceptional strength of the Lhasa administration during this period.

In 1950–1951 the army of the People’s Republic of China invaded Tibet and imposed the so-called 17-Point Agreement on the Tibetans (Richardson 1984:290–293). Resistance to Chinese rule began in K’am and Amdo, gradually spreading to central Tibet. In 1959 the 14th Dalai Lama, followed by about 70,000 refugees, fled to India, and the Tibetan government was dissolved. Central Tibet, along with western K’am and those parts of western Tibet under Chinese rule, now forms the Tibet Autonomous Region of the Chinese People’s Republic.

Anthropological research within central Tibet has only been possible for Western scholars since the late 1980s, and under restricted circumstances. At the time of writing, the only published material is that from Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall’s work with a pastoral population at Phala Xiang near Lake Dangra (Map 3, no. 1; Goldstein and Beall 1986, 1989, 1990; Goldstein 1987). Our information on agricultural communities is based on work with refugees. The principal studies of this kind are Barbara Aziz’s on Dingri (no. 2; Aziz 1978), C. W. Cassinelli and Robert Ekvall’s on Sakya (no. 3; Cassinelli and Ekvall 1969), and Melvyn Goldstein’s and Eva Dargay’s work, both on villages near Gyantse (no. 4; Goldstein 1968, 1971a, 1971b, 1971c, 1971d, 1986, 1988; Dargay 1982).

**THE LHASA GOVERNMENT AND THE DZONG SYSTEM**

The Lhasa government incorporated substantial parts of K’am in the east and Ngari in the west as well as the whole of central Tibet. It was nevertheless based in central Tibet and governed from central Tibet and is therefore discussed in this chapter. There are accounts of the Lhasa government by several writers, among the more recent Ram Rahul (1969), Melvyn Goldstein (1968, 1971d, 1973, 1989), Martin Brauen (1974), and Franz Michael (1982). It was staffed by lay officials from families of aristocratic or gerge status and by monk officials from the three great Gelugpa gompa near Lhasa. There was a college at Lhasa, maintained by the Finance Department, where the lay officials were trained (Rahul 1969:29–30; N. Thondup 1976). Officials were appointed to formal ranks, which ranged from seventh up to first rank,
the highest being the rank of the four kalön or Cabinet ministers (three laymen and a monk in recent times). The entire bureaucracy was quite small. Braun says that in the 1940s there were about 200 lay officials and 230 monk officials (1974:134), while Michael estimates 500-700 officials in all (1982:59). This included the local officials, known as dzongpön (Goldstein translates this as 'District Commissioner'), responsible for the local administrative centers or dzong, along with their subordinate stewards and clerks.11

The dzong were usually fortified buildings in high places. There were about 120 in recent times (Goldstein 1968; Braun 1974:143). Each had one or two dzongpön appointed for a period of three years. These were generally laymen but in some cases one was a monk (Rahul 1969:40). They were of fourth or fifth rank depending on the importance of the dzong, the most important post being that of Chief Commissioner of Shigatsé. In some areas there was another official senior to the dzongpön, the regional governor or chikyab. There were six or seven of these, mainly in the outlying areas.12

Dzongpön could settle legal cases brought to them but their primary function was the collection of revenue on behalf of the Lhasa government. Most dzongpön made a handsome profit in the course of their three-year term. Rahul (1969:43) comments that:

The amount of revenue due from each dzong was recorded in the Finance Department in Lhasa... A dzongpön was in fact a contractor for this revenue and made what profit he could. His income, out of which he paid his revenue, consisted of dues from the people within his jurisdiction, proceeds of the fines imposed by him, large arrears of revenue he had diverted temporarily or otherwise to his own coffers, private trading in which he could compel traders to sell goods to him below market rates, and his own estate.

Rahul also notes that dzongpön, particularly those in charge of remote dzong, were virtually autonomous. They had hardly any relations with the Lhasa government beyond sending the annual revenue. Those nearer to Lhasa would be more careful and would refer serious cases to the Kashag (Rahul 1969:43-44).

We will find the dzong system in various forms in most other Tibetan polities, including the petty states of K'am (Chapter 4) and the monastic and later lay kingdom of Bhutan (Chapter 6). In these states succession to the position of some or all dzongpön became hereditary.

This does not seem to be the case with the Lhasa government dzongpön, who were in recent times regularly appointed for a limited term. I am unclear whether reappointment was common and unclear, too, whether officials were regularly sent to serve at dzong near to their own estates.13

As Goldstein has pointed out (1973), the system was, in recent times, slanted towards the interests of the powerful reincarnation-series who served as regents and of a small number of the high-status aristocratic (gerpa) families. Many of the remaining gerpa families provided lower-level officials and were not particularly wealthy or powerful in comparison to rich peasant families. It is unlikely that they were able to build up substantial alternative centers of power through their occupancy of dzongpön positions. Such alternative centers of power were constituted by large semiautonomous monastic estates, such as Sakya and Trashi Lhunpo and occasionally by a few of the larger aristocratic estates, primarily those of depön and yabshi status.14

The position of the larger estates needs particular examination. We are best informed about one of the most important of these estates, Sakya, though I will also look at two others, Trashi Lhunpo and Lhagyari.

Sabadikum

SUBORDINATE UNITS WITHIN THE LHASA STATE: SAKYA, LHAGYARI, TRASHI LHUNPO

The Sakya estate was the lineal continuation of the Sakya government of Tibet during the Mongol (Yuan) period (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries). In the twentieth century it retained control over a large territory in the west of Tsang (marked on Map 3) as well as eight smaller territories in Tsang and two in K'am (see Cassinelli and Ekvall 1969:30-33 and Map 1). The head of the Sakya estate was the senior member of the same K'un family who had been given authority over Tibet by the Mongols. He was known as the Sakya Tr'ich'en, and was also the hereditary abbot of the main Sakya monastery and the head of the Sakya religious order. The members of the K'un family were believed to possess a particularly powerful body of ritual practices and the Sakya Tr'ich'en occasionally performed major rituals on behalf of the Lhasa government.15 In recent times, the position of Sakya Tr'ich'en has alternated between two branches of the family.

Sakya (Map 3, no. 3) was studied by the political scientist C. W.
Cassinelli and the anthropologist Robert Ekvall. Their book, significantly titled *A Tibetan Principality*, was based on information from four refugees, three of them from the ruling family of Sakya (1969). *A Tibetan Principality* was the subject of an important critique by Melvyn Goldstein, who argued that it wrongly presented Sakya as an independent political entity (Goldstein 1971). Two further valuable sources on Sakya in recent times are the autobiographical accounts by Dawa Norbu and Jamyang Sakya (D. Norbu 1974; Sakya and Emery 1990).

The relationship between Sakya and Lhasa was complex and I suspect that both Cassinelli and Ekvall (arguing for the autonomy of Sakya) and Goldstein (arguing for the superordinate status of Lhasa) tend to present it in inappropriately categorial terms. Both administrations, Sakya and Lhasa, were referred to in Tibetan by the same term, *skung*. Neither had "any polity-wide police network" (Goldstein 1971:175) and both were oriented towards the collection of taxes rather than the day-to-day regulation of the lives of their subjects.

Goldstein's arguments for the superordinate status of the Lhasa administration (which he refers to as "the Tibetan central government") are as follows: (1) the Lhasa administration controlled and monopolized the army; (2) the Lhasa administration controlled a corvée transportation network throughout the entire region; (3) the Lhasa administration coined money, printed postage stamps, and controlled relations with foreign powers; (4) anyone could take a dispute to the Lhasa administration for adjudication, and its decision was authoritative; (5) the Lhasa administration could make rules that were binding on subordinate units such as Sakya, as with the tax imposed in the 1920s to support the new standing army; and (6) the Lhasa government had an office that would take over what Goldstein calls "runaway serfs." 

Goldstein's arguments are generally convincing, but it should be remembered that they refer to a period where the power of the Lhasa administration was at its height. Subordinate units such as Sakya and Trashi Lhunpo had frequently negotiated on their own behalf with foreign powers in the past (item 3), while the "runaway serf" office (item 6) dated only from the early twentieth century. As for the power of taxation (item 5), the imposition of taxes on Trashi Lhunpo and Powo in the 1920s involved major conflicts, and, in the case of Powo, armed military intervention (see Chapter 4), before the tax was paid, an indication that the demand was regarded as unprecedented and unjustified. Looking at the period from 1642 to 1959 as a whole, we would doubtless find times when the Lhasa administration could intervene relatively effectively within the 'subordinate units' and other times when it had little option but to leave them to run their own affairs. These changes in the situation would not necessarily have been reflected by explicit changes in political vocabulary. As we will see again in relation to the Chinese power in eastern K'am (Chapter 4), formal titles, relationships of tribute, and the like could mask any of a variety of political realities. The parties concerned were often content to maintain a mutually acceptable fiction rather than forcing unnecessary confrontations.

On item 4, the question of taking disputes to Lhasa, Goldstein's example, the conflict over the succession to the throne of Sakya in 1930, is particularly interesting. In Cassinelli and Ekvall's account, the Lhasa administration's involvement in this episode appears as the last in a series of episodes of 'mediation' dating back to the early nineteenth century (1969:22-27). In the first case, a Lhasa aristocrat of the Rangchöönba family, related to the Sakya ruling house, acted as mediator between the two branches of the family, setting up the original arrangement by which, whenever the ruler of Sakya died, he was to be succeeded by the eldest male member of the family, whichever branch he belonged to. Subsequently the regents for the 12th (in 1866), 13th (in 1887), and 14th Dalai Lamas (in 1935) were asked to intervene in disputes over the succession; in each case Sakya's status as a *shung* was recognized.

According to Goldstein, "Tibetan government officials," presumably meaning former officials of the Lhasa administration, described the intervention in 1930 as "adjudication" (*kaเชล nang*), not "mediation" (*barshug*; 1971:177-178). This could hardly be true of Rangchöönba's intervention in the early nineteenth century, but the 1935 and 1950 episodes both seem to involve an acceptance of Lhasa's right to make the decision. Whether the 1866 and 1887 episodes should be regarded as 'mediation' or 'adjudication' is hard to say.

In fact, Cassinelli and Ekvall agree that Sakya recognized both the superordinate status of the Lhasa government and the Dalai Lama's claim to political control over the whole region. Their claims for the autonomy of Sakya are more to do with the lack of intervention from Lhasa in the operation of the Sakya administration:

[Sakya] was part of a political system that included Lhasa and Shigatse [i.e., Trashi Lhunpo], but this system was largely formal and had vir-
CIVILIZED SHAMANS

Usually nothing to do with the day-to-day business of governing the area of [Sakya] proper. In performing the essential governmental functions of collecting and allocating revenue, maintaining judicial processes, and selecting official personnel, the government of [Sakya] was answerable to no one. It was not linked with Lhasa as part of a federation or confederation, for there was no policy that applied to both Lhasa and [Sakya]; it was not part of an empire ruled by Lhasa, for the minor demands effectively made by Lhasa were too weak and infrequent to constitute an imperial relationship. The unity of western Tibet [i.e., Tsang] was cultural and religious; no one perceived a need for anything more than the most superficial political coordination. (Cassinelli and Ekvall 1969:44)

In a footnote, they add:

It is not meaningful to speak of 'sovereignty' in the case of [Sakya]. 'Sovereignty' is either a concept of international law, which did not apply to these Tibetan governments, or suggests an absolute independence that no government possesses. (Cassinelli and Ekvall 1969: 44 n. 11)

Goldstein's material suggests that Lhasa's claims on Sakya in recent times went well beyond the "minor demands. . . weak and infrequent" indicated by Cassinelli and Ekvall. To regard the relationship between Lhasa and Sakya as one of straightforward subordination is nevertheless too simple, and in Chapter 4 we will see that material on another small monastic state, Drayab, parallels Cassinelli and Ekvall's in several respects.17

Sakya was, in some respects, a special case, because of its former identity as the government of all Tibet. The administrators of Sakya were clearly very conscious of this status (for example, Cassinelli and Ekvall 1969:50); however, on closer examination, most of the 'subordinate units' of the Lhasa administration turn out to be special cases of one kind or another. The family of Lhagyari, for example, owned the small but wealthy estate of E-yul in Ü, claimed descent from the kings of the Yarlung dynasty, and had various privileges in relation to the Lhasa administration as a consequence (Karsten 1980; Yuthok 1990:35, 84-85). The head of the family (again known as tr'ich'en) was apparently not a tributary to the Lhasa government (Karsten 1980:165) and, although Lhagyari was one of the five depön families, its members

did not serve as officials at Lhasa after 1642. In ceremonial matters, they ranked next to the Panch'ën Rimpoch'e, who was the head of the Trashi Lhunpo estate.

Altogether, the region under the Lhasa administration was far less uniform in political structure than it might look at first sight. Numerous families and estates had special privileges of one kind or another, some areas (Chang'ang) had no dzong, in others (Ngari) the provincial governor had no control over the dzong, and so on. What has occasionally been presented (for example, Michael 1982) as a rational bureaucratic system consisted of a large number of special cases, with an underlying pattern of more or less formalized patron-client relations (see Goldstein 1973).

The Trashi Lhunpo estate was the most significant of all the subordinate units, and while we do not have the material for a comprehensive presentation of its position, it is worth discussing some aspects of this unit in detail. It was the largest subordinate unit within the Dalai Lama's state, and it had extensive holdings throughout Tsang, although I do not know of any detailed description of these holdings.18 Michael comments that "[f]he organization of the Trashi Lhunpo lab-rang [estate] was indeed very similar to the Lhasa government" (1982:112). The Shigatsé aristocracy served as lay officials for the Trashi Lhunpo administration, just as their equivalents at Lhasa did for the Dalai Lama's administration, and "when the Trashi Lhunpo ecclesiastical and secular officials travelled to Lhasa, they were received and accorded honors in ceremony and seating arrangements that were equal to those reserved for the ministers of the kashag and the Dalai Lama's ecclesiastical agencies" (Michael 1982:112).

The monastery of Trashi Lhunpo was founded in 1447 by Gendün Drub (1391-1475), a personal disciple of Tsongk'apa and the originator of the Dalai Lama reincarnation-series (see Chapter 27; the title of Dalai Lama itself was first given to the third of the series). It was built close to the dzong of Samdrupsé (modern Shigatsé), which had just been seized by the Rimpungpa dynasty, still formally subordinate to the P'agmodrupa dynasty at Neudong but rapidly becoming the leading power in central Tibet (Wylie 1980a:322-333; Shakabpa 1967:86-87). It was thus closely associated with the Dalai Lamas, and was the principal residence of Gendün Drub and his successor the 2nd Dalai Lama. The latter, however, moved to Drepung in 1494, apparently in response to the growing power of the Karmapa order in Tsang.
and to the threat posed by their Rimpungpa patrons, who had now taken control of Tsang (Wylie 1980a:328).19

The 1st Panch'en Rimpoch'e, Losang Chökyi Gyantsen (1567–1662), was tutor to the 4th and 5th Dalai Lamas and abbot of Trashi Lhunpo. He was given the title Panch'en (= pandita d'pon, Great Scholar) by the 5th Dalai Lama and in 1665 the same Dalai Lama recognized his rebirth as the abbot of Trashi Lhunpo. This incarnation-line rapidly became the most important in the Gelugpa order after the Dalai Lama himself.

Shigatsé lost its leading position in central Tibetan politics with the rise to power of Lhasa but it remained an important place. The gompa of Trashi Lhunpo, with its large estates and the important Panch'en incarnation-line, represented an alternative focus of power to Lhasa. While the senior status of the Dalai Lama does not seem to have been overtly challenged, the series of previous rebirths identified for the Panch'en Rimpoch'e was traced back through K'edrubje (1385–1438), who was an older and more senior disciple of Tsongkapa's than the 1st Dalai Lama, Gendün Drub. There were indirect suggestions that the Panch'en's spiritual standing was in some respects higher than that of the Dalai Lama's (see Norbu and Ekvall 1969). Significantly, Trashi Lhunpo developed an independent foreign policy from Lhasa. The 3rd Panch'en Rimpoch'e negotiated with George Bogle, emissary of the British Governor-General of Bengal, in 1774–1775, and the Manchu regime constantly attempted to play off one incarnation-line against the other, a strategy that was continued by the Chinese Nationalist and Communist governments in the twentieth century.

It is difficult to judge how far the two lamas themselves were caught up in the conflict. During the nineteenth century, all of the Dalai Lamas died young, so that power was in the hands of Regents for all but a few years. The position of Regent itself, significantly, was held by the Panch'en Rimpoch'e only for a few months (Mehra 1976:33 n. 63), otherwise it was monopolized by senior Gelugpa lamas from Lhasa and nearby. At any rate the relationship between Lhasa and Trashi Lhunpo deteriorated rapidly in the first decades of this century, following Trashi Lhunpo's ambivalent attitude to British and Chinese overtures during the Dalai Lama's flights to exile in 1904 and 1910. The Lhasa government asked Trashi Lhunpo in 1912 to contrib-

ute to the costs of the wars with China, but they paid only part of the amount requested.

Lhasa responded to the increase in tension by strengthening its administrative apparatus in Tsang. Shigatsé had previously been an ordinary dagon, with a fifth-rank lay official; it was now given a special status. A fourth-rank commissioner (immediately below the cabinet ministers) was appointed with responsibility for the whole province of Tsang (Goldstein 1968:37–38).20 Lhasa had agreed in the past that peasants on Trashi Lhunpo estates were not liable to corvée duties to Lhasa, but they went back on this in 1917 and imposed corvée duties on Trashi Lhunpo peasants at Gyantsé, extending them to all of Tsang in 1923 and imposing a new annual tax on the Trashi Lhunpo estate. Trashi Lhunpo refused to pay any of the taxes, and the Panch'en Rimpoch'e fled to Mongolia in December 1923 and subsequently to China, apparently in the hope of forcing a negotiated settlement (Goldstein 1989:110–120). The Lhasa government responded by appointing an administrator to the Trashi Lhunpo estate. The issue was not resolved, and the Panch'en Rimpoch'e remained in China until his death in 1935. Meanwhile, the Lhasa regime was able to impose its new taxes on Trashi Lhunpo.

It is clear, as Goldstein comments, that "the fundamental issue was the extent of the authority of the central [i.e., Lhasa] government" (1989:120).21 Lhasa's success (backed up by its new standing army) marked a further move towards a centralization, but the whole episode indicates that it would be mistaken to assume that Trashi Lhunpo had been 'traditionally' subject to Lhasa or that the Lhasa regime as a whole should be seen as a centralized state. The Lhasa regime generally had little interest in intervening at the local level, provided that the taxes came in regularly from the dagon offices. Indeed, its ability to intervene, even had it wanted to, was quite limited, especially before the 13th Dalai Lama's reforms.

TIBET AND THE GALACTIC POLITY

Much of the problem in conceptualizing the relationship between Lhasa and Sakya or Trashi Lhunpo, as Cassinelli and Ekvall rightly note, is the result of attempting to interpret Tibetan political struc-
The analogy is not perfect. The geography and ecology are different, and there was a degree of cultural, linguistic, and religious unity throughout most of the Tibetan region, for all its diversity, which contrasts with the high degree of differentiation within the hill peoples of upland Southeast Asia. The picture of a region characterized by areas of greater and lesser centralization with fluctuating linkages between them is nevertheless closer to the reality of Tibet than that of a centralized bureaucratic state. We will return to these questions again in later chapters.

I have emphasized in this chapter the limitations to the power and authority of the Dalai Lama’s government at Lhasa. The Lhasa regime was nevertheless the nearest to an effectively centralized state achieved by Tibetans in the premodern period. The relatively bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of the Gelugpa order, particularly after the 13th Dalai Lama’s reforms, reflected its role as something resembling a state church. Elsewhere, as we shall see in the next two chapters, neither political nor religious forms were as structured or ‘domesticated.’