THE TIBET HERITAGE FUND:
TOWARDS A HUMANE ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

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The former Tibetan capital city of Lhasa has experienced variations in policies towards the preservation of its historic architecture over the decades since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government took control in 1959. The Tibet Heritage Fund (THF) emerged in Lhasa to disrupt a period of increased destruction of traditional Tibetan architecture in the 1990s and brought Tibetan people together to upgrade and save their built environment. This action served as a model of humane preservation that put a priority on the lives of native Tibetans in Lhasa that can be applied to preservation efforts globally. However, with the increased development of pillar tourist industries in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), native Tibetans have been separated from their native architectural residences and have been replaced by foreign tourists. This situation redefines the scope and beneficiaries of architectural preservation efforts in Tibet and especially in the main Tibetan tourist cities such as Lhasa.

This thesis explores the humane preservation work of the Tibetan Heritage Fund framed within the history of architectural preservation in the former Tibetan capital city of Lhasa. The first chapter presents the history of traditional Tibetan architecture in Lhasa and explains the formation of policies that have affected architectural preservation in Lhasa. Chapter two provides a thorough account of the formation of the Tibetan Heritage Fund in counter-response to rapid, enforced decimation of Lhasa's historic structural environment by CCP policy. The basic tenets of humane preservation practice are defined through examples of active restoration projects that took place by the THF in Lhasa in the late 1990s. Chapter three puts emphasis on policies supporting increased tourism in Tibetan cultural zones in China. These policies focus on sculpting a theatrical landscape that exploits Tibetan culture for a state sponsored tourism market. Chapter four looks at the current state of reconstruction, renovation and restoration to support a pillar tourist industry in Old Town Lhasa. Examples are given from situations that were witnessed firsthand from fieldwork on the ground in Lhasa in 2016. This thesis then concludes with a discussion of the identity of beneficiaries of historic preservation in Lhasa within the scope of tourist development. The audience of humane preservation practice, as exemplified by the Tibet Heritage Fund, is recognized as a changing demographic as more native Tibetans are being replaced by mainly Han Chinese tourists. The Himalayan cultural residents in Ladakh now serve as direct beneficiaries of residential restoration as the THF continues to practice humane architectural preservation in the capital city of Leh using techniques that were formulated in Lhasa during the 1990s.

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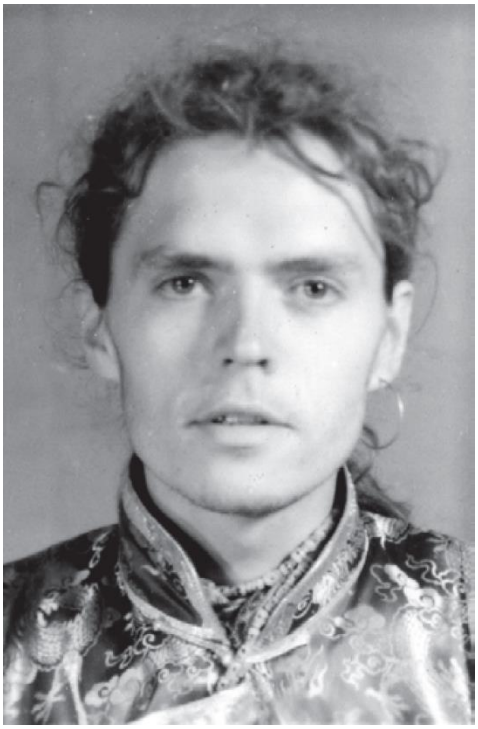
This paper is ultimately dedicated to Andre Alexander, Pimpim de Azevedo and everyone who has been a part of the Tibet Heritage Fund for the past 25 years. Their work is truly inspirational as examples of the successes of humanity to give us hope for a better tomorrow.



Dr. Andre Alexander

1965.01.17 – 2012.01.21[1]

[1] Per K Sorensen, “Obituary: Dr Andre Alexander 17.01.1965 - 21.01.2012 Conservation Pioneer and Himalayan Heritage Hero ,” *Bulletin of Tibetology* 47 (2011): pp. 107-112, https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot_2011_01_010.pdf, 107.

INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of Tibetan and Himalayan architecture is not as widely covered as some of the more popular periods of Western history such as the Greek and Roman eras, the Romanesque and Gothic or Modern architectural examples from either Europe or North America. It wasn't until circa mid-20th century that the West even became widely aware of traditional Himalayan buildings and built culture with the rise of architectural investigations by the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) government within the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the push to assimilate the Western, traditionally Tibetan, regions into the eastern mainland. Most of the written work on Tibetan cultural architecture emerged out of the 1990s, mostly with the investigations from Western Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the Tibet Heritage Fund or the Norwegian academic research teams lead by Knud Larsen and Amund Sinding-Larsen. Since the mid-90s there has been a significant increase in publications that reveal the mysteries and facts of the buildings of the Tibetan and Himalayan peoples. One of the most recent books to come out is a thorough examination of the history of architectural preservation in the traditional Tibetan capital city of Lhasa, *The Evolution of Preservation of the Old City Lhasa* by Qing Li, published by Social Sciences Academic Press/Springer Nature, Singapore, 2018. This book is structured to tell the complete story of architectural development and preservation in Lhasa from its earliest occupancy to modern period. The book provides key points in history including the kings and Dalai Lamas responsible for the development of a distinct architectural style that distinguishes Lhasa as a historic city. Written in an overtly Sino-centric manner, the historic viewpoint of *The Evolution of Preservation of the Old City Lhasa* is that of the influence of the Chinese mainland on Tibetan culture and seems to support the CCP's political agendas of complete assimilation and

submission of Tibetan culture to the dominant Han culture of modern China. Little mention is made in this book to Western efforts of preservation activity in Lhasa that have had a major impact on current practices. Although, respect has been paid to the critical work of Larsen and Sinding-Larsen in the late 90s to early 00s with extensive use of their detailed urban maps and architectural composition maps. *The Evolution of Preservation* is a prime example of the latest writing on architectural preservation in Lhasa, particularly by Chinese scholars. Much of the writing in the last half of the 2010s is very well intentioned in calling out flaws in heritage management and a lack of support for native Tibetan cultural heritage in the latest efforts towards building Lhasa up to be a major tourist attraction. However, a major missing piece of the preservation puzzle presented in Li's book and other recent papers is any mention of the Tibet Heritage Fund (THF). None of the preservation work that has been committed since the late 20th century in Lhasa would be possible without the heroic efforts of the THF. The approach of the THF to putting a priority on the Tibetan people most affected by architectural preservation is nonpareil with any efforts anywhere in the TAR today. To diminish the THF's role in preservation and restoration is to diminish the importance of humane cultural preservation throughout Tibet as well as throughout the planet.

This thesis promotes the Tibet Heritage Fund's work over the past 25 years as a model of humane architectural preservation by examining the many facets tangential to their work. First this thesis provides an introduction to the Tibetan capital city of Lhasa to set the contextual stage as a site where Tibetan heritage flourished prior to occupation by the Maoist Chinese Communist Party government in 1959. Lhasa is exemplary as a rare Tibetan urban center because Tibet has generally been a predominantly rural country with very few sites that can be identified as true "cities". By understanding the urban makeup of Lhasa one can appreciate the authenticity of

Tibetan architecture that once defined the cultural built environment that is currently in peril of being lost or altered by official state programs such as *Weigai* and the burgeoning tourist industry.

Next this thesis examines the role of the Tibet Heritage Fund in disrupting the state instituted programs of destruction of the cultural and historical physical environment in Lhasa. The relationship with which Andre Alexander, Pimpim de Azevedo and the other founders of the THF had with Tibet and the Tibetan people and their understanding of buildings as vehicles for preserving Tibetan lives, customs and heritage is illustrated through an examination of the THF's active role in Lhasa in the mid- to late 1990s. The THF's undying efforts to work with the people of Lhasa defined the tenets of humane architectural preservation and established a timeless model to guide preservation efforts today. This thesis will look at where the THF work ethic originated and how they specifically carried out their mission to the direct benefit of the Tibetan people until their forced departure from Lhasa in 2000.

This thesis then discusses the phenomenon of tourism in China and its transformative impact on cities such as Lhasa. An examination is made of *Xibu da Kaifa* policies of tourism development by the CCP in the early 2000s and its lasting impact on the exploitation of *minzu* or minority cultures in China. This thesis then reveals how tourism policies put Tibetan heritage sharply in focus through the case study of the reconstruction of a culturally Tibetan town into the fantasy world of Shangri-la. Tibetan architecture is shown to be of great value as the stage for tourism based on selling Tibetan cultural sites as exotic tourist destinations.

At this point this thesis reveals the critical period between which the Tibet Heritage Fund was able to establish a humane practice of architectural preservation in Lhasa in the 1990s and a period of state sponsored reconstruction designed to support the pillar industry of tourism today.

This thesis looks at the current climate of preservation in Lhasa, the scholarly community's calls for a need for better management practices and the negation of the recognition of the Tibet Heritage Fund's role in pioneering humane preservation in Lhasa. Observations of reconstruction and restoration practices in Lhasa towards the late 2010s based on actual field observations and discussions with those directly involved in reconstruction efforts and hotel management provide an inside look at actual conditions on the ground in Lhasa. This thesis concludes with the observation of the changing identity of Lhasa's inhabitants since the Tibet Heritage Fund established an effective model of humane preservation of Tibetan culture in the former capital city. In conclusion, it is questioned whether humane preservation can exist under policies of tourism, whether in Lhasa or elsewhere in the world.

Chapter One

An Introduction to Lhasa

The city of Lhasa is located between tall mountain peaks within the Kyichu River valley, high upon the Himalayan Plateau and is one of the few true cities in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Lhasa was the capital of the Tibetan government prior to Chinese occupation in 1959. It was composed of traditionally built, mostly masonry constructed buildings that responded to the functions of a nearly homogeneous population of Tibetan Buddhist monks and religious officials.[2] It was the center of Tibetan Buddhism, a religion that was suffused in most aspects of Tibetan culture then as it still is today. It has been the ultimate destination for throngs of pilgrims that travel to the capital city from across the Himalayan regions. As a result of pilgrimage activity, Lhasa has also been the center of commerce and trade in the TAR. The commercial functions in Lhasa have helped to diversify the population within the city through the arrival of Nepalis (or Newaris), Indians and mainland Chinese residing as shopkeepers, merchants or workers.

The traditional composition of Lhasa's population, identified by three distinct groups as monastic, governmental and commercial residents, reflected the built environment of Lhasa prior to 1959. This cultural distinction of Lhasa can be seen in three major landmarks found within the city. To the west, the Potala was the administrative seat of the Lamaist government and

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[2] A GIS comprehensive map of the historic layout of Lhasa from pre-1959 Chinese occupation is available at https://bit.ly/HistoricLhasaGIS and displays nearly 3500 individual traditional Tibetan structures. The map was created by members of the Tibetan and Himalayan Library development team for a Mellon funded consortium called the Humanities Virtual World Consortium, http://virtualworlds.etc.ucla.edu/.

home of the Dalai Lama, the political leader of Tibet and religious leader of Tibetan Buddhism since the 17th century CE. It is a fortress-like structure built on a massive outcropping in the middle of the Kyichu River valley (Figure 1.3). To the east, the Jokhang Tsuklakhang houses the most venerated shrine of Tibetan Buddhism, the Jowo Shakyamuni Buddha, and is today the most prominent pilgrimage destination for Tibetan Buddhists (Figure 1.4). The influx of pilgrims to this shrine has made the area around the Jokhang the center of market activity in Lhasa. In homage to the Jowo Buddha, a kora, or circumambulation route, is traversed by pilgrims around the mass of buildings that form the Jokhang complex (Figure 1.5). Along this route to the East of the Jokhang, market stalls and shops have sprung up over the past couple of centuries. A dense collection of shops, residences and other monastic buildings in this area have come to be identified as the Barkor, named after the kora route that encircles them. The Barkor is considered the historic core of Lhasa and it has undergone dramatic changes indicative of the overall alteration of Lhasa since 1959 (Figure 1.5).

The historical structure of the Tibetan capital of Lhasa has undergone massive alterations and transformations since occupation by the Chinese government in 1959. Chinese policies towards minority, or *minzu*, cultures within the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) have dramatically affected historic buildings in these areas. Tibetan regions within western areas of the PRC such as Kham and Amdo, in eastern traditional Tibet, and the Central Tibetan areas within the Tibet Autonomous Region have undergone dramatic transformations that are reflected in the treatment of the built environment. A trend from massive destruction to selective historic reconstruction and preservation has been wrought upon the urban fabric of Lhasa since 1959. Cultural preservation is at stake in China as *minzu* cultures such as Tibetan, Uighur and other non-Han cultures are being diluted, almost to extinction, by a Han majority Chinese government.

Architectural preservation is tied to cultural preservation as the physical elements of a culture are endowed by a sense of place in the built environment.

Lhasa traditionally functioned as both the political and religious capital of Tibet prior to Chinese occupation in 1959. By the 1940s there existed over 860 buildings in the traditionally historic core of Lhasa and over 3500 buildings by the 1960s in the entire Lhasa-Kyichu river valley. By 2016 a little over 70 buildings of historic origin remained in the traditional core of Lhasa known as the Barkor. Lhasa remains a destination for Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims as it has since its founding in the 7th century CE by King Songsten Gampo. The Barkor is a circumambulation route, or kora, encircling the holiest shrine in Tibetan Buddhism, the Jokhang housed within the Lhasa Tsuklakhang, a recognized World Heritage site. The religious significance of the Jokhang balances out the political significance of the Potala "palace", the traditional seat of power and home to the ruling Dalai Lamas, also a World Heritage site and one of the built "Wonders of the World". The traditional city of Lhasa grew radially from the site of the Jokhang to the rocky outcropping of Marpo Ri to the west upon which the Potala is situated (Figure 1.6). The buildings in this area are the oldest in Lhasa and most affected by several campaigns of transformation imposed by the Chinese government.

The Advent of Modern Historic Architecture in Lhasa, 17 C. - 20th C.

Architectural preservation in Lhasa is rooted in the few historical buildings that still occupy Old Town Lhasa. To appreciate the scope of the historical significance of these buildings, an understanding of the development of what could be considered "modern historical Lhasa" is necessary. Lhasa is a very old city that evolved from an even older town. Significantly historic buildings that still exist today can be dated to the 7th century CE,

the era of Songtsen Gampo (ca 617-50), recognized as Tibet's first Buddhist "king", responsible for the unification of Tibet and the development of ancient Lhasa[3]. Geomantic divination by Gampo's Chinese wife, the Princess Wencheng, revealed that Tibet was being held captive by a "supine demoness" whose heart lay in the center of the Milk Plain Lake, or central Lhasa.[4] At this time Lhasa was not a city at all but rather a small town situated in the Kyichu River Valley. To suppress the supine demoness, Songtsen Gampo had 108 Buddhist temples constructed at key points on the body of the demoness throughout Tibet, 12 of which secured the area of Lhasa.[5] In this symbolic gesture the seeds for the center of Tibetan Buddhism were sown in place as Songtsen Gampo had the Milk Plain Lake emptied and the foundations of the Tsuklakhang were constructed for the Jowo Lhakhang or Jokhang, to house the Jowo Buddha statue, the most revered statue, inside the most most holy of buildings in all of Tibetan Buddhism. Lhasa arose from the building of the Jokhang to evolve over the centuries as the capital of Tibet. Lhasa would not be recognized as the Tibetan capital for nearly 1000 years. Modern historical Lhasa begins in the mid 17th century CE under the rule of the 5th Dalai Lama, Nygawang Lobsang Gyatso, known throughout history as the "Great 5th" who ruled Tibet from 1642-82 CE. Gyatso was responsible for major building campaigns in Lhasa including the Potala Palace as the seat of Tibetan rule, development of the core historical district in Lhasa known as the Barkor, and establishment of the Lingkor circumambulation route that

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[3] Howard Solverson and Pommaret Françoise, *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: The Capital of the Dalai Lamas* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 16. Victor Chan, *Tibet Handbook: A Pilgrimage Guide* (Chico, CA: Moon Publ., 1994), 26.

[4] Solverson and Pommaret, 18.

[5] Knud Larsen and Amund Sinding-Larsen, *The Lhasa Atlas: Traditional Tibetan Architecture and Townscape* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), 18. Solverson and Pommaret, 19.

links the culturally historic core of the city with the center of religious/political rule (Figure 1.6). As Songtsen Gampo established a center of religious significance, the Great 5th established a capital center of power based on religious rule. The Potala was constructed in multiple campaigns beginning with the foundations of the Phodrang Karpo, or White Palace, erected on top of the Marpo Ri butte, in 1645-48 embodied the political power of the Dalai Lama leadership in Tibet both physically and symbolically.[6] Marpo Ri has been for centuries regarded as the heavenly palace of Avalokitesvara (Chenrezig in Tibetan), the bodhisattva of compassion embodied by the Dalai Lama.[7] The Potala grew to not only crown Marpo Ri but to become the hill site as it was built to completely cover the top of the rocky mount rising up out of the Lhasa Kyichu Valley with the construction of the Marpo Phodrang, or Red Palace, in the 1690s. As it grew so too did the immediate town surrounding the Jokhang Tsuklakhang with the Lingkor circumambulation route joining the two zones of the rising city together, unifying both the religious and secular significance of Lhasa. Lhasa grew organically from this time period into the early 20th century, radiating outward from the Jokhang in tightly knit complexes of buildings joined together by narrow winding streets and alleyways. By the early 20th century, Lhasa occupied three square kilometers and was inhabited by nearly 30,000 residents, which seems small for Western standards, but was quite expansive for a country that has very few places that we could verifiably refer to as cities, even today. The urban form of Lhasa that emerged in the

[6] Solverson and Pommaret, 44.

[7] Ibid, xiv.

17th century changed very little to its final configuration as a true Tibetan city in the early to mid-20th century.[8]

Traditional Tibetan Architecture

The past three centuries are considered to have been the peak of the development of a "classical order" for Tibetan architecture (Figure 1.7).[9] Traditional Tibetan buildings were characterized by a heavy rectangular masonry block shell surrounding a timber framed structural interior. The exterior treatment was quite austere with sloping walls punctuated by window and door openings in an interplay of rectangular and trapezoidal forms. Most common buildings were whitewashed while buildings of religious and/or official significance were washed in yellow-ochre or deep maroon-red. The windows were outlined with a heavy black surround, also trapezoidal, around rectangular openings (Figure 1.8). On top of these openings an intricately constructed timber awning cantilevered out nearly a meter away from the wall surface (Figure 1.8). These acted as a form of small, lean-to roof over the windows and were topped off with slate shingles. The entire construction was built to shed rain while reflecting light and absorbing heat in the cooler Tibetan air. Textiles played an important role in the adornment of buildings, mainly as door and window coverings to shield from the powerful Tibetan sun (Figure 1.9). While the exterior presented itself as an austere monochromatic entity, the interior opened up to a rich display of detail and color. The interior was composed of a basic post and lintel structure with ornate, bracketed columns supporting rough hewn log beams both painted red (Figure 1.10). Larger capitals could also incorporate detailed painted motifs, usually Buddhist in

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[8] Ibid, xiv.

[9] Larsen and Sinding-Larsen, 39.

origin. The one pillar square room is the unit of spatial configuration within the building.[10] Larger buildings thus inhabit a forest of pillars dividing up the space and creating zones for living. Building forms were mostly comprised of a block with a courtyard interior. Living spaces would surround the courtyard and in larger buildings and central block could inhabit the courtyard. A large multi-framed window, called a *rabsel* window, occupied the central bay of the central block structure signifying the entrance (Figure 1.11). The roof tops were flat and created usable space above the living areas. Roof access was usually incorporated as a major means of egress. The traditional material of the roof, as well as flooring, was known as *arga*, a composition of clay and stones manually stamped into place using a tool called a *babdo*, in a ritual that involves a team of workers, stamping in unison, usually accompanied by song to resemble a workers' dance (Figures 1.12 and 1.13).[11] Just below the roof line is a feature that is reserved to Tibetan traditional architecture called the *pembey* frieze. This detail is a band that surrounds the top of the building wall and is constructed of thin tamarisk bush branches, or *pembey*, cut to about half a meter, and placed to protrude out perpendicularly from the wall axis (Figure 1.14).[12] This band can vary in height to about a meter depending on the significance of the building and provides a horizontal accentuation of a predominantly vertical plane of the masonry wall. It is usually found on monastic and some traditional government buildings and can be adorned with golden medallions of Buddhist icons (Figure 1.14). Another feature of Tibetan monastic architecture are the *tuk* banners made of yak hair and *gyeltsen* victory banners

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[10] Larsen and Sinding-Larsen, *The Lhasa Atlas,* 1.

[11] Larsen and Sinding-Larsen, *The Lhasa Atlas,* 7.

[12] Andre Alexander and Matthew Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa: Tibetan Buddhist Architecture from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* (Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 24.

that are affixed to the roof and usually adorn corners of the building or mark the main entry façade (Figure 1.15).[13] What has just been described here is the essential form of traditional Tibetan architectural structures that defined the urban construction of Lhasa up until the mid-20th century. After that, the buildings, layout, purpose and meaning of Lhasa would be dramatically altered.

Weigai and the Need for Inter-Urban Protections and Preservation

In the mid 1990s a non-governmental organization (NGO), the Tibet Heritage Fund, was formed to address issues of building degradation and deterioration of residential life being voiced by the inhabitants of the Barkor. After Tibet was occupied by the Chinese government in 1959, all buildings were claimed for the state and most were transformed from private residences to low cost, subsidized housing.[14] Buildings decayed rapidly due to lack of state funding for maintenance as well as the loss of private initiative for upkeep.[15] Lower rents attracted the poor from the countryside as wealthier families moved out. Buildings that were originally designed for single family use were being occupied as multi-family units. Overcrowded slum conditions resulted as many buildings fell into deep disrepair. In the 1990s the Chinese government began to implement a policy that dealt with dense city center populations and rapidly declining housing

[13] Ibid, 115.

[14] Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction: the Case of Old Lhasa, Tibet China," in *Poverty Reduction That Works: Experience of Scaling up Development Success* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 55-65, 55.

[15] Ibid.

known as *Weigai*.[16] The solution enforced by this policy saw the relocation of inner city residents to the outskirts while historically significant buildings were demolished and redeveloped. This policy was being implemented all over the PRC and especially affected the historic hutong neighborhoods in Beijing.[17] Residents who were moved outside of the city faced decreased living spaces. Property redevelopment companies placed former residents in minimally adequate housing, usually outside the city far away from their normal lives.[18] The loss of homes whether historic in origin or more recently constructed, impacted the culture of the residents. *Weigai* was not restricted to Beijing and also found its way into Lhasa redevelopment campaigns. While engaged in field work during the early to mid-1990s, members of the Tibet Heritage Fund were alerted to the concerns of inhabitants in the Old Town quarter of the Barkor. The Tibet Heritage Fund approach to preservation focused not just on buildings but also more importantly on the people inhabiting them.

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[16] Andre Alexander et al., "Beijing Hutong Conservation Plan: The Future of Old Beijing and the Conflict between Modernization and Preservation" (Berlin: Tibet Heritage Fund International, 2004), 21.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Andre Alexander et al., "Beijing Hutong Conservation Plan: The Future of Old Beijing and the Conflict between Modernization and Preservation," 21.

Chapter Two

The Tibet Heritage Fund

The 1980s to 1990s were a predominantly progressive time in China, and subsequently Tibet. However, progress did not seem to include architectural preservation. The few surviving traditional Tibetan buildings in Lhasa continued to decay and fall into disrepair after the destructive years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in Tibet. Demolition and removal by the CCP government was occurring all over the PRC under the Weigai policy of "reforming dangerous old buildings".[19] In 1991 a massive redevelopment campaign began with systematic demolition of historic buildings in Lhasa.[20] Only major historical buildings such as the Potala, Jokhang and Norbulingka were considered for restoration.[21] Minor buildings such as residential and smaller religious sites were left to the wrecking ball. During this time period, in 1987, Andre Alexander first visited Lhasa and was enamored with the architecture, the culture and the people he found in the central old town district of the former Tibetan capital city. A visit to the Jokhang imprinted within him the austerity and the beauty of Tibetan traditional architecture. Also during that visit, he witnessed the restoration and revivification of Ganden monastery to the east of Lhasa and was impressed by the communal, voluntary efforts that local Tibetans put into rebuilding this complex multi-structured monastic complex.[22]

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[19] Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction: the Case of Old Lhasa, Tibet China," in *Poverty Reduction That Works: Experience of Scaling up Development Success* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 55-65, 55.

[20] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa*, 11

[21] Ibid.

[22] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House: Typology of an Endangered Species* (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2019), 16.

The Aufschnaiter Map

Due to the riots of 1988 and government imposed martial law in 1989, Alexander was unable to return to Lhasa until 1993 at which time he was determined to begin documenting the few surviving historic buildings in an effort to form a campaign to save them from further demolition. During this interim period in 1991, Alexander obtained the 1948 Peter Aufschnaiter map of Lhasa and used this as the basis of his research into the historic buildings still left extant in Lhasa (Figure 2.1).[23] The Aufschnaiter map is one of the most thorough resources that accurately document the structural urban configuration of the historic Lhasa city core that had existed from the 17th century CE to the early 20th century CE, prior to PLA reconfiguration, expansion and decimation. The map defines the building footprint of 869 individual built features. Each feature is identified in Tibetan language Ume script[24] and numbered and attributed to one of nine zones assigned to traditional neighborhoods that existed at the time. Each neighborhood zone is given a letter from the Tibetan alphabet so that each building can be identified by zone + building number + building title. For example the Pomdatsang aristocratic residence which is currently extant in the southeast edge of the Barkor route is identified on the Aufschnaiter map as Ca01 (Figure 2.2).[25] For Alexander, the Aufschnaiter map was a Rosetta Stone for interpreting the intricate and detailed urban fabric of the original city. With the help of Tibetan scholar Tsewang Norbu in Berlin, the map was translated to Wylie, the standard

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[23] Ibid.

[24] http://subjects.kmaps.virginia.edu/features/7533.

[25] Traditional Tibetan buildings mentioned in this text will be accompanied with their Aufschnaiter number in parentheses.

transliteration scheme for Tibetan characters to Latin alphabet,[26] and served as the primary reference for forthcoming survey work in Lhasa.[27]

The Lhasa Historic City Archive

Alexander returned in 1993 to witness the demolition of the Surkhang aristocratic house in the southeast corner of the central Barkor district.[28] Convinced that the Chinese government was intending to demolish much of the historic buildings in the Old Town core of Lhasa, Alexander and colleague Andrew Brannan formed the Lhasa Historic City Archive (LHCA) project to begin documenting existing historic buildings in an official survey.[29] Shortly after in 1994, Portuguese artist Pimpim de Azevedo joined the effort to form a partnership that would last many years beyond the LHCA. Fieldwork needed to be done quickly and concisely as buildings were being torn down at a rapid pace at this time. A catalogue was created for documenting each building into which recorded information included photographs and interviews with residents, conditions and a brief history description.[30] The LHCA project lasted from 1993-95, during which time the Shol village at the foot of the Potala, that once housed and served Tibetans that worked directly with the Dalai Lama governments, was partially razed amongst other buildings in the city core. An estimated average of 35 buildings per year were

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[26] http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/#!essay=/thl/ewts/

[27] Alexander André et al., *The Lhasa House*, 16.

[28] Alexander André et al., *The Lhasa House*, 17.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 18.

being demolished between 1993-98.[31] The LHCA survey and subsequent catalog of historic structures in Lhasa would provide the critical base layer of information for an even more ambitious project soon to come.[32]

The LHCA was not the first survey in Lhasa and built itself upon previous work, most notably by Tibetan archaeologist Sonam Wandu who in 1985 organized survey missions to compile documentation of important surviving historic buildings all over Tibet that survived the Cultural Revolution resulting in the County Cultural Relics Inventory (pinyin. *Xian Wenwu Zhi*).[33] Another similar documentation effort was commissioned in 1979 by the 10th Panchen Lama and carried out by Tibetan architect Minyak Chokyi Gyentsen and the Tibet Architecture Design Institute in Lhasa to specifically study and document traditional Tibetan architecture. An extremely thorough and detailed publication of the architecture of the Potala, published by Xizang Press in 1999, complete with numerous scaled architectural drawings was released as a result of these efforts.[34] In 1995, a documentation effort similar to the LHCA, identified as the Lhasa Historical City Atlas (not to be confused with the Archive) was executed by the Network for University Cooperation Tibet-Norway directed by Knud Larsen and Amund Sinding-Larsen and included a scholar and student exchange program to engage in survey field work.[35] The area of focus was mainly the historic core inside the Lingkor, the traditional, larger circumambulation

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[31] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project* (Berlin: Tibet Heritage Fund, 1998), 6.

[32] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 385-395. See the Appendix for "Tabular Data of Historic Lhasa Houses."

[33] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 11.

[34] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 23.

[35] Larsen and Sinding-Larsen, 20

route around the Old City including both Marpo Ri and Chakpo Ri to the west and the Barkor and immediate traditional neighborhoods to the east as defined by the Aufschnaiter map.[36] The main effort took place on the ground in Lhasa in 1996 and included assistance from the LHCA survey team who provided much of the guidance, support and coordination for building documentation.[37] The fruits of this survey went into the creation of a building database for Lhasa which included 330 entries for secular and religious buildings. The directors described their efforts as "emergency archaeology" as they too had to face rapid, impending demolition actively taking place in Lhasa at the time.[38] The information harvested from the Atlas project was made available to the public through the publication of the Lhasa Atlas (Shambala, 2001), one of the most valuable resources on Tibetan architectural taxonomies, construction, details and urban composition of Lhasa available today. The Atlas includes several historic maps as well as newly drawn digitally based GIS maps, urban analysis maps and graphics and detailed scale architectural plans, sections and elevations of various historic buildings encountered during the survey (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). The end of the 90s and the 20th century resulted in a plethora of survey data and resource information vital to the preservation record of much of Lhasa's historic built environment.

The Foundation of the Tibet Heritage Fund

By 1996, Andre Alexander came to the realization that an academic survey effort was not going to save buildings or halt the rampant destruction of Lhasa's historic fabric for which he

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid, 10. Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 20.

[38] Larsen and Sinding-Larsen, 9.

bore witness. The LHCA team had begun to network inside and outside of Lhasa to gain an understanding of the potential for physical preservation to take place. Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo presented the detailed work of the LHCA to the 7th International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) forum to alert the Tibetan scholarly community of the destruction that was transpiring in Lhasa.[39] Alexander had also notified UNESCO of the extent to which Lhasa was losing buildings, a note that would garner much notice from the organization especially after recently admitting the Potala into the status of a World Heritage Site, and the Jokhang soon to follow.[40] 1996 was the most pivotal year for Alexander and de Azevedo's efforts as they formed the Tibet Heritage Fund (THF) as an officially recognized non-governmental organization (NGO) with the sole purpose of saving buildings in Lhasa and supporting native Tibetan cultural heritage. The two had appealed to the local Lhasa municipality government to intervene in preservation efforts, and Lobsang Gyentsen, mayor of Lhasa at the time, responded favorably with official consent to the creation of the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group whose purpose was to reverse decay of Lhasa's urban fabric with a focus on all structures, residential and religious, large and small.[41] One of the first, and possibly most essential, tasks at hand was to shift construction responsibility away from the governmental Lhasa Construction Bureau (LCB), who had little to no knowledge of traditional Tibetan construction and allocate it directly to the Lhasa Cultural Relics Bureau (LCRB), lead by An

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[39] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 11.

[40] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 17. https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/2507/.

[41] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 11. Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 18.

Li.[42] The THF collaborated with the LCRB to lobby for new conservation guidelines including stronger obligations from residents who became empowered in the decision making process for preservation efforts.[43] Both Mayor Gyentsen and An Li worked together to get official approval to allow the THF to direct and coordinate all reconstruction efforts for historical buildings in Lhasa under the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group[44]. Andre Alexander had already begun to gather together the older craftsmen with knowledge of traditional building techniques during his survey work with the LHCA and he was ready when it came to putting together a team of master builders, lead by renowned Tibetan master builder Pala Migmar-la, who built many of the early 20th century traditional buildings in Lhasa.[45] Migmar with his master student Loya assessed building needs, advised on materials and tools needed to restore buildings to traditional conditions necessary for preserving the history and heritage of Lhasa architecture.[46]

The Initial Principles of Humane Preservation

The THF quickly grew into a multi-national, multi-institutional effort as the project leaders appealed to many organizations for support. Main support came from inside the PRC including the National Cultural Relics Ministry, Religious Affairs Department, the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences in Lhasa as well as outside the PRC from The Trace Foundation, Heather Stoddard and the Shalu Association, the aforementioned Norway-Tibet University Network,

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[42] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 21.

[43] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report (Tibet heritage fund, 1999), https://www.asianart.com/associations/lhasa_restoration/report99/index.html, 6.

[44] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 11, 21. Ibid.

[45] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 21.

[46] Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 12.

Trondheim University of Science and Technology and the German Embassy in Beijing.[47] The main pillars of the THF intentions are inspirational to humane practices of architectural preservation[48]:

- Restoration in traditional style
- Supervision of construction efforts by older craft masters who pass their knowledge on to new Tibetan craftspeople
- Skills training workshops to teach Tibetans new building skills such as plumbing, electrical, concrete an surveying
- Improve and upgrade historic, traditional Tibetan buildings with modern convenience of water, sanitation and electricity
- Above all else this campaign would include community participation from local Tibetan residents directly affected by preservation and restoration

The principles by which these pillars were to be followed included:[49]

- Cooperation for sustainable, participatory and equitable development

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[47] Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 7. Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 19.

[48]Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 3. Alexander, Andre, Pimpim de Azevedo, Lundup Dorje, and An Li. "Upgrading of Housing as Strategy for Poverty Reduction: the Case of Old Lhasa." Berlin: Tibet Heritage Fund, n.d., 4

[49] http://tibetheritagefund.org.

- Focus on housing, vocational training, ecological architecture, infrastructure and low-income communities
- Conservation of buildings and traditional building technologies
- Maximum retention of historic elements and materials
- Priority on livability where owners/occupants participate in planning process

By 1998 the THF had worked with local Lhasa government leaders to reverse the destruction carried out as a result of *Weigai* policy in the central historic core of Lhasa and devote its energies to more progressive preservation policy planning.[50] Instead of replacing older, historic buildings with reconstruction, the traditional architecture of Lhasa would survive with community-based restoration.[51] The THF also helped to implement strategies for preserving the traditional built environment within the Old City such as the re-establishment of building heights around the Barkor neighborhood so that no roof could be taller than the golden roofs of the Jokhang, and existing roofs were actually lowered to follow these rules which had previously existed in traditional Lhasa.[52]

The Influences Behind THF Preservation Practice

Two major precedents influenced the principles by which the THF was founded. Andre Alexander was impressed with the model of *Behutsame Stadterneuerung*, or "careful urban

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[50] Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction," 55.

[51] Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 3.

[52] Ibid.

renewal", taking place in his native Germany in the Kreuzberg district of (West) Berlin.[53] Developed by German architect, Hardt-Waltherr Hamer in response to redevelopment taking place in post-war Berlin, "careful urban renewal" was guided by "12 principles of urban renewal."[54] Key actions of this preservation policy that were major influencers on the THF included:[55]

- preservation of historic areas in their contemporary urban context
- infrastructural needs based on actual needs of residents
- local resident input with planning officials.
- The division of larger districts in Kreuzberg into conservation zones for emphasis on micro-level improvements of residential areas

The other major influence on the THF came from the principles of living cities as laid out in the 1987 Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas produced by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites).[56] This document was produced as an addendum to the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, more widely known as the ICOMOS Venice Charter of 1964, with a distinct focus on

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[53] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 46.

[54] https://deu.archinform.net/stich/544.htm.

[55] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 46.

[56] Ibid, 47.

humane preservation techniques in the renewal of historic urban areas.[57] The guiding policies of this document served as the major direction the THF would take on the ground in Lhasa. The Charter identified cities as "historic documents" that deserved intensive and careful preservation of its "cultural properties", both tangible and intangible.[58] It defines the recognition of urban relationships, between built and open spaces, urban and extra-urban with policies that support the sustainability of urban authenticity, through multidisciplinary policy making where participation of local residents directly affected by urban renewal have a distinct participation and acknowledged input in the planning processes.[59] Emphasis on local resident participation is crucial to the guidelines in the Charter as they are the active players in the living history of towns and cities. To engage residents in urban renewal areas, the Charter mandates the transparency of conservation plans that are shaped and supported directly by residents.[60] General information programs should be set up to inform and encourage residents to participate with added incentives of specialized training to involve residents direct in the renewal processes.[61] Renewal should include improvements for public service facilities as well as housing but with respect and minimal impact to existing spatial layouts. To support pre-existing, spatial, urban heritage, the Charter mandates that existing historic conditions be thoroughly documented through survey as well as archaeological investigation providing a baseline understanding the historical

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[57] ICOMOS, "Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas (Washington Charter 1987)" (International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1987), https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/towns_e.pdf.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid, 2.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid, 2-3.

significance of the urban area under consideration of preservation.[62] The principles and guidelines of "careful urban renewal" in both Behutsame Stadterneuerung and the ICOMOS Charter are quite evident in the actual practices in which the THF engaged in the preservation of historic buildings and urban cultural life in Lhasa in the late 1990s.

76 Houses

As stated on the front page of the TibetHeritageFund.org website, the THF "is an international non-profit organization committed to preservation of architectural heritage in general and Tibetan heritage in particular, and to the improvement of the lives of people living in traditional and historic settlements through sustainable development … designed primarily to benefit the local residents."[63] Through every step of their process, from the early days of survey to the latter efforts of active preservation, the people that are impacted the most, the local residents, have always been a priority. In 1997, the THF identified 76 buildings of historical and cultural significance in Old Town Lhasa that they listed as priority preservation landmarks with the Lhasa City Cultural Relics Bureau (Figure 2.11).[64] The THF requested that these buildings be given protected status and helped develop an official government plaque that was placed on each of these structures.[65] Conservation zones were then planned for the intention of immediate restoration action coordinated and carried out by the THF. With government offices actively

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[62] Ibid, 3.

[63] http://tibetheritagefund.org.

[64] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 12. Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 31. http://tibetheritagefund.org.

[65] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 32.

supporting and encouraging preservation in Lhasa, a major shift in policy had come to the Tibetan city.

Saving the Barkor Neighborhood

After forming constructive partnerships with local government entities in Lhasa the THF formed the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group with the help of the Lhasa Cultural Relics Office and chaired by Lhasa mayor Lobsang Gyentsen with the intent purpose to reverse decay of Lhasa's urban fabric. This included all buildings both residential and religious, both big and small, not just major religious and official buildings, as was the focus of past government efforts[66]. This was a group that organized active restoration of historic buildings in Lhasa under the guiding principles of humane preservation set out in the ICOMOS Charter. The primary target for restoration was the historic urban core of Lhasa identified as the Barkor neighborhood. The Barkor is the circumambulation route that encircles the oldest part of Lhasa including the buildings of the Jokhang Tsuklakhang complex. In Lhasa there are three major kora, or circumambulation routes that relate directly to the Jowo Buddha Chapel, or Jowo Lhakhang, hence Jokhang, that houses the most venerated and holy of Tibetan Buddhist statues (Figure 1.5). The three kora circumambulation routes radiate outward from the Nangkor route immediate to the Jowo Buddha image within the Jokhang Tsuklakhang, to the Barkor that encircles the Jokhang Tsuklakhang complex and other religious and secular residences adjacent to the west, to the Lingkor which encircles the entire historic quarter of the city as well as Chakpo-Ri and

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[66] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 11. Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 6.

Marpo-Ri upon which sits the entire Potala complex (Figure 1.6).[67] The buildings encircled by the Barkor kora route are some of the oldest extant structures in the entire Kyichu Valley if not in all of Lhasa, some dating back to the era of Songtsen Gampo ca. 7th century CE. In line with the ICOMOS Charter, the THF chose an initial, pilot conservation area in the southeast corner of the Barkor neighborhood known as the *Oedepug* zone (Figure 2.5).[68] When Pimpim de Azevdeo surveyed these buildings in 1997 she found a mix of mostly aristocratic residential houses including the former site of the Surkhang house whose destruction inspired Andre Alexander to mobilize preservation efforts in Lhasa in 1993.[69] Traditional use of the majority of these buildings involved living spaces in the upper floors while lower floors were used to house livestock and/or incorporate shops, mainly responding to the main market street of the Barkor kora route.[70] After buildings were nationalized in 1959, residences were converted to public housing which redefined the use of these structures from single family to multiple family dwellings.[71] Decay and dilapidation set in over the decades of these repurposed buildings.

The Modern Dilemma of Traditional Preservation

Old buildings that housed and maintained traditional lifestyles were not equipped to handle modern life. One of the most overwhelming catalysts of decay in these buildings resulted from dampness that set into the lower floor structures due to lack of maintenance and over-use of

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[67] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 28. Larsen and Sinding-Larsen, *The Lhasa Atlas,* 15.

[68] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 48.

[69] Ibid, 50.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

facilities that were not built to accommodate the number of residents now occupying these buildings. Toilet areas were one of the main causes of decay from dampness.[72] The traditional Tibetan toilet in these multi-storey structures was a shaft type space incorporated into the house layout. A simple hole provided access to the shaft which filled up over time. With increased use, these shafts became overused producing an overabundance of damp conditions that would seep through the walls into living spaces. To make matters worse, the traditional *arga* roof was not maintained and would cause leaks from above as roof repairs were made using modern materials that were not as flexible or adaptive as traditional materials.[73] As windows and doors were closed off creating makeshift conditions in the transition of accommodating more people in smaller spaces, air was prevented from circulating throughout structures to dry out spaces as they were originally designed to do.[74] These conditions created structurally unsafe buildings with insufficient sanitary facilities encouraging governmental action to simply tear these buildings down and replace them with new structures. As builders cut corners to save money, new structures tended to be built cheaply with thinner walls and poorly formed concrete with designs that were substandard to human living conditions.[75] Older housing would include larger courtyard spaces for adequate lighting and air circulation necessary for maintaining interior conditions. Newer housing had smaller courtyards to accommodate increased numbers of rooms for living space with more numbers of storeys for taller buildings.[76] Rents were also much more

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[72] Ibid, 51.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid, 53.

[75] Ibid, 52.

[76] Ibid.

expensive for residents moving into newly constructed housing after their historic, older housing had been torn down.[77] Older residents who had lived in these buildings for many years preferred to keep the historic structure despite the decay.[78]

To address conditions of severe decay and degradation of living conditions, the THF not only needed to garner local government support, but also needed to enlist the support of residents themselves. Intrinsic to subsidized housing is the displacement of residents from ownership of their own homes creating an atmosphere of apathy towards not only owning their physical house but also owning up to sustaining living conditions through resident maintenance. Without owner investment in maintenance of their living spaces, decay and dilapidation are free to run rampant through historic urban environments. Thus, resident inclusion in the planning and preservation processes was vital to the mission of the THF. The THF connected with the Neighborhood Community Office to engage local residents as a link between government and community involvement.[79]

The Oedepug Conservation Zone

With all the support they needed the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group dove into the *Oedupug* Conservation Zone and began a program of intensive restoration. The THF held community programs of restoration workshops where masters under the guidance of Pala

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Lubumshar House survey of residents by The Tibet and Himalayan Digital Library in 2001 recorded that a woman who grew up in that house wanted to stay despite complete dilapidation of walls, and having the house used as soldiers' barracks at one point.

[79] Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction," 59.

Migma-la trained an army of apprentices in a variety of traditional skills including carpentry, masonry and mural conservation.[80] New skills included electrical, water and sanitation infrastructure. A collaboration of volunteer architects including John Harrison, Yutaka Hirako and Ken Okuma taught project management and architectural rendering and design.[81] Funding came from a variety of international sources such as the Trace Foundation, Ford Foundation, the Canada Fund and the German Embassy in Beijing. The restoration program was held at the Tadongshar house to the east of the Meru Nyingba monastic complex in the northern section of the *Oedepug* Conservation Zone (Figure 2.5).[82] Traditional improvements that were typical of most that were carried out on historic Lhasa houses included:[83]

- Replacement of rotten timber pillars in the interior structure
- Masonry walls renewed with traditional masonry techniques
- Renewed *arga* roof
- Renewed polished black frames around windows and doors
- Traditional carpentry on window and door structures
- toilet shafts renewed

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[80] Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 15-21.

[81] Ibid, 20.

[82] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 68.

[83] Ibid, 68-75.

Including incorporation of more modern improvements such as:[84]

- Installation of solar showers
- Tiled toilet areas
- Septic tanks fitted in some cases
- Water lines installed under city streets to service all *Oedepug* buildings
- Electrical lines either renewed or properly installed in older buildings

Meru Nyingba

Though the original focus of the THF was the improvement of residential buildings to improve Lhasa resident lives, efforts also branched out into some religious buildings, especially since many had been converted to multi-family homes, but also in response to multiple requests from the Religious Affairs Department.[85] The Meru Nyingba monastic complex, or *gompa*, was a hallmark of religious building restoration (Figure2.6). Its layout follows the typical dratsang design of a central four-storey block flanked on three sides by two-storey service and dormitory wings with a common courtyard, similar to nearby monastic complexes like Shide, Tengyeling and Tsoemonling (Figure 2.7).[86] It is an example of how the THF could adapt their preservation motives to include all buildings of Tibetan heritage, not just residential. Meru Nyingba has purported origins from the time of Songtsen Gampo, ca. 7th century CE. Located adjacent to the eastern side of the Jokhang Tsuklakhang complex along the northern edge of the Oedepug

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 14.

[86] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 118.

Conservation Zone, Meru Nyingba grew organically over the centuries, mostly from the 17th to 19th centuries CE. This *gompa* is a rare Tibetan monastic complex that incorporates three separate *lhakhangs*, or temples, representing different sects of Tibetan Buddhism. The Dzambala Lhakhang, located on the ground floor of the current main entrance alley on the western wing, dates to the 9th c. CE and is one of the earliest buildings at Meru Nyingba.[87] Above the Dzambala Lhakhang in the western wing is the shrine to the protector deity Palgon Dramchi, maintained by the Gongkar Choede monastery in Lhoka according to Sakya tradition.[88] The main central building block that houses the *dukhang*, or main meeting hall of the monks, was built to establish an urban location for the Nechung Oracle monks by the 5th Dalai Lama in the 17th c. and thus is associated with the Gelugpa tradition.[89] Meru Nyingba has established itself as a multi-faceted Tibetan Buddhist heritage resource in Lhasa's built environment.

When Andre Alexander first visited the Meru Nyingba site in the early 1980s he found this venerable *gompa* in a mundane state of decay, far removed from its original intentions. The ground floor rooms had been converted to livestock stables, the *dukhang* of the main central block building was a granary and the large outside courtyard was filled with hay.[90] Shortly after the PRC occupied Lhasa in 1959, Meru Nyingba had been closed down. Though it was heavily vandalized during the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the structure remained basically intact. Early restoration efforts were made in the early 1980s, carried out by Drepung and Gongkar Choede

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[87] Ibid, 105. Alexander André and Mathew Akester, *Lhasa Old City: Vol. II: A Clear Lamp Illuminating the Significance and Origin of Historic Buildings and Monuments in Lhasa Barkor Street* (S.l.: Tibet Heritage Fund, 1999), 37.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid. Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa*, 105.

[90] Ibid.

monasteries, but only stabilized enough for life to continue within the complex as religious functions were returned to Meru Nyingba, though within the context of shared public housing.[91] In the late 90s the THF surveyed the site for the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group to commit to a full restoration. In 1999 Meru Nyingba was fully restored to its former glory and the details of the process show the attention to which the THF gave not only to the residential function of the complex, as with other buildings in the Oedepug Conservation Zone, but more importantly to the religious details imbued within Tibetan life that make this building an important document to Tibetan Buddhist culture.

As with the restorations of residential buildings in the *Oedepug* zone, the timber and masonry structures were repaired and restored, leaving as much of the original structural material as possible and replacing any material with traditional material using traditional building techniques from trained masters. A new *arga* roof was stamped in place with the addition of a new drainage system to prevent any further rot and decay. The difference between Meru Nyingba, and other religious buildings that are also used as residential buildings, is the amount and intensity of detail found throughout the complex. Tibetan temples, shrines and other religious spaces are filled with murals, carvings, textiles and artwork depicting the deities, protectors and venerated scholars and lamas of Tibetan Buddhism. Every space is full of vibrant colors with red being the dominant hue. During the dark years of the 1960s, many of the murals inside Meru Nyingba were painted over and desecrated. One of the main tasks of the THF in rebuilding the traditional environment of Meru Nyingba was the restoration and preservation of its artwork. With the help of master Tsewang Dorje as well as renowned mural restoration artist

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[91] Ibid.

Uli Eltgen, the murals were painstakingly renewed using traditional mineral based paints and coloring materials (Figures 2.8).[92] In some cases murals were carefully revealed underneath swaths of paint applied in the 1960s, otherwise murals were recreated according to the records held by the resident monks.[93] These murals would be extremely important in restoring the religious function of displaying Buddhist narratives and iconography expressed on the walls of Meru Nyingba to hundreds of pilgrims that circumambulate the central *dukhang*, Dzambala chapel and other pilgrimage spaces.

An architectural feature commonly found on significant Tibetan religious buildings but usually absent in residential buildings is the *pembey* frieze found at the top of the exterior walls as a crowning feature just under the parapet (Figure 2.9). It is created from stripped tamarisk branches, or *pembey (*Tib. *span bad)*, painted maroon and protruding perpendicularly from the main wall.[94] The THF committed extensive repairs to restore the frieze including removing the shrapnel lodged in the branches from the 1959 shelling of Lhasa by the PRC upon occupation of the city.[95] Religious features such as gyaltsen banners were reconstructed, gold medallions recast, carved timber pillars and a plethora of other structural adornments were either restored or replaced in order to preserve and reanimate the traditions that were fostered by Meru Nyingba. One other detail that illustrates the THF's commitment to preserving Tibetan cultural heritage within its built environment at Meru Nyingba is the presence of a secret room found in the west wing adjacent to the Dzambala Lhakhang. When looking at the plan of the Meru Nyingba

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[92] Alexander and de Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 15,21.

[93] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa,* 119.

[94] Ibid, 24.

[95] Ibid, 115.

ground floor, a very noticeable dark hole appears in this area (Figure 2.10). There are no windows, doors or other portals indicated on any plan for this space because there are none in reality. This space is rumored to be the location of a boulder that was recognized as an auspicious feature by the ancient Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo. This natural feature was significant in the siting of the Jokhang as well as the earliest buildings of Meru Nyingba. The THF determined that spaces around the boulder were filled with smaller rocks to create a solid room.[96] Out of respect for the importance of this space and its venerated contents, the room was left unopened and untouched and remains that way today.[97] The restoration of a Tibetan building is never a merely practical venture and must include attention and respect for the traditions, the history and the heritage that make up Tibetan culture.

World Heritage

By the end of the 20th century, the Tibet Heritage Fund had dramatically altered the pattern of destruction being wrought upon traditional Tibetan architecture in the former capital city of Lhasa. Instead of redevelopment, the THF was fostering restoration for the Tibetan people in support of improving local resident life and cultural heritage, and not preservation for a "tourist theme park."[98] After successfully restoring and halting the destruction of historic buildings in the Oedepug Conservation Zone as well as the intensive preservation and restoration of the Meru Nyingba monastic complex, the THF expanded their conservation zone planning to

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[96] Ibid, 107.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction," 5. Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 50.

other historic urban areas immediate to the core Barkor neighborhood to include all of the structures in the planned 76 building protection zone.[99] Zones were formed to the north, east and south of the Barkor to include a mix of traditional residential as well as monastic sites in desperate need of restoration (Figure 2.11). 1999 was a pivotal year not only for the THF, but for Tibetan cultural recognition by the Chinese government. With increased interest in Tibetan culture and the TAR, Beijing nominated the Jokhang Tsuklakhang as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to be listed with the Potala, which had previously been listed in the early 90s.[100] This listing turned the PRC focus of interest in *minzu* cultures towards Lhasa with increased funding for the type of restoration efforts to which the Tibet Heritage Fund was committing to Tibetan architectural preservation. UNESCO had specifically praised the THF in the following statement:

> for its holistic approach to conservation. The project has been systematically undertaken, with an urban-scale conservation plan providing the framework for restoration of specific buildings. The restoration has provided an opportunity to revive traditional construction and restoration techniques, support experienced artisans, and strengthen community pride in cultural traditions and skills.[101]

The End of the Beginning

During this time, the 76 Houses list of protected structures had been expanded to 93 buildings. Twenty buildings inside Lhasa had been completely restored (Figure 2.12).[102] Three hundred artisans had been trained by the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group vocational

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[99] Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 4-7. Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 84-85.

[100] Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 6.

[101] Alexander and Akester, *The Temples of Lhasa*,,12. UNESCO Regional Unit for Social and Human Sciences in Asia and the Pacific, dated 2 September 2004.

[102] http://tibetheritagefund.org.

training program, creating skilled workers who were finding employment inside and outside the city.[103] The restoration was largely being funded by external sources so it was costing very little for the Chinese government to have urban areas improved and infrastructure upgraded. Work was also expanding outside of Lhasa and the TAR into other areas of China as well as Mongolia and into Himalayan cultural areas of India, especially in the capital city of Leh, Ladakh. One ambitious project involved the restoration of hutong alleys in Beijing which were under threat of demolition despite being the sites of some of the most historically significant, traditional Chinese urban culture. Also in 1999, the Cultural Relics Bureau and the Lhasa Planning Office both agreed to a five year preservation program being proposed by the THF.[104] The THF was busy drafting a master plan that had included:

- Urgent repairs to prevent further damage
- Formation of Conservation Zones
- Improvements to city infrastructure
- Continuation of vocational training program

Everything seemed in place as great progress was being made and partnerships were being strengthened between the THF, the local government and more importantly with the local residents whose lives were directly affected by preservation. However, in 2000 the CCP government chose to surreptitiously shutdown the activities of the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group and expelled the Tibet Heritage Fund out of Lhasa. Reasons for the action are

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[103] Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction," 58.

[104] Ibid.

not extremely clear, but it was rumored that the PRC did not look favorably upon the congregation of native Tibetans for organized activities that were not completely supervised by Chinese government authorities.[105] This move was most likely founded in other, more political and economic motives that the PRC was planning for the near future that would radically shift the focus of its attitudes towards industry and the TAR. This industrial shift would put the traditional Tibetan built environment as well as Tibetan culture at the center of economic aspirations for the TAR.

[105] Interview with Andre Alexander at IATS X, 2003.

Chapter Three

The Theater of Tourism in Tibet

To say that the ousting of the THF from Lhasa was a huge and unexpected disappointment would be one of the biggest understatements of the century. All seemed well, and many disparate groups came together to benefit from a sincerely humane program of architectural cultural heritage preservation. The halting of the Lhasa Old City Protection Working Group meant that further restoration efforts may not have had the welfare and interest of the residential communities as prioritized as the THF had intended. It was also unclear if restoration would continue. Even more drastic was that the maintenance necessary for newly restored traditional architecture was not being allowed to proceed. A sustained maintenance program to monitor, adjust and improve traditionally built structures over time was crucial to the planning and restoration of Tibetan buildings as new masonry settles and new timber frames adjust to their newly constructed environment. Why did THF operations have to come to such a sudden halt? Why was the Tibet Heritage Fund ousted from Tibet after making a positive and lasting impact on the buildings of historic Lhasa? What was to become of historic Lhasa? These questions do not have clear answers as the reasons given were not made public nor were they clearly communicated to the Tibet Heritage Fund. However, the motives for the Chinese government's sudden change in official attitudes towards restoration for the people, by the people, may be understood in the policies that began to emerge in the early 21st century that would not only define the role of historic architecture for Tibet, but for most historic Chinese buildings.

Early Chinese Policies on Tourism

Tourism has been a driving force for policy in all Chinese regions including, and especially, in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party commenced what was recognized as the "second revolution" shifting emphasis from political struggles to economic reconstruction. [106] At the 3rd Plenary of the 11th Congress in 1978, Chairman Deng Xiaopeng's economic reform and open policies focused on the development of light industries with greater emphasis on putting tourism at the forefront of Chinese economic policies.[107] Key to tourism would be a massive campaign of urban design and construction throughout China to accommodate the machinery of tourism. This shift in attention to the urban built environment would be critical to architectural preservation and destruction practices. The end of the 1970s saw the institution of tourism beginning to take root with increased tourism training programs, development of tourism routes and the construction of star rated hotels in major Chinese cities.[108] By the mid 1980s the PRC allowed tourism into the TAR and other western regions. Tourism was seen as key to the economic development of these regions through the increase in tertiary industries.[109] A diversity of cultural heritages in China would take center stage as the primary attraction to potential tourist destinations throughout China's territories.

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[106] Honggen Xiao, "The Discourse of Power: Deng Xiaoping and Tourism Development in China," *Tourism Management* 27, no. 5 (2006): pp. 803-814, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.05.014, 803.

[107] Ibid, 811.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ashild Kolås, *Tourism and Tibetan Culture in Transition: A Place Called Shangrila* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1.

A series of policies intended to support cultural preservation began to roll out over the 1980s to 90s. In 1982, the Heritage Conservation Act was put in place to emphasize the role of historic sites and structures in support of disparate Chinese cultures.

From Article 2(i)-(v):

> those ancient cultural sites , ancient tombs, ancient buildings and architecture, cavern temples and rock engravings, .. those valuable artworks and handicrafts representative of different eras in Chinese history ...
>
> ... those representative objects which reflect the different eras and different ethnic social systems ...[110]

The 20 Point Statement to the Chinese National Congress in 1990 encouraged Chinese ethnic cultures to find ways of making money from their heritage and tourism planners to "make culture pay" through the intended purpose 'to preserve and conserve ancient buildings and fragile documents and to unearth buried artifacts …'[111] In 1992 Jiang Zemin's report of the 14th National Congress echoed this drive by realizing that economic development in ethnic regions would also result in greater economic progress for China as a whole.[112] The TAR would directly be affected by increased subsidization and investment as a result of this succession on tourism policy making and by 1994 the "Aid Tibet" proposal at the Third national Work Forum on Tibet would pour billions of RMB specifically into construction projects throughout Tibet.[113] Just as the Tibet Heritage Fund emerged on the scene in Lhasa, the "5 Year Plan" to develop tourism in

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[110] Trevor H.B. Sofield and Fung Mei Li, "Tourism Development and Cultural Policies in China," *Annals of Tourism Research* 25, no. 2 (1998): pp. 362-392, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383(97)00092-3, 371.

[111] Ibid, 373.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Emily T. Yeh, "Tropes of Indolence and the Cultural Politics of Development in Lhasa, Tibet," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no. 3 (2007): pp. 593-612, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2007.00565.x, 596.

Tibet commenced in 1996.[114] Perhaps the success of the THF over the next 4 years was due to the coalescence of tourism policies as they began to take shape, first more distinctly in mainland PRC and then evolving over time towards the western regions in the TAR? The actions of the THF seemed to have been in line with support of tourism development in Lhasa and other TAR locations, but yet the THF was ousted nonetheless. It would have appeared that humane preservation would have a purpose that was supportive of the bigger Chinese agenda of development in terms of nurturing a tourism industry in Tibet, but a policy would not be more directly defined until the very start of the 21st century. One policy in particular would affect the public consumption of Tibetan cultural heritage more than ever and become the catalyst for the Chinese government to take control of architectural preservation efforts throughout China.

Xibu Da Kaifa

Throughout the 1990s, China's wave of tourism policy development would put cultural heritage directly in the spotlight for public performance. China is a country that is home to many different cultures within a very large land mass. Tibetans are only one of 57 recognized ethnic minority or *xiaoshu minzu* cultures in comparison to the majority Han culture in China.[115] Tourism policy development in China began to focus upon not only the majority Han culture as a subject of tourist interest in the PRC but also the presentation of a diversity of *minzu* cultural heritages to potential tourists outside, and inside, China. Tibet is identified as the major ethnic culture of the West occupying the western fringes of the PRC as well as the Tibet Autonomous

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[114] Mary L. Cingcade, "Tourism and the Many Tibets : The Manufacture of Tibetan Tradition ," *China Information* 13, no. 1 (1998): pp. 1-24, https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203x9801300101, 2.

[115] Kolås, *Tourism and Tibetan Culture in Transition: A Place Called Shangrila* 79. Sofield and Li, "Tourism Development and Cultural Policies in China," 372.

Region. In 2000 Jiang Zemin launched the Western Development Strategy, or *Xibu Da Kaifa*, defined literally as "Great Opening of the West" that would radically transform the mysterious and remote regions of the TAR as a primary hotspot for tourists all over the world.[116] *Xibu Da Kaifa* was designed from the start to modernize and develop the Western regions of China to make them more easily accessible and attractive to travelers in China.[117] But it also had the stated motive to better integrate and raise the standard of living of China's minorities into Chinese culture, represented predominantly by Han culture.[118] To achieve an overhaul of the western regions, a massive construction and infrastructural improvement campaign was outlined during the 2001 Fourth Work Forum, only this time companies doing the work could be privatized rather than solely contracted to government agencies as in the earlier funded campaigns of the 90s.[119] Migrant workers imported into the TAR were the primary beneficiaries of subsidized funding. This trend decreased the need for local Tibetans and their traditional knowledge of constructing Tibetan buildings.[120] This would help to partially explain why the Tibet Heritage Fund's work directly with Tibetan locals as the primary workforce as well as beneficiary came to such an abrupt halt in early 2000. At this time as profits from tourism

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[116] Andrew Martin Fischer, *State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet: Challenges of Recent Economic Growth* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2009), xx. Jarmila Ptackova, Toni Huber, and Hermann Kreutzmann, "The Great Opening of the West Development Strategy and Its Impact on the Life and Livelihood of Tibetan Pastoralists Sedentarisation of Tibetan Pastoralists in Zeku County as a Result of Implementation of Socioeconomic and Environmental Development Projects in Qinghai Province, P.R. China" (dissertation, n.d.), 26.

[117] Ptackova et. al., 8.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Kolås 11. Yeh, "Tropes of Indolence and the Cultural Politics of Development in Lhasa, Tibet," 569.

[120] Yeh, 569. Fischer, 81. Kolås, 14.

industry development were being outsourced to privatized companies with mostly Han Chinese making up the workforce, what was left for the Tibetan people? What was their role in Chinese tourism development in their homeland? More importantly, how do traditional Tibetan buildings set the stage for tourism policy in Tibet? As more money was poured into construction, what part of this funding was going to reconstruction, renovation or restoration? Tourism, Tibetan culture and traditional buildings became a profitable combination for the Chinese economy over the first two decades of the 21st century. Policies towards Tibetan traditional buildings in Tibet, and more particularly in Lhasa, would change dramatically over this two decade period as they would become the stage for a particular type of tourism that would put Tibetans in the spotlight. An understanding of Chinese ethno-tourism is necessary to comprehend the construction of the stage upon which Tibetan culture was to be put on profitable display.

Minzu Ethno-tourism

In the early 2000s the Chinese government was investing billions of yuan in the upgrade of the Western regions with the stated intention of development towards stability.[121] The PRC promoted the results of this stability as securing the integration of diverse cultures into one China.[122] Tourism could put this diversity on display and make it the attraction behind tourist destinations in China. Tourism planners were encouraged to look to heritage as a profitable hook by "making culture pay".[123] Conserving buildings, creating museums, preserving cultural heritage artifacts were a way to create elements that relate history to tourism such as historic

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[121] Yeh 597.

[122] Sofield and Li, "Tourism Development and Cultural Policies in China," 373.

[123] Ibid.

routes, places of activity or events, monuments transformed into tourist activities and destinations. The revival of Tibetan culture became an important part of the PRC tourism plan for Tibet because it was obviously "good for investment".[124] But for whose investment and for the benefit of whom? Tourism in Tibet was not necessarily a benefit for everyone but rather for a very particular audience. To understand who is the intended audience is to understand the type of tourism policy that was actually being introduced in all regions of China, that of ethnic tourism.

Travel introduces a distant audience with a local cultural site.[125] The reasons for travel to distant destinations can be defined by the attraction of a foreign culture residing in a foreign place that appeals to the exotic interests of the tourist. Ethnic tourism is grounded by the exotic difference between what is mundane and what is new and interesting. The greater the difference, the more satisfying the tourist experience.[126] It is probable that *xiaoshu minzu*, or minority nationalist, cultures were prime targets when *Xibu Da Kaifa* opened up the west to tourism in the 1980s but it was not completely apparent until the early 2000s. In Lhasa, and other Tibetan areas, the image of Tibetan people is constantly being cultivated and transformed by tourism to support the intrigue of "exotic" culture. The disparity of Tibetan "backwardness" compared to modern Chinese Han life has been a notably systematic view that supports the investment that China has made in its western regions.[127] Traditional architecture plays the most important role in setting the ethno-tourist stage, not just in Tibet, but just about any tourist destination that puts

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[124] Kolås 2.

[125] Cingcade, "Tourism and the Many Tibets, 6.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Kolås, 50.

a particular culture into the spotlight. In Tibet, funding for tourism includes a huge investment in the built environment to reinforce an "other" world of the exotic place for exotic people and things.

The tourist experience hinges on the immersive environment of a perceived exotic culture where participation takes place in the lives of others.[128] A tourist destination has the ability to locate a visitor outside of time and place, socially separated from residential normalcy.[129] The creation of place for tourism is exciting and different from the everyday experience and has the potential to present an exceptional place or space for the tourist.[130] The familiar becomes renewed and in the context of a tourist destination, becomes extraordinary.[131] There is a notable contrast between the exotic and extraordinary and the authentic. The idea of an authentic experience is a bit complicated when it comes to tourists and tourism destinations. The deeper the tourist dives into an exotic culture the more fascinating the experience. The more convincing the place, the more intense the experience. To do this, tourism developers must create a stage of authenticity, usually the back regions of the exotic culture on display, where real life functions take place and the life of the ethnic actor is more fully understood.[132] The irony of this backstage drama staged within a living museum is that it is staged as a production for tourist consumption. To achieve the backstage, the set must be convincing and engaging. This is where the

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[128] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 106.

[129] Ibid, 10.

[130] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011), 11.

[131] Ibid, 12.

[132] MacCannell, 91-100. Urry, 9.

significance of architecture for successful tourism is most apparent. In Tibet, if some buildings are not really traditional, then they needed to be "Tibetanized" to create a convincing stage (Figure 3.1). The method employed in Tibet by Chinese tourism developers is called "s*imsha*" where prefabricated Tibetan style moldings are adhered to the mundane, plain-faced concrete buildings typical of Communist culture.[133] In the early days of *Xibu DaKaifa*, *simsha* began to be applied all over Lhasa and other Tibetan cultural tourist destinations. This was quite visible especially around the central attraction of the Potala, which originally stood apart from the main central Old Town of Lhasa in a swampy plain. By the early 21st century this area was surrounded by a plethora of new business and apartment buildings. *Simsha* seemed to spread throughout the built environment of Tibetan towns but in one particular case the entire town was Tibetanized to the point that its identity was reinvented with a wholly new persona and backstory.

Shangri-la : A Tibetan Paradise in China

For centuries the Western conception of Tibet has been represented as a mysterious, far away land full of mystical monks and high, snowy mountains. The geographical boundary of the Himalayas has reinforced its distant seclusion from Western society as travel has been traditionally difficult to manage. Up until the recent opening of the Qinghai-Golmud-Lhasa Railway in 2006 and the inauguration of Tibet Airlines in 2011, travel from the West was never an easy task. Before *Xibu Da Kaifa* only a handful of Westerners set eyes on the Land of the Snows including Christian missionaries, British invaders and a couple of Austrian runaways.[134]

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[133] Fischer, *State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet,* 78.

[134] Peter Aufschnaiter and Heinrich Harrer of *Seven Years in Tibet* fame.

Even today, it takes more than two full days to travel half way around the world from the US to Beijing and then onward to Gongkar Airport, two hours outside the city of Lhasa. There are no direct flights from the U.S. to the Tibet Autonomous Region. Depending on the political climate, permissions for Westerners to enter the TAR could take years, and these days travel for Westerners inside the TAR is highly restricted. Granted, once you are in central Tibet the altitude adds to the delirium of experience as it takes at least three to four days to acclimate. The lowest elevations inside Lhasa city are just under 12,000 ft (3600 m). Even today there is mystery and mystique about what actually happens inside Tibet. Mystery invites an interesting narrative to those who create the mystique, and it is from this phenomenon that the PRC was able to animate a myth through the reinvention of a small town in the West.

The Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is located within Yunnan Province, in the far southwest region of Mainland China, just at the foot of the Himalayan shelf that separates the Mainland from the primarily Tibetan high altitude regions. Inside Diquing, Zhongdian County was traditionally known to Tibetans as Gyal-thang, or "victory plain". In 2001 Zhongdian was "identified" as the true location of the mystical, lost city of Shangri-la. In western cultures, Shangri-la has been known as a mythical city far removed from the chaos and debauchery of the modern world, "untouched by the evils of developed civilizations."[135] If an actual location of such a city were to exist, it would need to be in a region of the world that has had little contact with the West to capture the mystique of an unconquered territory surrounded by a culture that was seemingly imbued with peaceful people living simple lives without disturbance by the mechanized machinations of modern life. Prior to the latter part of the 20th century, Tibet was

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[135] Cingcade, 5. Kolås, 5.

perceived as just that sort of a land, vast and hidden behind the nearly impassable peaks of the Himalayas. Since Tibet was now Chinese territory, it seems it was up to the Chinese government to discover the "truth" behind this fabled city.

The problem with this "truth" was that the concept of Shangri-la was purely fictional having been created in James Hilton's 1933 novel, *Lost Horizon* (followed shortly by Frank Capra's film of the same name in 1937). In this story Shangri-la is a hidden Tibetan monastery in Hilton's Valley of the Blue Moon, an idyllic peaceful community run by a lama in a paradise of longevity hidden from the rest of the world.[136] It becomes accidentally discovered when the plane carrying protagonist, Hugh Conway, crashes somewhere in the Himalayas, and the four survivors are instructed where to find the hidden city by the fatally wounded pilot. The residents live in simple harmony while the tenets of civilization remain indefinitely preserved by the head lama, locked away in the main temple of the monastery. Anyone living in Shangri-la will age much more slowly than the rest of the world and live a preternatural length of time in the perfect harmony of this hidden Tibetan environment. Shangri-la was what western tourists expected when the gates were open to Tibetan tourism in the 1980s and further expanded when *Xibu DaKaifa* inspired a campaign of programmed narrative for this vastly unvisited region.

The fictional narrative for Shangri-la must have been extremely appealing to the burgeoning Chinese tourism industry in the early 2000s as the need to locate such an intriguing paradise in reality became the focus of tourism officials in the Diqing region. In 2001, Chinese officials in the Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture assembled a "search team" to locate Shangri-la backed up by academic "experts" who pieced together a narrative that proved that all

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[136] Ibid.

the elements that went into creating the Lost Horizon story were true and existed in Diqing.[137] Criteria were extracted straight from Hilton's novel and placed in the real world, such as Khawa Karpo Mountain as Hilton's Mount Karakal, three rivers that crisscrossed the region as the Nujiang, Lancang and Jinsha and that an American plane did indeed crash in the area (though it did so during WWII, years after Hilton wrote his novel) and most importantly the Tibetan Buddhist monastery of Ganden Sumtseling (piniyin *Songzanlin*) whose fictional counterpart is the Shangri-la lamasery itself.[138] Media around the official announcement that Shangri-la had been located inspired other efforts outside of China to join the "search" including National Geographic.[139] The neighboring Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County joined the competition to claim that Shangri-la existed there as well, but ultimately Diqing won out.[140] On the 5th of May, 2002, Zhongdian was officially renamed as Xianggelila, Chinese pinyin for Shangri-la.[141] Immediately after this "identification" and "reassignment" of Zhongdian, the newly re-discovered, lost city of Shangri-la was transformed from a dull little town in the middle of nowhere, to a bright, pristine and colorful lost city of yore.

As in just about any other major tourist destination in the world, the buildings of the former Zhongdian were reshaped to provide a stage set where the Shangri-la story could unfold in real, living color to the whole world. Reinvention requires renovation, or reconstruction in

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[137] Ibid 6. Ben Hillman, "China's Many Tibets: Diqing as a Model for 'Development with Tibetan Characteristics?,'" *Tibetan Studies in Comparative Perspective*, 2018, pp. 124-132, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315873053-9, 273.

[138] Kolås, 6.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid, 5.

some cases. In the newly identified Shangri-la, *simsha* technique of Tibetanizing buildings was applied to the plain Communist-style, concrete blocks of buildings lining the streets of Shangri-la by applying prefabricated, Tibetan architectural stylizations and details.[142] State funding was provided to upgrade and restore the Ganden Sumtseling monastery to become a real temple of the the lost Tibetan paradise of Shangri-la as described in *Lost Horizon*. Tourism officials filled the set with trained Tibetans to become the actors who color the story of Shangri-la as a peaceful refuge of the Himalayas.

There is a struggle to understand the tourist search for authenticity and the appeal of the fantastic. The two goals are almost at odds with each other yet collide on the staged set of Shangri-la through a cultural commodification of the Tibetan people who take center stage.[143] The story of Zhongdian Shangri-la is fraught with irony in just about every aspect. Not only is a small town in Yunnan reinvented to fit a fantastical narrative, but James Hilton's original narrative is appealing to a fictional perception of a real place. This is a perception that so strongly resonates with the Western mind's search for relief from modernization that it has created a cultural misperception that has ignored the underlying beauty of the reality of Tibetan culture. The ironies abound as Hilton's text was quite degrading to both Chinese and Tibetan cultures. The Tibetan "lamaserie," the term Hilton uses for a Tibetan monastic complex, or *gompa* in Tibetan, is the architectural symbolization of the physical Shangri-la, but is downplayed and degraded by characters in *Lost Horizon*, so much as to dissuade any (Westerner) from visiting one:

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[142] Ibid, 3. Fischer, 78.

[143] Kolås, 25.

"Then I asked him what he know about Tibetan lamaseries … They weren't beautiful places, he assured me, and the monks in them were generally corrupt and dirty."[144] Both Chinese, Tibetans (and Japanese as well) are referred to in derogatory terms, and at one point one of the main characters exclaims that "He said he couldn't differentiate Tibetans from Chinese."[145] The real heroes in the story aren't even Asian, but rather the ideal of Western (white) men, and particularly British men, as Americans are depicted as clownish and grammatically challenged. The head lama of the Shangri-la temple is discovered to be a European monk in charge of protecting Western ideals of civilization in an Asian location. The main protagonist is portrayed as the ideal Westerner, not overly zealous in judgement and well practiced in moderation of all modern aspirations. *Lost Horizon* is basically a Western fantasy on an Asian stage. Instead of Middle Earth, the Land of Oz or even Yoknapatawpha, the fantasy world is located deep in the inner dimensions of Tibet.

It is doubtful that anyone would read *Lost Horizons* before venturing to the "real" Yunnan Shangri-la so all of these points may remain moot. Except for the architecture. The buildings have to conform to the ideal, and to tourism developers, so it does not matter that the place is not really real, or even really Tibetan. What matters is people believe they have located some lost treasure of the exotic realm of Tibet. A land so removed from the modern world, full of magical monks and mystical monasteries that a visit to such a place must have some kind of meaning to it. But what really is the magic and the mystery of Tibet? Is it brightly colored Tibetans living in brightly colored buildings acting out a fantasy narrative? Or is there magic in

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[144] James Hilton, *Lost Horizon* (London: Pan Books, 1947), 133.

[145] Ibid, 134.

real Tibetans living real lives in traditional architecture? Obviously, the Tibet Heritage Fund believed in the latter and found real human value in supporting traditional lives by engaging real Tibetans in a program that sustained traditional Tibetan life. Could Shangri-la exist outside of Yunnan? What about the rest of Tibet? Can an alternative narrative be attributed to all cities and towns in Tibet? Or is there something about Tibetan traditional culture that could be tapped into?

After the THF was ousted from Lhasa, the Chinese government must have begun to see value in authentic Tibetan culture as tourism policies moved more towards exposing "real" Tibetan life to tourists and not just a Western idealized narrative. Even near Shangri-la, "Tibetan Family Houses" (Chin. *zangmin jiafang*) were set up near Zhongxin Town to accept tourist "visitors" so they could become embedded in "real" Tibetan lives and take part in Tibetan routines.[146] The house was the stage where basic conceived essentials of Tibetan traditional life such as farm work, housework, prayer, food and oral histories were put on display for "invited" tourists, usually Han Chinese on tour package plans.[147] The more authentic the experience, the more tourists were willing to pay for that experience. Though the experience was less fantastical and more traditionally based, the performance by Tibetan actors for a tourist audience was still more theatrical than genuine (Figure 3.2).

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[146] Kolås, 97.

[147] Ibid, 97-98.

Chapter Four

Current Preservation in Lhasa

Since the early 2000s, and intensifying into the mid 2010s, there has been a definitive shift in the politics of preservation in Tibet. Most reporting on the subject, especially on papers being published in the PRC, are focused on the importance of the few remaining historically significant buildings in Lhasa, and many are calling for careful restoration of these structures. Scholars have been voicing clear support for architectural restoration of traditional Tibetan buildings and structures in Old Town Lhasa.[148] The preservation of traditional urban street life is intrinsic to Old Town Lhasa. The call for preservation in Lhasa goes beyond the architecture into various areas of urban Tibetan culture in Lhasa, such as the restoration of traditional cultural arts activities including painting, textiles and other Tibetan arts.[149] The preservation of spatial soundscapes defined by traditional activity within the historic urban core is another area of focus.[150] Most of these papers draw attention to the same concerns that the Tibet Heritage Fund confronted in the mid-1990s in Lhasa:

- Reuse as a means of restoring the original function of the building[151]

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[148] Qing Qin, Yang Chen, and Haiyue Zhang, "A Study on Protective Reuse of Traditional Architecture in Lhasa," *E3S Web of Conferences* 120 (2019): p. 01004, https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/201912001004, 2-4.

[149] Ibid, 5.

[150] Lingjiang Huang and Jian Kang, "The Sound Environment and Soundscape Preservation in Historic City Centres—the Case Study of Lhasa," *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 42, no. 4 (January 2015): pp. 652-674, https://doi.org/10.1068/b130073p, 671-673.

[151] Qin,Chen,Zhang, 2. Andre Alexander, Pimpim de Azevedo, and Yutaka Hirako, "THF 2006 Annual Report" (Berlin: Tibet Heritage Fund, 2006), pp. 1-24, 22.

- Community education and careful building management can prevent self-renovations by current residents that are harmful to the building, potentially dangerous and destroy the historical character and significance of a historical building[152]
- Re-development and reconstruction programs should include community residents who should directly participate in community planning[153]
- Focus on preservation of traditional spatial patterns in historic districts[154] to protect the Tibetan cultural ecological ethics of community space[155]
- Protect vertical limits of reconstruction that are vital to Tibetan traditions of construction[156]
- Historic boundaries in the Old City Lhasa are being weakened and threaten traditional routes such as major circumambulation *khoras*, particularly the Lingkor[157]

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[152] Qin,Chen,Zhang. 2. Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 3. Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction," 4.

[153] Fan Ding and Yunying Ren, "Analysis of Public Space in Historic Districts of Historic Cities Based on Community Governance," *CONVERTER*, 2021, pp. 80-87, https://doi.org/10.17762/converter.268, 84. Alexander and Azevedo, "Tibet Heritage Fund 1999 Annual Report," 3. Andre Alexander et al., "Chapter 3 : Upgrading of Housing as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction," 4.

[154] Ding and Ren, 84. Alexander, de Azevedo and Hirako, "THF 2006 Annual Report," 22.

[155] Wei Wei and Bin Wan, "Analysis of Cultural Value and Protection Strategies of the Spatial Elements of Tibetan Historic Cities," *Proceedings of the 2015 International Conference on Economics, Social Science, Arts, Education and Management Engineering*, 2015, https://doi.org/10.2991/essaeme-15.2015.122, 567. Alexander, de Azevedo and Hirako, "THF 2006 Annual Report," 22.

[156] Ibid. Alexander, de Azevedo and Hirako, "THF 2006 Annual Report," 22.

[157] Ibid. Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 31, 46-47.

- The Old City Lhasa should be a core area of protection for the historic built environment[158]

In all of the cases thus cited, none include references to the Tibet Heritage Fund or hint that this group and any of their work ever existed in Tibet. This is unfortunate since it is clear that the THF have developed effective methods to accomplish and accommodate culturally sensitive practices of restoration and preservation of the traditional built environment of Lhasa.

Ground Truthing

Despite these calls for cultural assistance, the situation on the ground in Lhasa remains complicated. Buildings continue to be removed despite increased attention being drawn to the need to maintain the historic fabric of Lhasa's traditional neighborhood zones. A survey of the remaining buildings in Lhasa was executed in 2016, based on a previous survey by the THF in 2013 (Figure 4.1). Out of ninety-six individual features surveyed, six major structures had been converted to hotels, four major sites were under renovation, and four major sites were completely removed.[159] The scale of building removal has ranged from small, former residences hidden deep within the Barkor, Ramoche and other historic zones to the larger, former home of the parents of the Dalai Lama, the Yabshi Taksters, which was located only a couple of blocks from the Potala complex.[160] The Tibetan reporter, Tsering Woeser, the International Campaign for

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[158] Wei and Wan, 567. Ding and Ren, 84. Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, *The Old City of Lhasa: Report from a Conservation Project,* 50.

[159] 2016 Survey- see https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iXNwSEVl-3hGcHPsBlFlTWT8ZwI8N-EXnIN8wEy76js/edit#gid=0.

[160] Tsering Woeser, "Woeser: Ruins of Lhasa: Yaosidazi (Part 1)," Invisible Tibet - Woeser's Blog, November 17, 2015, http://woeser.middle-way.net/2015/11/rfa_17.html. Tsering Woeser, "'The Ruins of Lhasa: Yabzhi Taktser' (Part One) by Woeser," Translations and Commentary

Tibet (ICT) and High Peaks Pure Earth, among other resources, have been main sources of information for actual conditions in Lhasa. In February 2018, Chinese state media outlets Xinhua and Sina reported a fire at the Jokhang Temple World Heritage site in Lhasa.[161] No information was given on the extent of the fire or if any damage had been done to the most revered site in Tibetan Buddhism. ICT and the world waited for months as the conditions of the Jokhang were kept hidden from the public.[162] The Tsuklakhang Jokhang brings in millions of tourists every year, and next to the Potala (its partner World Heritage site as recognized by UNESCO) it is the most popular destination for tourists visiting Lhasa (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). The loss of this invaluable icon would significantly damage the Chinese tourism industry in Lhasa. Today it is still unclear what exactly was damaged by the 2018 fire or what became of the venerated Jokhang Buddha icon. Recently the Jokhang was once again on the top of the preservation watch list as new pavilions were constructed (Figure 4.2) over top of two historically iconic monuments that have stood at the entrance to the Tsuglakhang complex for centuries, one being the Treaty of 821 stele (Tib. *rdoring*) (Figure 4.3) that established clear

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from Tibetan Social Media, June 29, 2020, https://highpeakspureearth.com/the-ruins-of-lhasa-yabzhi-taktser-part-one-by-woeser/.

[161] International Campaign for Tibet, "Fears for Extent of Damage after Major Fire at Sacred Jokhang Temple during Tibetan New Year," International Campaign for Tibet, February 18, 2018, https://savetibet.org/fears-for-extent-of-damage-after-major-fire-at-sacred-jokhang-temple-during-tibetan-new-year/.

[162] International Campaign for Tibet, "New Fears for Historic Structure of Jokhang Temple after Major Fire, as China Covers up Extent of Damage," International Campaign for Tibet, March 12, 2018, https://savetibet.org/new-fears-for-historic-structure-of-jokhang-temple-after-major-fire-as-china-covers-up-extent-of-damage/.

boundaries between the former Tibetan Empire and Tang Dynasty China.[163] The ICT has raised serious issues with this traditional "Chinese styled" construction and combined with the fire of 2018 they are recommending that the World Heritage Committee consider the Tsuklakhang to be a site of "World Heritage in Danger".[164]

Despite these major alterations of the traditional Tibetan landscape in Lhasa, another trend was visible on the ground in Lhasa during fieldwork of 2016. Many large, former residences within the central Barkor area were undergoing active renovations. Construction crews filled the innermost alleyways as buildings were being gutted from the inside. This was most notable at former THF protected sites, Tadongshar (THF 14/Ka 28) (Figures 4.4 and 4.6) and Nagtsagjang (THF 16/Ka 30a) (Figures 4.5 and 4.6).[165] The techniques of historic building renovation that were observed in Lhasa during the 2016 fieldwork were clearly in favor of preserving the historic look and feel of traditional buildings in Lhasa. The main impression of renovation action during this time was that large, multi-occupancy buildings were the focus of these efforts to create hotels and restaurants from former, larger nobles' residences. These structures were optimal for hotel accommodations located in the center of the oldest part of the city, equipped with multiple rooms for maximum tourist occupancy and large spacious inner courtyards perfect for dining outside. Major structures affected by these reconstruction efforts

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[163] International Campaign for Tibet, "Concerns about Construction at UNESCO-Protected Jokhang Temple in Tibet," International Campaign for Tibet, May 7, 2020, https://savetibet.org/concerns-about-construction-at-unesco-protected-jokhang-temple-in-tibet/.

[164] International Campaign for Tibet, "World Heritage in Danger: ICT Calls for Jokhang Temple Protection," International Campaign for Tibet, June 28, 2021, https://savetibet.org/world-heritage-in-danger-ict-calls-for-jokhang-temple-protection/.

[165] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 398.

included the Gorka Nyingba, Pomdatsang and most notably the Yabshi Phunkhang located on the major east-west artery through Old Town Lhasa, the Beijing Dong Lu or East Road (Tib: *Dekyi Shar Lam*).

Yabshi Phunkhang (Kha 25)

The Yabshi Phunkhang former residential complex is located north of the Barkor central district along Beijing Dong Lu (or Beijing East Road, formerly Dekyi Shar Lam (Tib.), the central east-west route through Lhasa) (Figures 4.7 and 4.8). *Yabshi* is a status attributed to a family of the Dalai Lama, in this case the Phunkhang family of the 11th Dalai Lama, ca. mid-19th century.[166] After 1959 the family remained in a rooftop apartment while the rest of the immense complex was used for meeting, rallies and trials.[167] The complex was converted to a hotel in 2009.[168] Ownership changed hands between 2009 and 2016 and underwent massive renovation and restoration during this time. The site was visited during 2016 fieldwork just prior to its re-opening in August 2016. Traditional materials were used throughout the complex including *arga* flooring on all upper floors (Figure 4.9). As in the Pomdatsang hotel complex, the roof of Yabshi Phunkhang revealed restoration decisions that were not quite as traditional as the care that was taken in the lower floors. Originally the roof had been resurfaced in traditional *arga* in keeping with the historic nature of the site.[169] However, during the years just prior to the 2016 re-opening, water from the neighboring buildings had begun to flood onto the roof of the

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[166] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 121. Larsen and Sinding-Larsen, *The Lhasa Atlas*, 156-57.

[167] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 121.

[168] Ibid, 122.

[169] See Chapter One, p. 13 for the definition of *arga*.

Yabshi Phunkhang increasing the amount of water flow that the roof had originally been designed to handle.[170] As a preventive measure, the Chinese owner had resurfaced the entire roof in black polymer roofing material over top of the original *arga* roof. This included the traditional parapets on the edges of the roof (Figure 4.10). The result was a rooftop space that was no longer usable space due to increased heat of the black roofing material. Rooms on the top floor were also noticeably warmer as the intense Tibetan sun baked the black roof. *Arga* is a much more forgiving material with such solar exposure as well as being able to shed water more efficiently if well maintained. Workers at the Yabshi Phunkhang appealed to the owner to return the *arga* roof as the black polymer roof began to present problems of overheating as well as leaks that were forming underneath the polymer surface from gaps on the edges. The dilemma they faced was exemplary of a more foreboding problem faced by hotel managers of renovated historic Tibetan structures.

Restoration Management

Bureaucracy seems to be the overbearing issue when it comes to getting anything done in Tibet. There is a chain of approvals that must be traversed to gain funding for projects of any sort. In the case of historic buildings, immediate concerns for building preservation start at the level of the building managers. These people run the businesses and maintain the buildings on a daily basis. In the case of the Yabshi Phunkhang, building managers recognized the problem that modern roofing materials were creating for maintaining comfortable conditions in the hotel. Yet appealing to the building owner was not seeming to produce favorable results as the owner saw modern materials to be less in need of maintenance over time, reducing overall building

[170] Interviews with Yabshi Phunkhang staff, August 19, 2016.

expenditures. The use of modern materials was not addressing the cooling needed in lower floors or the leaking occurring underneath the materials due to poor edge sealants. The overall historic nature of the building was being compromised by the hot black polymer roof as well, though access by tourists to the roof was not perceived to be as frequent in comparison to access to lower floors. The disconnect between building managers and building owners was also complicated by the disconnect between owners and government officials who allocate funding towards repairs of this nature. Historic buildings in Lhasa are controlled locally by the city government who then appeal to central government officials to receive actual funding.[171] However, an intermediary consultancy could help solve these problems of bureaucratic disconnect.

An interview conducted during 2016 fieldwork with a colleague from the Tibetan Entrepreneur Program (TEP), sponsored by the University of Virginia Tibet Center, revealed the existence of consultancy offices that broker relationships between building owners and building construction companies to attempt to help preserve the traditional structure and fabric of buildings in Lhasa.[172] These companies advocate for traditional Tibetan methods to be used when renovating historic buildings, usually being repurposed for tourist development. In the case of Yabshi Phunkhang such a consultancy middleman was employed during the mid-2010s restoration and renovation of the building. Though these offices can recommend preservation-like practices during reconstruction, there does not seem to be any stipulation or requirement that recommendations be followed. As tourism development evolves into the 21st century, more

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[171] Interview with a Tibetan colleague who works for an intermediary construction consultancy company in Lhasa, August 19, 2016.

[172] Ibid.

building owners are concerned with providing an “authentic” Tibetan experience to tourists who are seeking such an experience while visiting Lhasa. Restoration of historic, traditional Tibetan buildings such as Pomdatsang and Yabshi Phunkhang, with traditional materials and construction methods increases the authenticity of the experience. Third party consultancy offices can help ensure that the authentic experience is achieved by recommending renovations with an attitude toward restoration and preservation. These consultants seem to be the lynchpin in preserving Tibetan architecture, albeit not necessarily for the Tibetan people, but rather for tourists. Perhaps there is a nexus that could be formed from the lessons of humane preservation practices of the Tibet Heritage Fund and the need for authentic space in Lhasa?

CONCLUSION

The Tibet Heritage Fund's time was very limited in Lhasa. Though they were active for just five years, the legacy of humane architectural preservation continues today in Ladakh where the THF is preserving most of the historical, culturally Himalayan structures and sites in the capital city of Leh. The work they are currently doing in Leh reflects work they did in Lhasa, twenty years earlier and puts to practice their methods of preservation for the people. In this case the people include the native residents of Leh. Through two decades of architectural restoration, they have given the world a recipe for humane architectural preservation that can extend globally:

- Restoration and construction that is sensitive to traditional style and cultural architecture
- Construction efforts that include older and newer traditional craft masters working together
- Sensitive construction techniques that combine traditional craft with newer techniques necessary to improve and upgrade historic buildings
- Inclusion of the people and the residents who are directly affected by restoration efforts of their homes and neighborhoods
- Skills training workshops to teach native residents new skills and building techniques
- Transparency of goals and efforts between the people, the local governments and the restoration teams

Heading into the 21st century, Lhasa has been set on a course for destruction of both tangible and intangible culture. The Tibet Heritage Fund blocked what seemed to be a fateful conclusion

to this terminal condition by raising awareness of cultural deterioration of the Tibetan built environment in Lhasa and then taking active measures to restore its historic fabric to functional standards for the native residents that remained in the Old Town City. By collaborating with local governments and employing local residents to work with native tradespeople with traditional knowledge of cultural building techniques, the THF helped establish historic restoration as a priority in Lhasa. In so doing, the actions of the THF to save historic Lhasa begs the question of how much their work brought to attention the potential for restoring buildings to attract a different type of resident, namely tourists. In 2000, when the THF were told to pack up and leave the TAR, Chinese policies centered around developing a pillar industry of tourism in Tibet were just starting to catalyze. It could be suspected that the PRC was beginning to see historic restoration as something to be subsumed into a profitable venture away from NGO control. Whatever the reason, the current situation is a much different political attitude than the apathy for historical restoration prior to the 1990s.

With tourism increasing in priority status from a tertiary to a primary pillar industry in Tibet, and especially Lhasa, it has become necessary for the Chinese to invest in a degree of preservation to ensure that tourist destinations remain intact in Old Town Lhasa. But what does preservation for the sanctity of tourist profits actually mean, especially in consideration of the authenticity of cultural heritage sites and the "authentic" tourist experience? Preservation efforts in Lhasa today seem to be concentrated on re-creating historic buildings and sites in Lhasa rather than restoring them. Case examples like Yabshi Phunkhang, Pomdatsang and the other former "mansions" of Lhasa are the most obvious indicators of what architectural preservation actually means in Lhasa currently.

The People of Lhasa

As re-construction and "renovation" efforts increase in Lhasa to convert native residences into tourist attractions and accommodations, the Tibetan people that once called inner Lhasa their homes have been removed to make way for an influx of a majority of Han Chinese tourists. Mass housing complexes have been springing up on the outskirts of Lhasa for over a decade. Inner city Tibetans, some with pre-1959 legacy ties to residential life, not only for themselves, but also their ancestry, are now foreign to their native land. During fieldwork in 2016, my tour guide grew up in a multi-family, traditional Tibetan house adjacent to the Ramoche complex. She recalled playing in the courtyard outside the main entrance to Ramoche as a little girl. When we visited Ramoche during my 2016 fieldwork she pointed to a concrete structure that now stands where her house and her childhood memories physically once existed.[173] She, too, was part of the exodus of Tibetans forced to move to apartment complexes outside of Lhasa. On a field trip to Shigatse she pointed out apartment complexes on the very edges of development that were still considered to be associated with Lhasa though an hour away from the Old Town City Center. Lhasa continues to expand with new growth eastward and westward along the Kyichu River Valley pushing in both directions so that by now those remote apartment buildings that were shown to me are probably surrounded by more new buildings. The few Tibetans that remain in Lhasa either work for the tourism industry or are players in the pageantry of Tibetan heritage that attracts so many tourists to this once remote, capital city. If there is to be a humane architectural preservation in Lhasa then who are the humans who benefit from it? The Tibet

[173] Interview with my tour guide while doing field work in Lhasa at Ramoche Lhakhang, August 2, 2022.

Heritage Fund has given us a model of preservation that focuses on the people who are most affected by it, namely the residents of the buildings undergoing restoration. But the residents of culturally historic Lhasa in the late 20th century are not quite the same as they are now in the early 21st century. There is an overwhelmingly Sino influence of the current culture in Lhasa. Even though some of the buildings "look" Tibetan, they are mostly occupied by permanent and transient Han Chinese. The transient tourists are also becoming increasingly non-Western visiting from the mainland to the East. It is becoming more and more difficult for Westerners to visit the remote lands of the central Tibetan Autonomous Region, especially due to the riots of 2008 and even more so with the recent COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this writing, Lhasa is still shut down due to COVID-19, the streets are eerily quiet and empty, a seemingly impossible condition for such a densely populated city. When I last visited Lhasa for fieldwork in 2016, I could only be permitted access to the city with a tourist visa. Just ten years prior, and on earlier fieldwork trips in 2001, 2004 and 2006, I was allowed a research visa that allowed me to acquire access to buildings and sites that most tourists would not be able to access. A tourist visa requires one to be accompanied by a tour guide at all times. The agenda is usually set by the tour guide agency, and the sites are what the agency deems important to visit and appealing to most tourists. In 2016, I was not in Lhasa to "see the sites" but rather to document the state of traditional architecture across a wide area of Central Tibet within the TAR, including Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse, Ganden, Samye and other critically important cultural heritage sites of Central Tibetan culture. I was in Tibet for three weeks, which unbeknownst to me, was longer than the advised ten-day stay for most Western tourists. Because of my connections to academic institutions and scholars working inside the TAR, I was able to "go off script" and visit these places, mainly to photograph and take notes of their conditions. It only became apparent to me

on the last day of my stay that this was not a favorable option to officials who oversee the tourist agencies and monitor the actions of Western tourists in the TAR. On the last day of my stay in Lhasa, my entire tourist agency team and academic colleagues were interrogated by "police" wanting to know why I was in Lhasa for so long and what interest I had in historic buildings, and why I did not follow the protocol of visiting "tourist" approved locations like the Mt Everest Base Camp. I was not, or at least I was not aware that I was "visited" by these inquisitors just as much as I was not aware of any infringements until I was out of the TAR and back in the PRC awaiting my flight to the United States. This anecdote is reflective of the difficulties that Westerners have in being able to experience the situation of conditions in Lhasa, much less the degree of preservation that the built environment is undertaking.

Fifteen years after the Tibet Heritage Fund was ousted from Lhasa, founding members Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo gave a report at the UNESCO World Heritage and Role of Civil Society Conference in Bonn, 2015, entitled, "Lessons from the Attempt to Conserve the Architectural Heritage of Lhasa's Old Town". In this report, the THF made this adamant recommendation to UNESCO:

> To preserve the existing historic vernacular buildings it is necessary to change the present approach without delay into a conservation approach, monitored by the regional and national Cultural Relics Departments together with UNESCO to ensure that conservation objectives are met and the integrity of the World Heritage Sites preserved. Furthermore, they should give strict guidelines to ensure that the sites' integrity and authenticity are protected.[174]

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[174] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, "Lessons from the Attempt to Conserve the Architectural Heritage of Lhasa's Old Town," in *The UNESCO World Heritage and the Role of Civil Society Proceedings of the International Conference Bonn 2015*, ed. Dömpke Stephan (Berlin: World Heritage Watch, 2016), pp. 89-91, 91.

This plea came three years after a petition had been circulated anonymously by a gathering of the top Tibetan scholars in the world, listed as The Members of the International Tibetan Studies Community, to curb the degree of cultural appropriation and historic mutilation in Lhasa. The main demand made in this petition called for the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Lhasa to receive independent monitoring from both UNESCO and Chinese teams to prevent further deterioration of the historic and cultural fabric of Old Town Lhasa.[175] The petition was a direct defense of decisions that were publicly made to protect Old Town Lhasa at the 28th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee held in Suzhou, China, in 2004. But UNESCO might not be enough to halt the exploitation of Tibetan architecture for a state tourist agenda. By establishing World Heritage Sites, UNESCO draws attention to commodification of the traditionally built environments and emphasizes the exotic interest of tourists who wish not only to gaze upon the fantastic image of a "foreign" site, but become immersed in it.[176] Robert Shepherd has suggested that, especially in Lhasa, "UNESCO marks sites as worthy of protection because of their cultural value, and Chinese authorities comply by transforming these sites into elements in the state narrative of Chinese culture and civilisation (sic)."[177] Shepherd continues to say that "Chinese tourism and heritage policies in Tibet aim to transform a contested past into a source of allegorical allusions to the present, aided by UNESCO's backing for proclaiming

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[175] Andre Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, "Lessons from the Attempt to Conserve the Architectural Heritage of Lhasa's Old Town," in *The UNESCO World Heritage and the Role of Civil Society Proceedings of the International Conference Bonn 2015,* ed. Dömpke Stephan (Berlin: World Heritage Watch, 2016), pp. 89-91, 91.

[176] "the experience of the back room is just another show to the tourist" MacCannell, 105.

[177] Robert Shepherd, "UNESCO and the Politics of Cultural Heritage in Tibet," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 36, no. 2 (2006): pp. 243-257, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472330680000141, 250.

particular historical sites to be world heritage sites."[178] Though well intentioned, UNESCO has no say over what national governments can do with their World Heritage Sites. From the difficulties that UNESCO is having in calling for independent monitoring, and more stringent sensitivity towards cultural preservation, not just architectural or structural preservation, it looks grim for authenticity to prevail in the near term for Tibetans in Lhasa and the TAR. The current strategy of *simsha* reconstruction and sustainability of a state narrative for Tibetan culture begs the question "Who is to save Tibetan architecture, then, and for whom?" If anything, the Tibet Heritage Fund has given us model to follow should the powers that be allow sensitive, humane preservation to prevail. But it may be a model that does not apply to a city devoid of its former native residents. So the real question we are left to ponder is "can humane architectural preservation find success in historic cities occupied by tourists?" It's not just a question for Lhasa but also for many cities facing similar dilemmas around the world.

Afterword

The Tibet Heritage Fund as a model of humane preservation finds success today in the capital city of Leh, Ladakh. They carry on the work and methodology initiated by Andre Alexander in Lhasa 25 years ago.[179] One can follow the progress of Yutaka Hirako, Pimpim de Azevedo and a team of traditional craftspeople and volunteers on social media today.[180] In recent years they have committed restoration work within Old Town Leh and preserved several

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[178] Ibid, 249.

[179] 2022 marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Tibet Heritage Fund.

[180] https://www.facebook.com/www.tibetheritagefund.org, https://www.instagram.com/tibetheritagefund/?next=%2F

buildings such as the Chamba Lhakhang (Figure 5.1), the Matho Kar House (Figure 5.2) and monuments such as the Naushar Stupa Gate (Figure 5.3). In 2019 the THF established the Artisans Artists and Architects House (AAAH), the "Himalayan Bauhaus," in an effort to "preserve, sustain and develop Ladakhi, Tibetan and Himalayan traditional crafts and building techniques… it aims to create jobs, sustain traditional skills and establish an initiative for the preservation of the local fragile environment and living cultural heritage."[181] In essence, the AAAH is the HQ for humane HP (historic preservation). The 2006 Annual Report of the Tibet Heritage Fund spelled out the recipe for humane preservation even more clearly, but with more resolute experience:[182]

• Assisting poor and disadvantaged communities in both urban and rural settings

• Conservation for local communities (ICOMOS living cities principle)

• Conservation of buildings and of building technology

• For residential buildings: priority on livability, owner/occupants participate in planning process

• For monuments (incl. monasteries): authenticity desired, building history respected, owners participate in planning process.

• Maximum retention of historic elements (UNESCO Venice charter), mud plaster and soil roof layers often replaced

• Accommodation of local demand for pragmatic usability of sites

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[181] Pimpim de Azevedo and Yutaka Hirako, "Tibet Heritage Fund 2019 Annual Report" (Berlin: TIbet Heritage Fund, 2019), 5.

[182] Alexander, de Azevedo and Hirako, "THF 2006 Annual Report," 22.

• Compromise and Negotiation are routine

Fortunately, for the world, the THF will continue to promote a model of humane preservation in Himalayan cultures that can inspire efforts globally. Whether this model can once again be applied to the former Tibetan capital city of Lhasa remains to be seen. The successes and failures of the past can guide the present and the future only if ignorance of history is discouraged.

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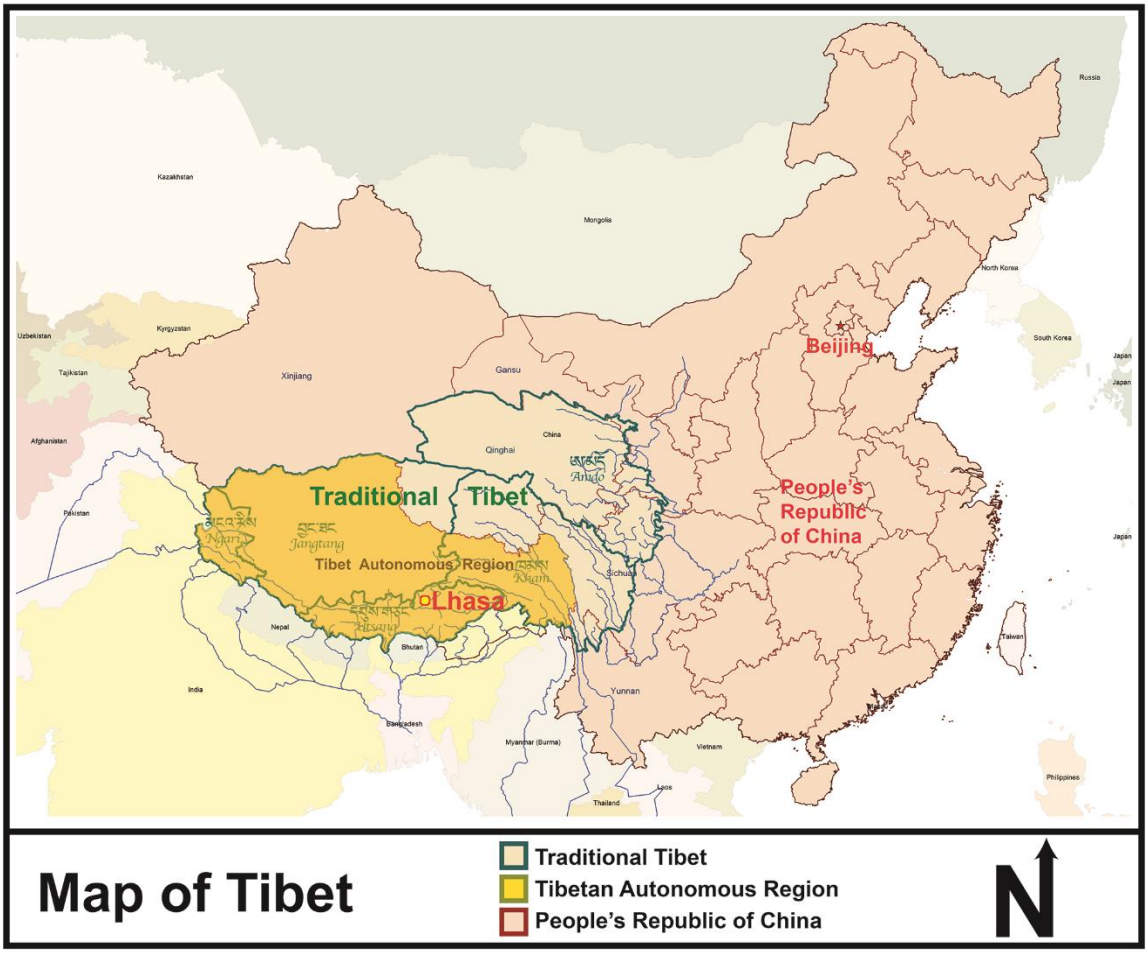

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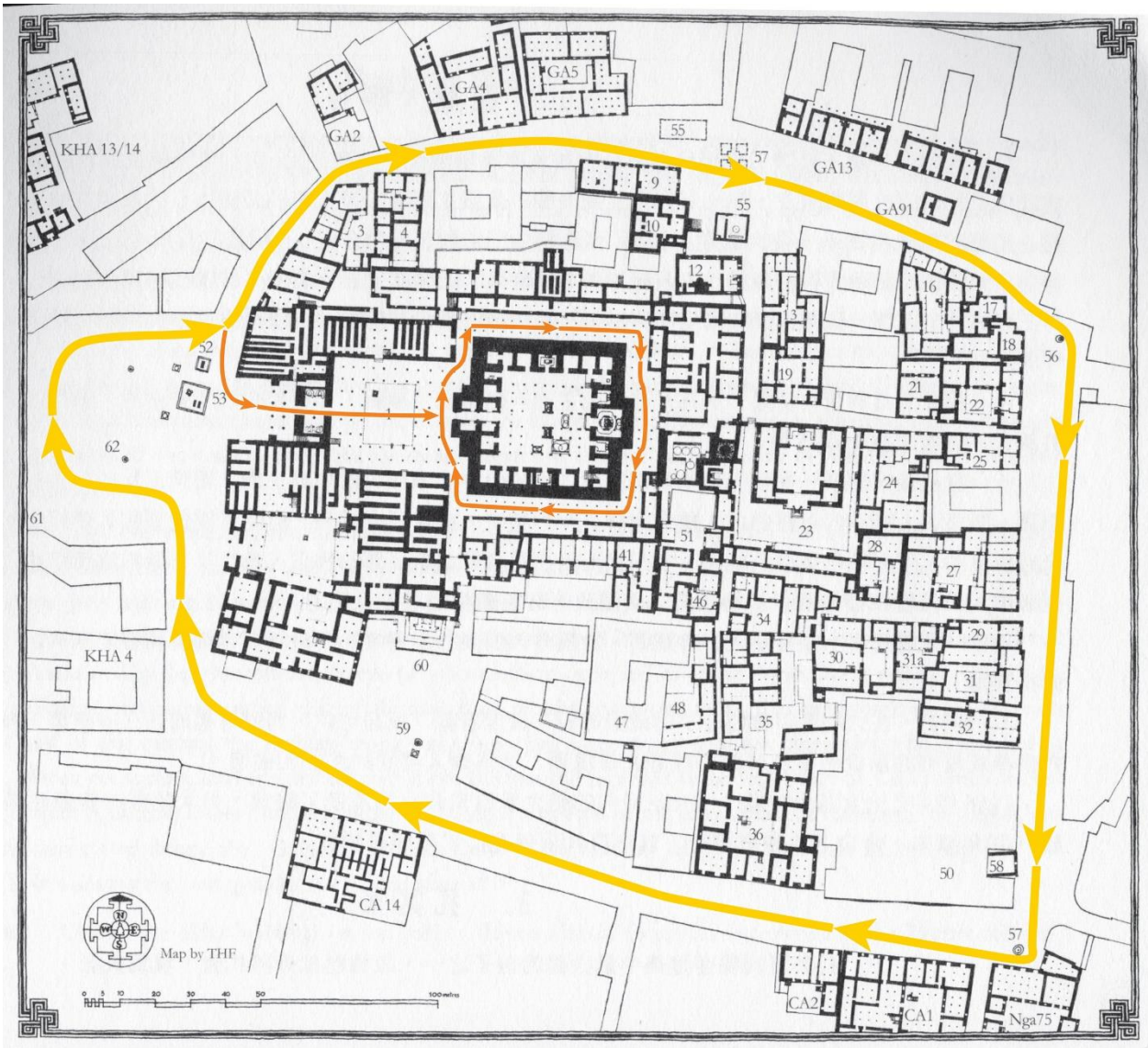

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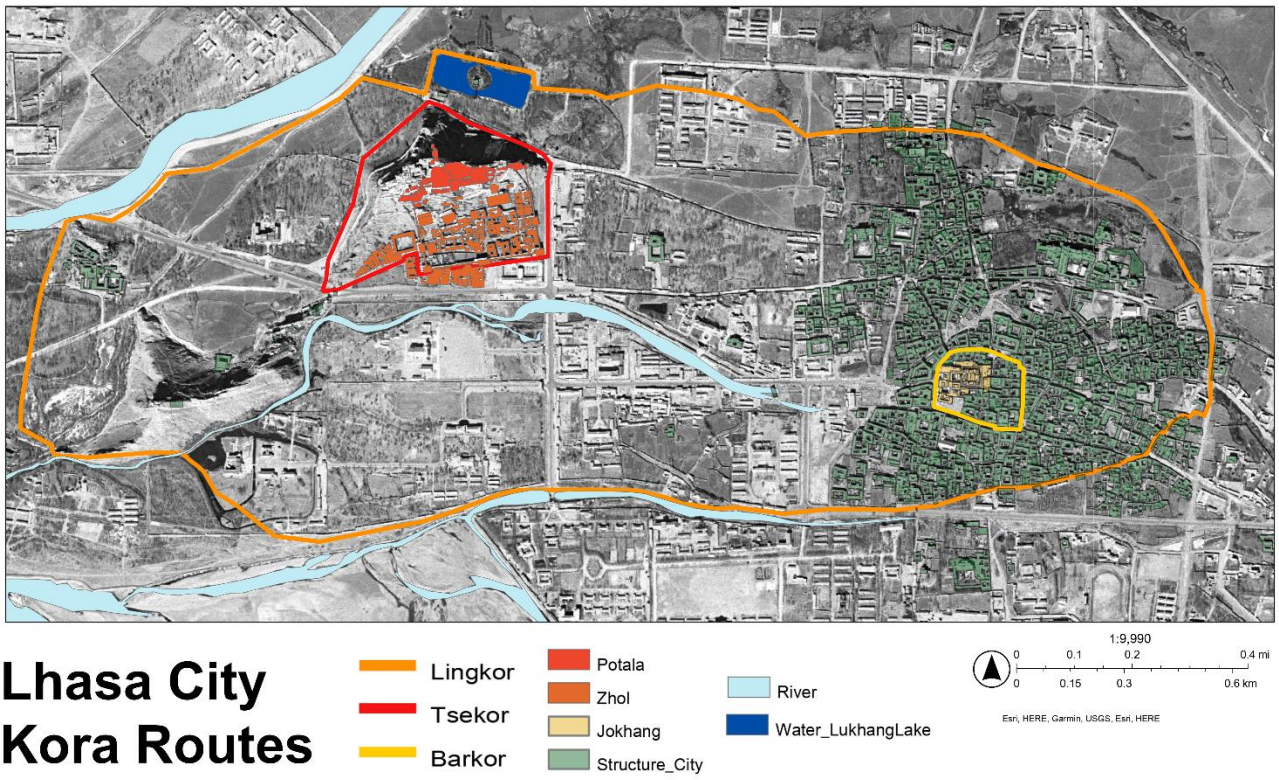

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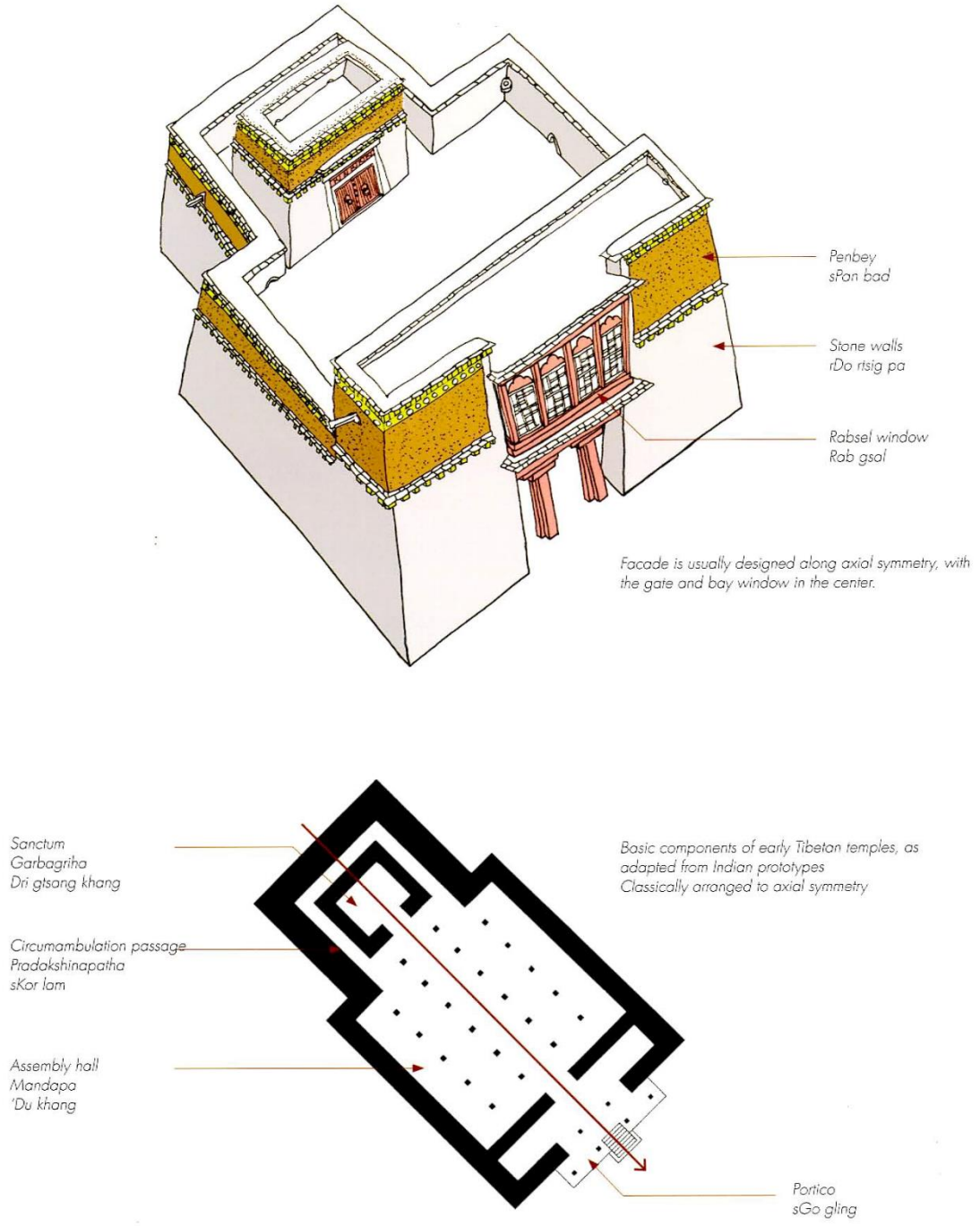

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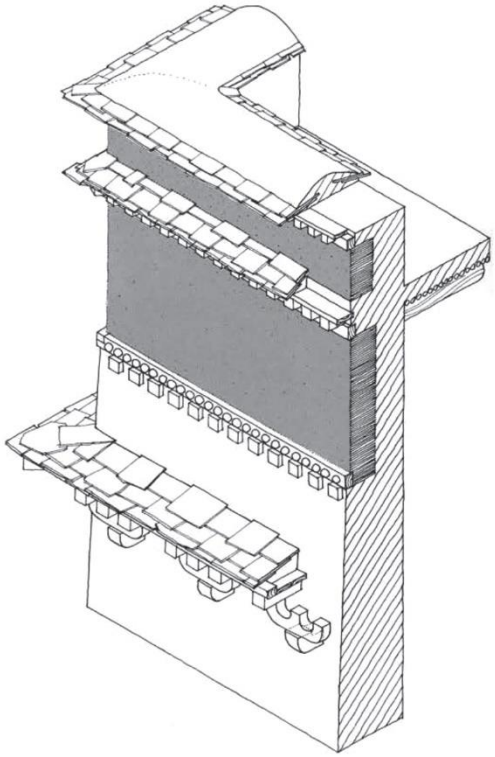

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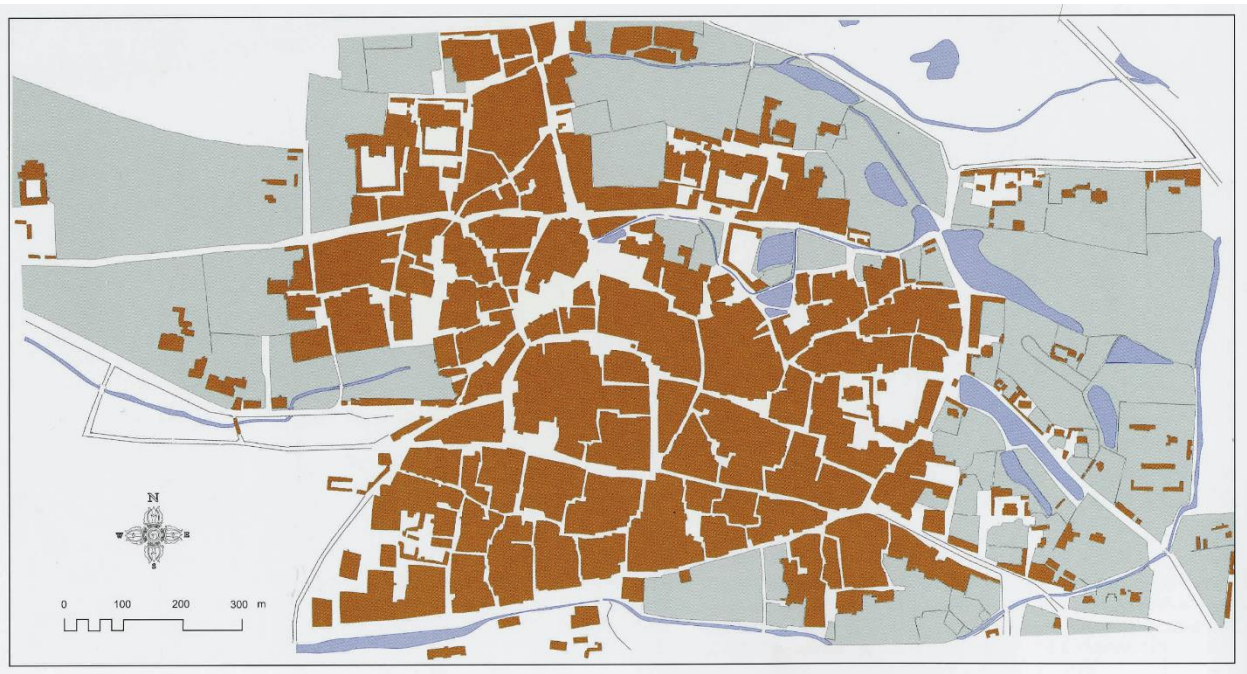

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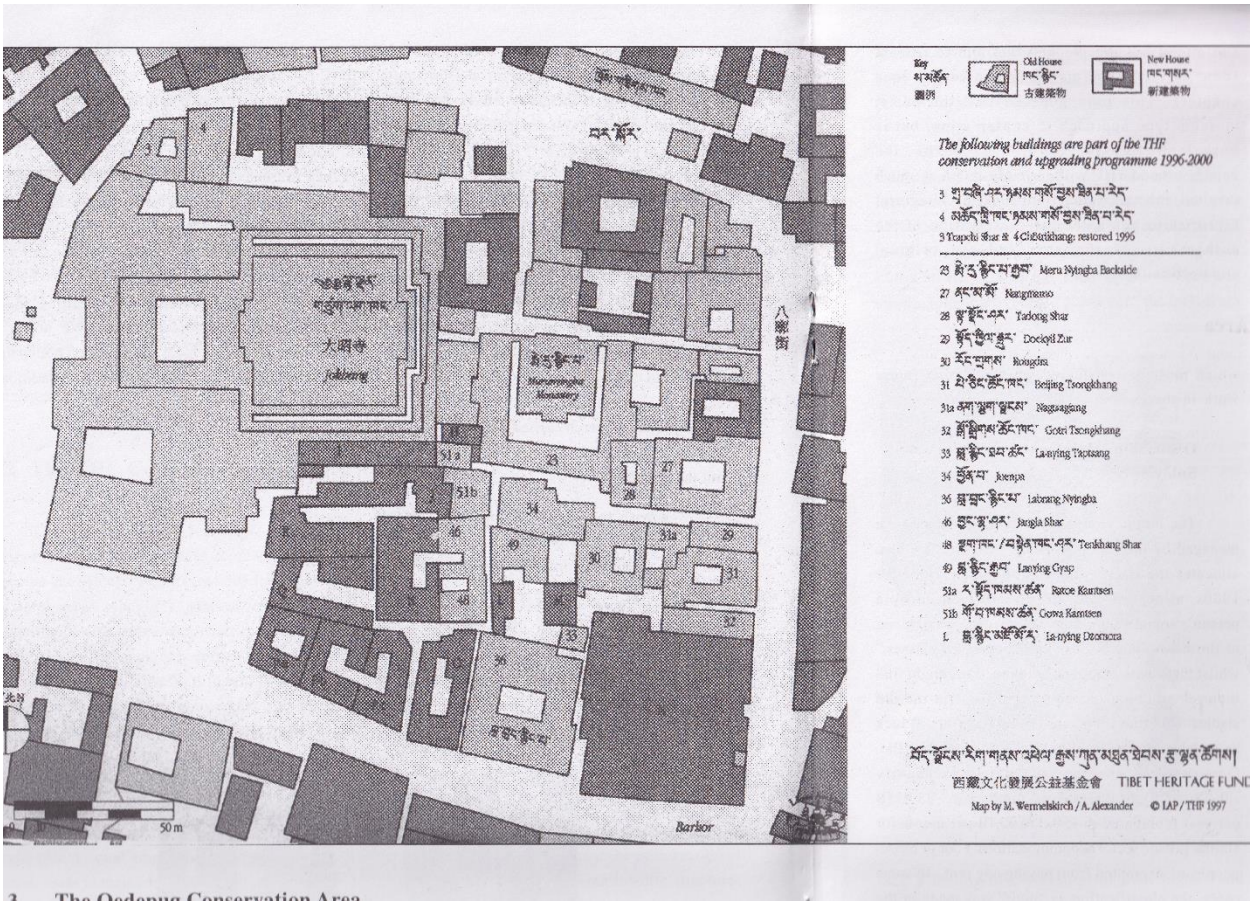

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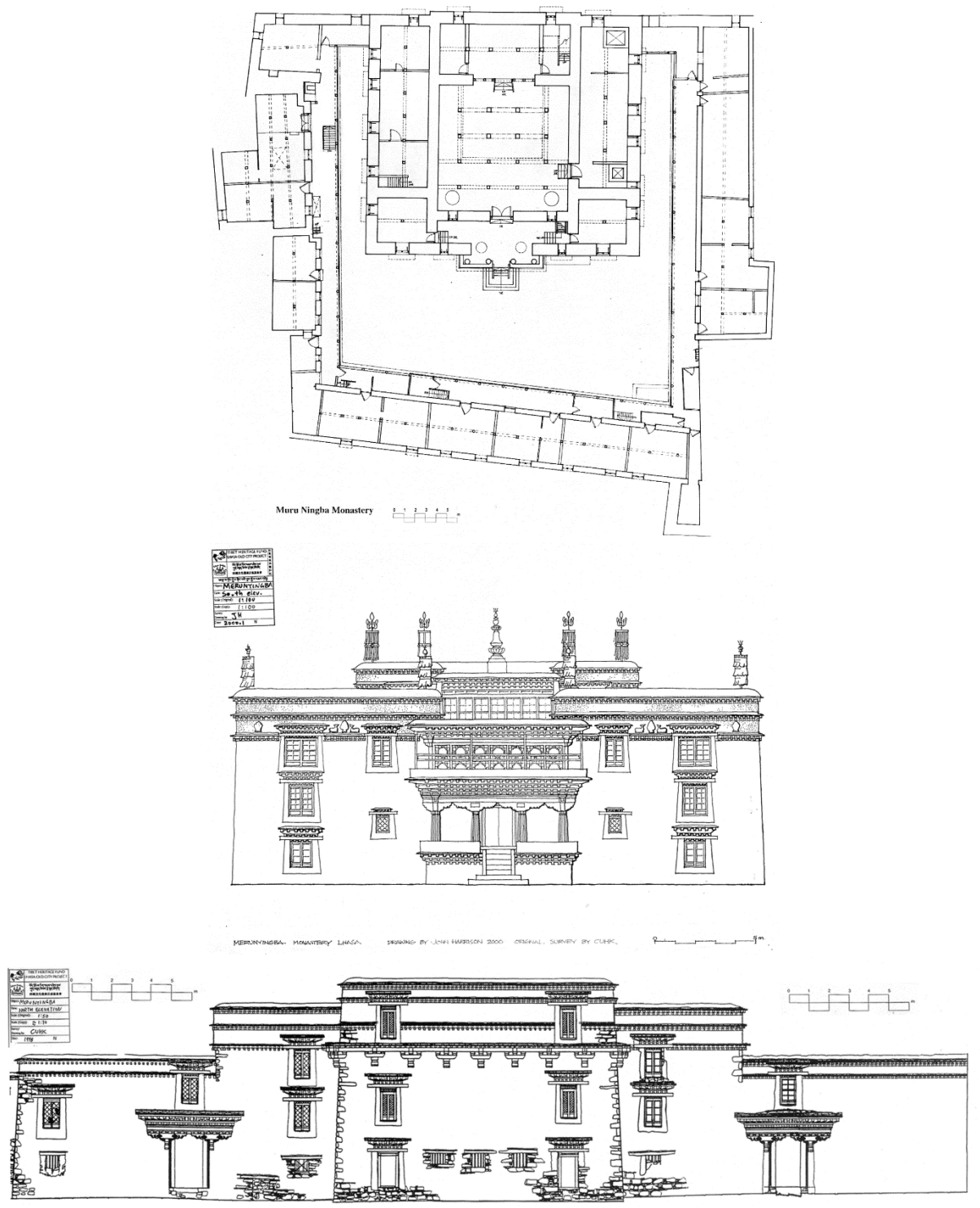

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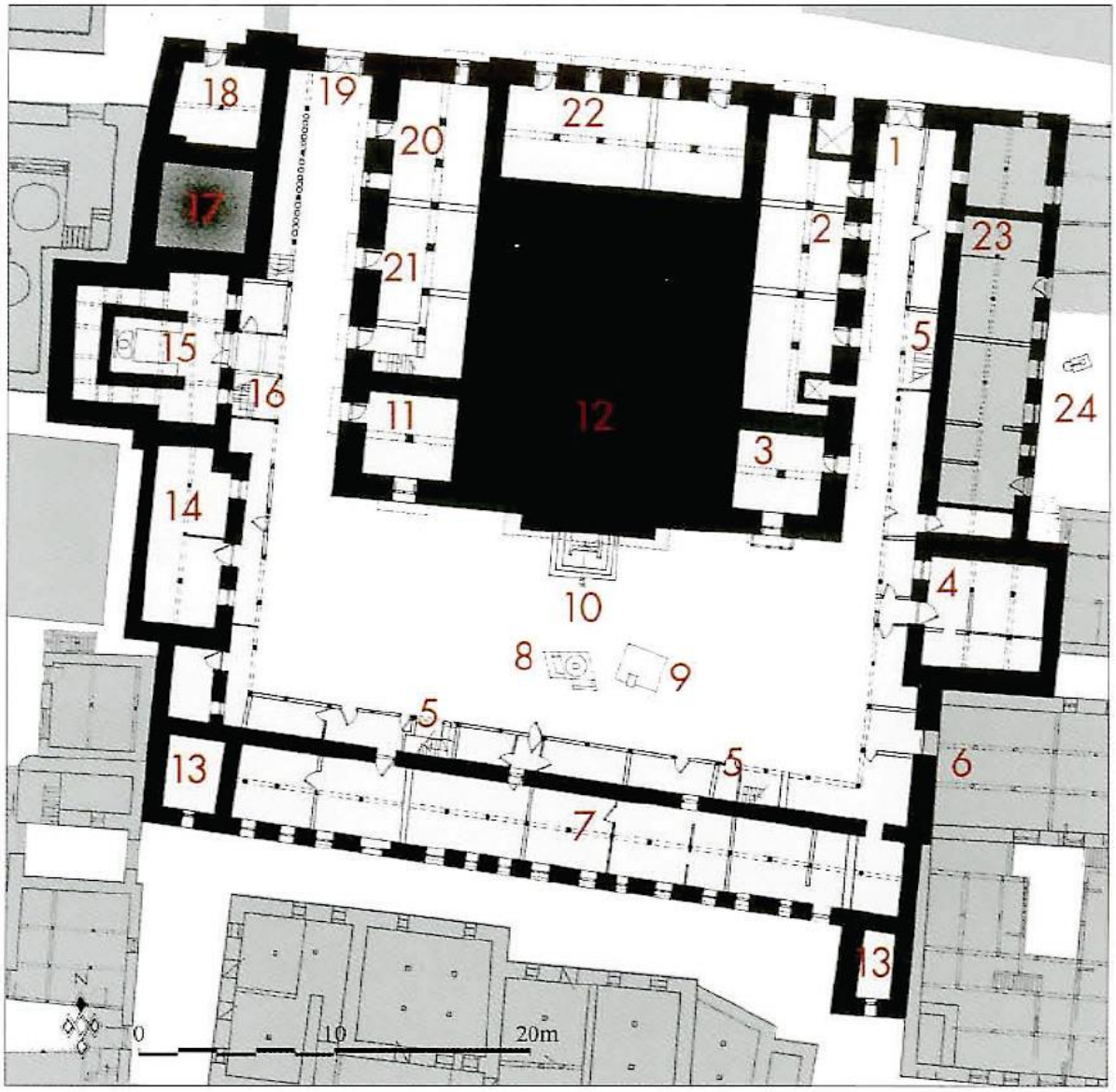

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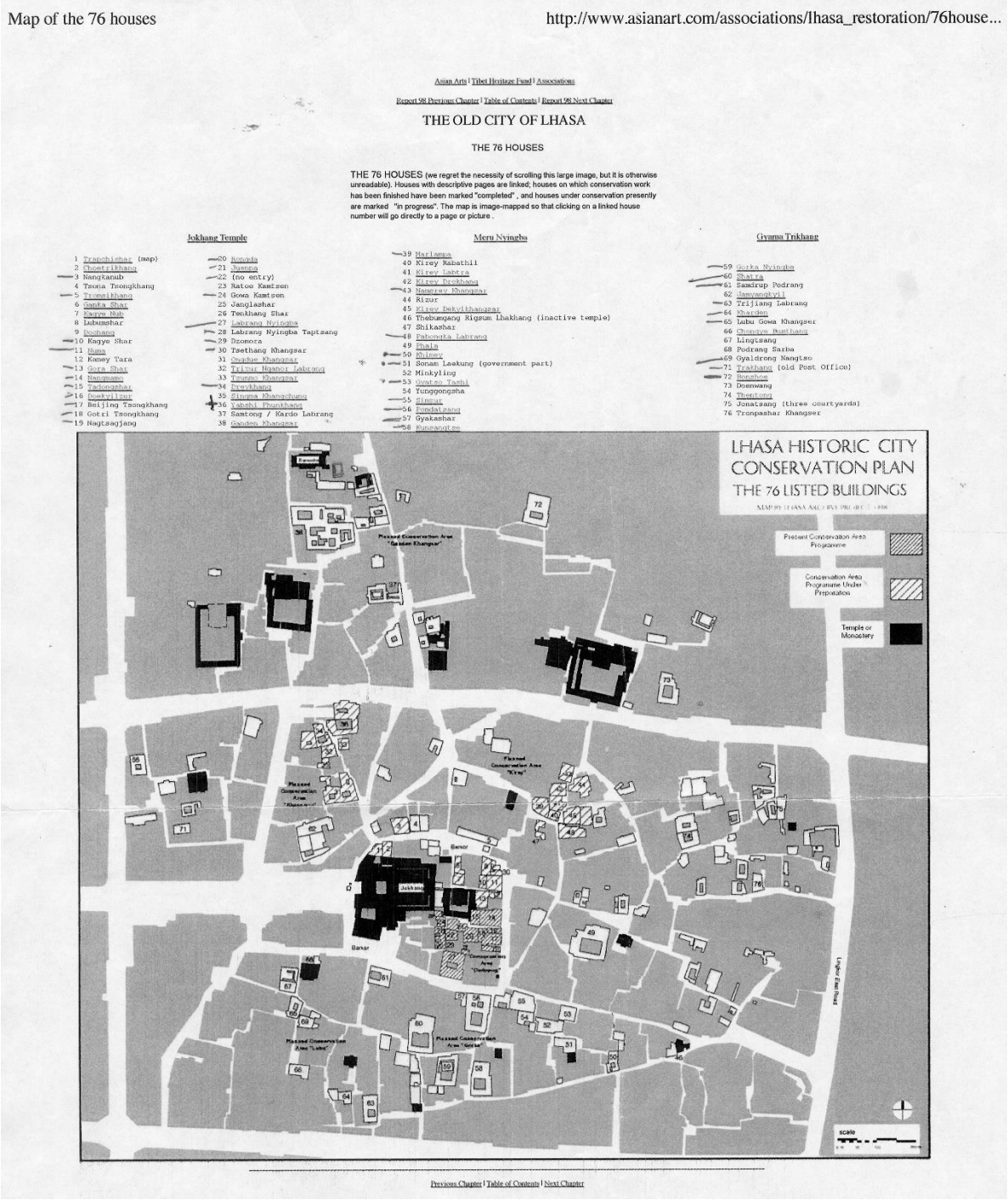

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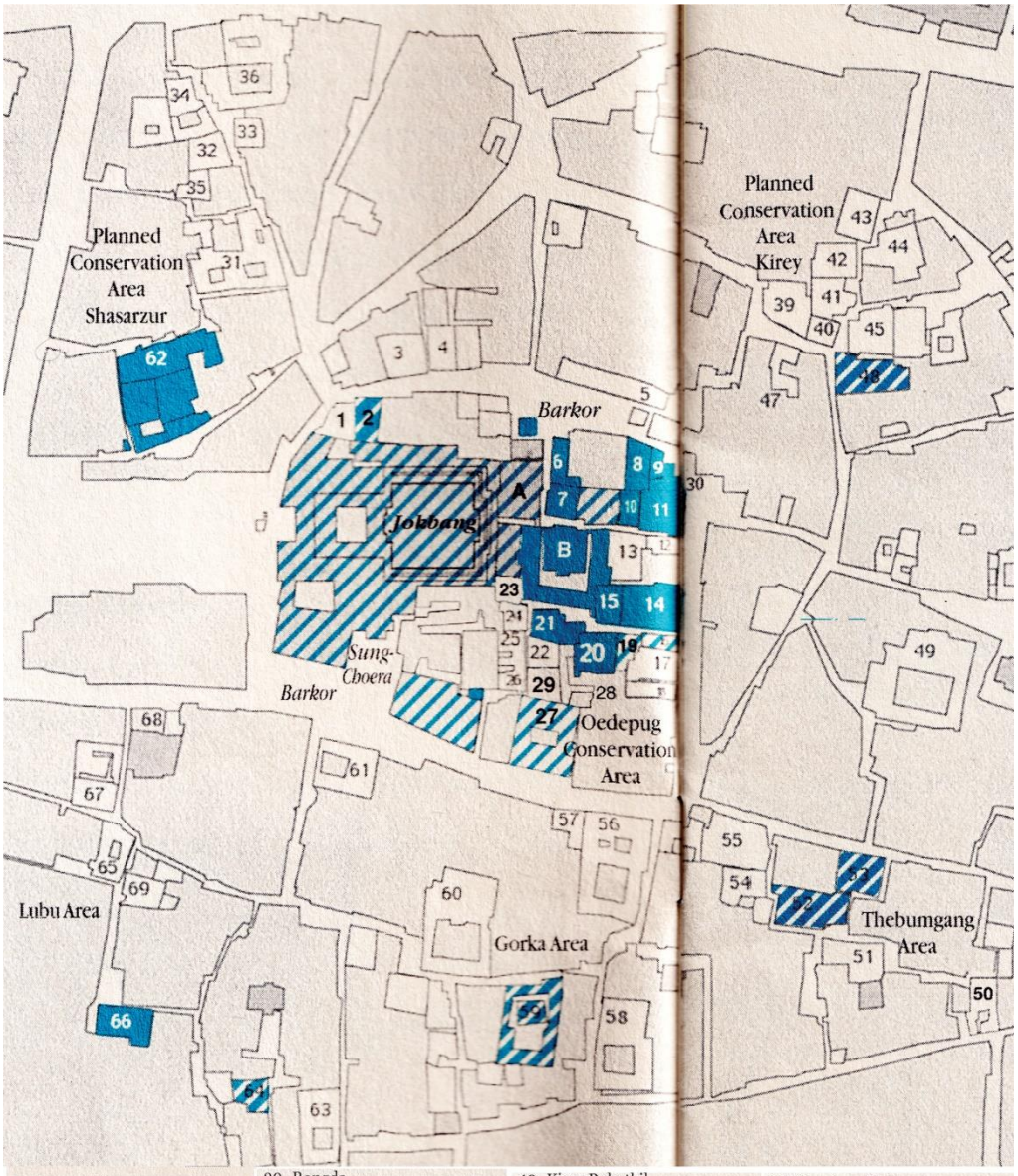

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[183] Andre Alexander et al., *The Lhasa House*, 37.

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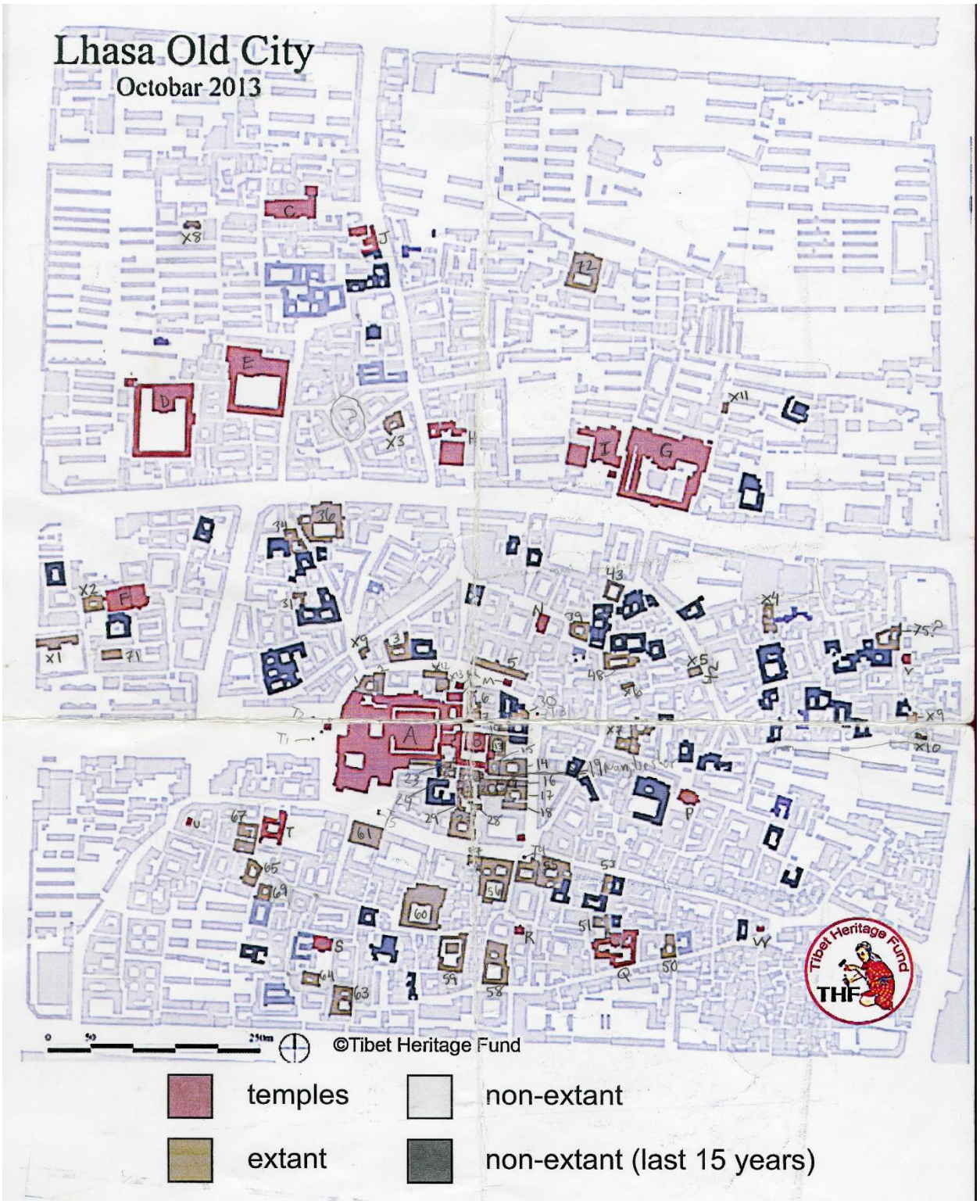

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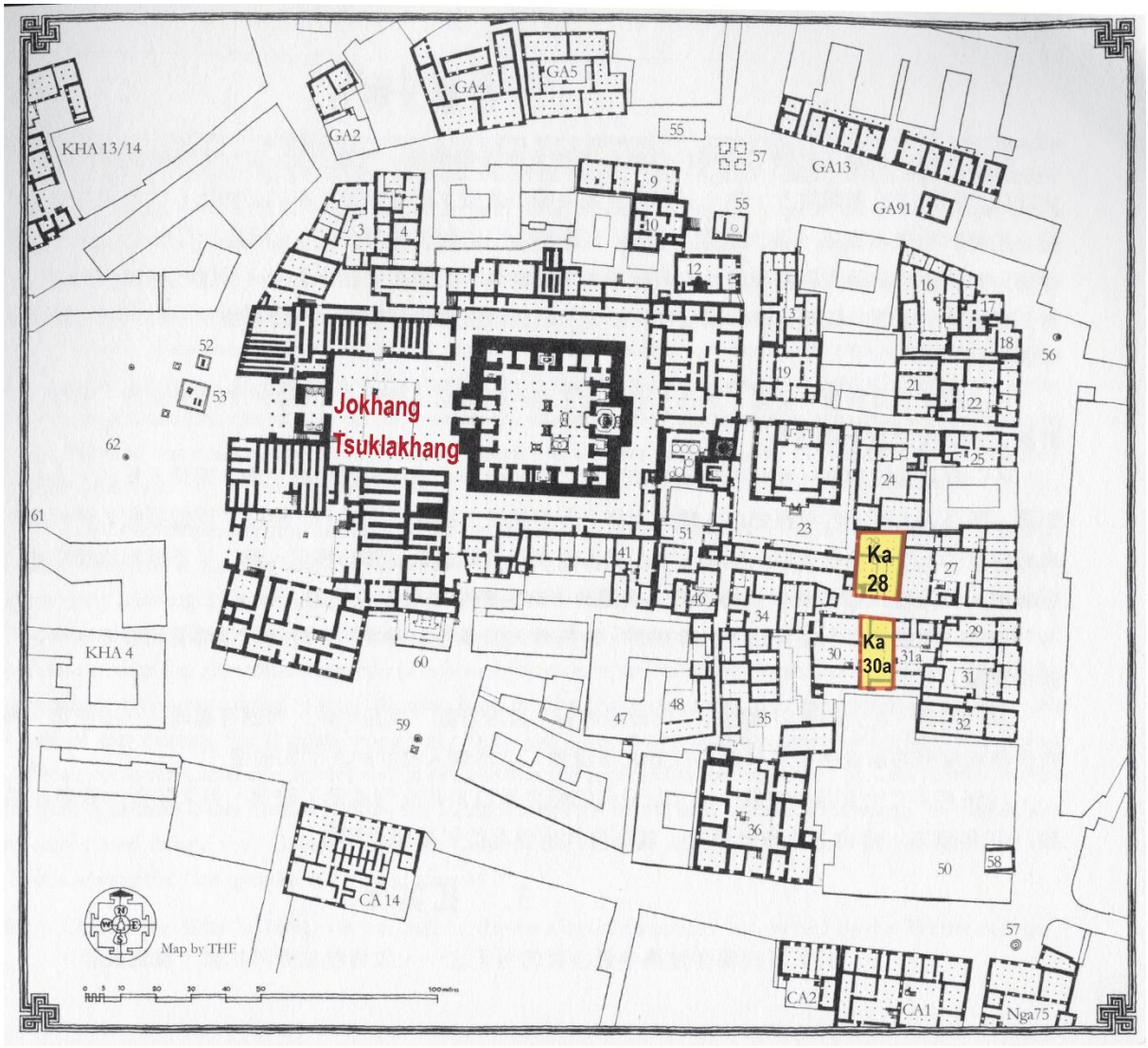

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