

**Food of Sinful Demons:  
A History of Vegetarianism in Tibet**

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“Meat is a food for sinful demons.”

~ *Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen (1356-1415)*

## Abstract

This dissertation is a social and religious history of vegetarianism in Tibet. Drawing on a wide variety of Tibetan language sources as well as contemporary ethnographic fieldwork, I examine the practice of vegetarianism itself, the arguments used to support it, as well as the social and cultural framework in which it occurred.

I begin by arguing that while vegetarianism never became normative for Tibetan Buddhists, it was widely debated by religious leaders. Further, from at least the eleventh century onwards, many individuals have responded to this debate by both personally adopting vegetarianism and by promoting a meat-free diet among their followers. Most, if not all, of these individuals were motivated to adopt vegetarianism by their understanding of Tibetan Buddhism's call to have compassion for all beings. Each individual understood this call differently, however, and I explore and delineate the various approaches different authors have taken in their arguments for vegetarianism.

Given the strength of these arguments, and the importance of compassion in Tibetan Buddhism, I then turn to an analysis of why vegetarianism did not become more prevalent. Some of the reasons for this were practical: the Tibetan environment made the cultivation of vegetables difficult and meat tastes good. Other factors impeding the

spread of vegetarianism were cultural: meat eating was part of a vision of masculinity that celebrated strength and the ability to dominate others. This dissertation, therefore, explores the intersection of and conflict between religious ideals celebrating compassion for animals and the practical and cultural factors that opposed the adoption of a vegetarian diet.

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## Transliteration, Translation and other Conventions

Throughout this dissertation, I have generally eschewed strict transliteration of Tibetan terms and names in favor of phonetic transcription. By doing so, I hope to make reading this work an easier task for those not already familiar with the Tibetan language. In this effort I have employed the system of Tibetan phonetics developed by the Tibetan and Himalayan Library, with occasional modifications based on my own understanding of how a particular term is pronounced. I have also deviated from the THL standard for names and terms that are already well known to an English speaking audience with a particular spelling. Thus, I have used Jigmé Lingpa, rather than THL's suggested Jikmé Lingpa. Immediately following this dissertation is a complete concordance giving the phonetic rendering of all names, along with their correct spelling in standard Wylie transliteration. Wylie transliteration for all Tibetan terms other than names has been provided in footnotes. All Chinese terms have been presented in Pinyin romanization.

This dissertation contains names of more than a hundred individual Tibetans. The first time a name is mentioned in each chapter, it is followed by the year of that person's birth and death in parentheses. By repeating this information only once in each

chapter, I hope to strike a balance between assisting the reader in remembering these details and avoiding visual clutter.

Unless explicitly noted in a footnote, all Tibetan and Chinese passages quoted in this dissertation have been translated by myself, even if other translations have been previously published. By doing so, I hope to maintain a consistent tone across all such passages. When previously published translations of a particular text are available, they are mentioned in the footnote, immediately following the Tibetan language reference.

Text titles have been translated into English, in order to help those who do not read Tibetan distinguish between them. The only exceptions are those canonical texts already widely known by their Sanskrit titles. For these texts, English and Tibetan titles have been provided in footnotes.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to open these acknowledgments by thanking my professors at Hampshire College, particularly my advisors Sue Darlington and Alan Hodder. Their example, patient support and (sometimes) painful critiques instilled in me a love of scholarship for which I am profoundly grateful. I am also grateful to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoché and the staff of the Rangjung Yeshe Institute. Their patient tutelage helped turn my naive interest in Tibetan Buddhism into an appreciation of the complexity and dynamism of this amazing religion. In particular, I am forever grateful to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoché, who introduced me to the practice of compassion and who advised me to pursue academic studies.

Any project as involved as a dissertation cannot be completed without the assistance of many people. This is particularly true of a project such as this one, dependent as it is on the identification of many small pieces of evidence. Reading the entirety of the Tibetan literary canon by myself is obviously impossible, and few of the sources used in this dissertation mention me in their titles. I have relied, therefore, on the willingness of friends and colleagues to point me towards relevant source material. It is impossible for me to name every individual who assisted me in this way, but I will do

my best, and extend my apologies to all those I have overlooked. My heartfelt thanks go to (in alphabetical order) Cathy Cantwell, Bryan Cuevas, Catherine Dalton, Dominic Di Zinno, Shayne Clarke, Kunzang Dorjee, Brandon Dotson, Margaret Ferrigno, Ruth Gamble, Holly Gayley, Janet Gyatso, Lauran Hartley, Sarah Jacoby, Manu Lopez, Charles Manson, Elizabeth Reynolds, Christy Robinson, Jann Ronis, Jampa Samten, Thubten Soepa, Nicolas Sihlé, Matthew Stephensen, James Stewart, Brenton Sullivan, Phurbu Tashi, Antonio Terrone, Leonard van der Kuijp, Stacey Van Vleet, Jed Verity, Tenzin Wangmo, Chris Wilkinson and Noah Winer. I would also like to thank my many Tibetan friends and informants inside Tibet who contributed their time and energy to this project. I am withholding the name of these individuals out of concern for their privacy, but I am deeply grateful nonetheless.

This project also depended on the financial support of several institutions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, the Julian Paul Green Memorial Fellowship and the Ellen Bayard Weedon Travel Grant. Without the support of these institutions and fellowships, this project would never have seen the light of day.

I also wish to thank my advisors at the University of Virginia. David Germano has been particularly adept at demolishing my fondest theories. This could be annoying at times, but the dissertation is much better because of it and I am grateful. Kurtis Schaeffer has overseen this entire project with unwavering support. I remember the day I showed up in his office, a year and a half into an entirely different project, and suggested

changing my topic to Tibetan vegetarianism. I fully expected him to discourage me, given the time already invested in the other project, but he saw the potential of this project and encouraged me to pursue. Again, I am grateful for his assistance.

Finally, I wish to extend my deepest thanks to my family. My parents, Linda and David Barstow, have consistently supported my research and academic ambitions. My mother and father in law, Ellen and Robert Young, have likewise been unwavering in their support. Further, for the better part of three both my mother and my mother in law travelled repeatedly to first Charlottesville, then Spartanburg in order to assist my wife, Eliza, and I with caring for our young daughter, Meg. Without this assistance, neither Eliza nor I would have been able to complete the work our projects required.

Eliza has been a wonderful partner on this journey. It is always difficult juggling the requirements of two academic careers, but this is particularly true when one requires extended travel. Since beginning the PhD program at UVA five years ago, I have spent more than twelve months doing fieldwork in China, a time that also corresponded with some of the first years of Meg's life. The travel required by my program has not always made Eliza's life easy, and I am profoundly grateful for her willingness to shoulder a sometimes-unfair burden. Without her active support, this project would have been impossible.

Lastly, I wish to thank my daughter Meg. It is always a joy to return from a long day in the library and to see her smiling face, arms up-stretched for a hug. She has brought more joy into my life than I ever thought possible.

# Introduction

Few rules are as central to Buddhist ethics as the command not to kill. It is the first of the many rules the Buddha laid down, and both monks and laypeople are expected to adhere to it. In Tibet, this emphasis on not killing has led to widespread condemnation of anyone who kills for a living. Both soldiers and butchers are routinely critiqued. Despite this emphasis on avoiding killing, however, almost all Tibetans eat meat, often copiously. In fact, meat is one of the three most important staples in the Tibetan diet, along with roasted barley flour and butter tea.

Meat eating, however, is not universal in Tibet. From at least the eleventh century on, some individuals have understood meat eating to conflict with Buddhist ethical norms and have adopted a vegetarian diet. Vegetarianism was never normative in Tibet, but its practitioners were a consistent minority, present throughout Tibetan history. In this dissertation, I will examine the practice of vegetarianism in Tibet, addressing its historical presence, the arguments used to support (and denigrate) it and the social and religious contexts in which it occurred.

## Goals and Conclusions

This dissertation has its roots in a reading of Patrül Rinpoché's (1808-1887) *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. I had already spent a year researching another project, and had opened Patrül's classic with that project in mind. I was struck, however, by Patrül's mocking description of monks, beards tinged red from the bloody meat they were eating, covering their heads in shame.<sup>1</sup> I had lived with Tibetans long enough to know that most ate meat with gusto, but this passage made me wonder if Tibet might have a history of vegetarianism as well. At the same time, a search of the secondary literature showed that scholars had yet to analyze the place of vegetarianism within Tibetan religion. Given these two points, I was happy to jettison my previous topic and launch into the study of vegetarianism.<sup>2</sup>

When I first described my project to academic peers, many were skeptical that vegetarianism was widespread enough to justify my research. There may have been a few vegetarians in Tibet, these interlocutors suggested, but surely not enough to warrant a history of the diet. Such beliefs were not limited to western scholars, but were also expressed by many of my Tibetan friends. For many, the idea of a Tibetan refusing to eat meat was somewhat comical, and they greeted descriptions of this project with looks of patient bewilderment.

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<sup>1</sup> dpal sprul, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 103. Patrül, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 70.

<sup>2</sup> At this point, I want to thank my advisor, Kurtis Schaeffer, for his support of this shift in topic. When I first suggested the change, I was worried that he would try to dissuade me, given the year I had already spent on plan A. But he saw the topic's potential as soon as I suggested it, and encouraged me to make the shift.

Indeed, in recent years there has been a consistent discourse that labels vegetarianism in pre-modern Tibet not just non-existent, but actually impossible. Even those contemporary Tibetan lamas who personally support vegetarianism have often insisted that in the pre-modern context, vegetarianism was impossible in Tibet, often citing the difficulty of growing vegetables in Tibet's high altitude climate. To give just one example of many, Tenzin Gyatso, the present Dalai Lama (1935- ), has argued, "In Tibet the difficult geographical conditions - its climate and altitude - were not suitable for growing vegetables and the people have always had to depend on meat and dairy products to survive."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, most of my informants in contemporary Tibet could not name a single Tibetan vegetarian who lived prior to recent decades, generally insisting that vegetarianism was a recent phenomenon, possible only after the creation of modern roads allowed vegetables to be imported from adjacent, lower altitude regions.

As this argument suggests, agriculture is, in fact, quite difficult in most Tibetan regions. With the exception of barley, few crops can be easily cultivated, and fruit is all but unknown. In some villages, those vegetables that were available were not thought to be fit for human consumption.<sup>4</sup> Further, a large proportion of Tibet's population were nomads, dependent on their herds for both food and the entirety of their economic production. Given these constraints, it is not surprising that meat was a staples in the Tibetan diet.

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<sup>3</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama, "Non-Vegetarian Food," 57.

<sup>4</sup> Khentrul Rinpoche, *Vegetarianism Free from Extremes*.

Nor are environmental factors the only constraints on the practice of vegetarianism. Tibetan medicine, both in textual and popular understanding, views eating meat as a crucial element in human health. Concerns over vegetarianism's impact on health also carried religious overtones: without health, an individual could lose the ability to practice religion properly.

Beyond its general association with health, meat also carried specific connections with physical strength. Strength, in turn, was intimately related to masculine ideals. As a threat to an individual's physical strength, vegetarianism also represented a threat to their masculinity. For some men, therefore, meat was not simply a dietary necessity, it was an important aspect of their masculine identity.

And yet, despite all of these factors, there has been a consistent discourse in Tibetan religious literature that critiques meat as sinful. Tibetan Buddhism idealizes compassion as the highest motivation for any activity. Moreover, such compassion is to be directed towards all sentient beings, a category that explicitly includes animals. Drawing on this idealization of compassion, some Tibetan religious leaders have argued that eating meat is unacceptable, praising vegetarianism as the only dietary practice acceptable for Buddhists.

Further, and despite my informants' claims to the contrary, vegetarianism was not only praised, but actually implemented in Tibet. To date, I have compiled a list of thirty-seven individuals who lived prior to the 1950 Chinese invasion and who can reliably be identified as vegetarian, with fifty more whose vegetarianism is possible but

unconfirmed.<sup>5</sup> These may not seem like large numbers, given the thousand plus years of Buddhist history in Tibet, but these are only the individuals I have identified by name. There were, presumably, many others who upheld a vegetarian diet but whom I have been unable to identify. Vegetarianism never became normative in Tibet, but it did exist.

In many ways, this dissertation explores the intersection between these religious calls for vegetarianism and the environmental and cultural factors that made such a diet difficult. Vegetarianism may have been praised by some Buddhist leaders, but that praise did not necessarily remove the many obstacles to its adoption. The account I present here, however, is more than just a story of practical difficulties being overcome—or not overcome—by religious ideals. Just as there are a variety of factors, both environmental and cultural, that mitigate against vegetarianism, there are also a variety of arguments that support it. Some of these concerns overlap and converge, others are in opposition to each other. My goal, throughout this dissertation, has been to create a portrait of the practice of vegetarianism in its Tibetan context with as much detail and nuance as the sources will allow.

Towards that end, this dissertation is structured in two parts. In the first, I establish that vegetarianism did, in fact, exist in Tibet. It never became normative, but it persisted as a minority practice reserved for a small group of religiously devout Tibetans. That said, vegetarianism was definitely more popular at some times than at others;

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<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed in chapter two, vegetarianism in Tibet meant different things to different people at different times. Not everyone included in these numbers, therefore, practiced exactly the same diet, or was vegetarian for their entire life.



thirteenth through fifteenth century Central Tibet being one important time and Kham from the nineteenth century through the present another.

The first section of this dissertation also addresses the various arguments given in support of vegetarianism. Most discussions of vegetarianism hinge on Tibetan Buddhism's call to have compassion for all beings. Each individual understood the demands of compassion differently, however, and I explore the various approaches different authors have taken in their arguments for vegetarianism.

Following this discussion of vegetarianism itself, in the second part of the dissertation I turn my attention to the social and cultural context in which vegetarianism was situated. This discussion invokes many factors, including environmental constraints. Most importantly, however, I note the alignment between vegetarianism and the tamed ideals promoted by Buddhist religiosity, in contrast to other cultural ideals more closely associated with untamed masculinity. This alignment explains vegetarianism's specific association with monastics rather than lay religious practitioners, despite the explicit permission to eat meat found in the monastic code. It also explains vegetarianism's ability to enhance both individual and group legitimacy, at least during those times when tamed religion was celebrated over untamed ideals such as strength and dominance.

## Vegetarianism & Tibetan Studies

To date, there have been no academic studies of vegetarianism in Tibet.<sup>6</sup> A few studies have mentioned the presence of vegetarians, but none have sought to examine the practice in any detail. There has, however, been a continuing debate among contemporary Tibetan Buddhists—both ethnically Tibetan and western—over vegetarianism. This debate has played out in magazine articles, sermons by prominent lamas, and an ever increasing number of texts—in both Tibetan and western languages—that directly reference vegetarianism. While these works generally forego any systematic, academic analysis of the phenomena, they have often been extremely useful in helping me locate important sources.<sup>7</sup>

Further, while there has been no scholarly analysis of vegetarianism in Tibet, there has been significant scholarship directed towards vegetarianism in the Buddhist traditions of India and China. With regards to the former, several studies have been written that specifically focus on two points, the contents of the Buddha's final meal and the role of the rule of threefold purity.<sup>8</sup> While these studies do not directly reference

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<sup>6</sup> The one exception is my own article on vegetarianism in the works of Jigmé Lingpa, recently published by the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*.

<sup>7</sup> Particularly important translations include:

Patrul Rinpoche. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*. Jigme Lingpa, *Story of the Hunted Deer*. Nyakla Pema Dudul, *Advice on Abandoning Meat*. Mochizuki, "On the Scriptures Introducing the Prohibition of Meat and Alcohol."

<sup>8</sup> On the Buddha's last meal, see:

Wasson & O'Flaherty, "Last Meat of the Buddha."

On threefold purity, see:

Horner, "Early Buddhism." Rahula, "Buddhist Attitude." Prasad, "Meat-Eating and the Rule of Tikoṭiparisuddha."

Tibetan Buddhist practices, they do allow Tibetan vegetarianism to be understood in the context of its Indian forebears.

Similarly, there have been several excellent studies of vegetarianism in Chinese Buddhism. Of particular importance is John Kieschnick's "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," which provides a brief but detailed history of the diet in Chinese Buddhism, tracking its rise from a fringe practice to a diet expected of all devout Buddhists, ordained and lay. This work, along with other articles that address vegetarianism in China with varying degrees of directness, provides an even more complete picture of Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism than is available for India.<sup>9</sup> Again, while the patterns found in Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism do not necessarily apply to Tibet, these works help to situate Tibetan vegetarianism in a broader regional and historical context.

There have also been several important studies that deal with the place of animals in Tibetan culture. The most important of these include articles addressing the role of hunting in Tibetan culture. Both John Bellezza and Brandon Dotson have written important works discussing the social role played by hunting in the pre-Buddhist period, both of which have proven instrumental in my discussion of the relationship between hunting and masculinity. Toni Huber addresses contemporary hunting practices in his "Antelope Hunting in Northern Tibet," as well as the practice of banning hunting in

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For more general studies of vegetarianism in India, see: Doniger, *Hindus*. Chapple, *Nonviolence*. Alsdorf, *Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India*.

<sup>9</sup> Other key works include: Reinders, "Blessed are the Meat Eaters." ter Haarh, "Buddhist Inspired Options." Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*.

certain areas. All of these works shed light on attitudes towards animals and animal suffering in Tibet.

Finally, this dissertation is indebted to the many recent works of scholarship that address nineteenth and twentieth century Kham. Of particular importance are dissertations by Jann Ronis, William Gorvine and Alex Gardner, as well as articles by William Coleman, Tsering Thar, Xiuyu Wang, Lauren Hartley and Gene Smith. This time period is the focus of chapter five in this dissertation, and I draw heavily on these works for my understanding of its religious, political and cultural movements.

## Sources & Methodology

In performing the research for this dissertation, I have relied primarily on Tibetan language texts, including biographies, autobiographies, religious advice literature and discussions of monastic vows. Among these the biographical and autobiographical material is perhaps the most voluminous. Tibetan biographical literature was frequently written by disciples of a prominent lama, and generally assumes a reverent tone, clearly intent on presenting the author's revered teacher in as positive a light as possible.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, autobiographical literature, while written by the subject themselves, was usually intended to cultivate disciples' faith, so it once again focuses on highlighting the positive aspects of their life.<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that Tibetan biographical and autobiographical

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<sup>10</sup> Gorvine. *The Life of a Bönpo Luminary*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 116-121.

literature always omits less positive aspects of an individual's life, but given the often explicit goal of cultivating disciples' faith, positive episodes are frequently highlighted.<sup>12</sup>

Such goals make these sources both useful and potentially problematic for this study. On the positive side, admired traits, including vegetarianism, are often mentioned in such works, making them a valuable source of information on who adopted vegetarianism. At the same time, these mentions are often highly reverential in tone, resulting in little, if any, discussion of the lived realities a vegetarian diet might entail. A good example of this type of passage can be found in Gö Lotsawa's (1392-1481) *Blue Annals*'s depiction of the fourth Karmapa, Rolpé Dorjé (1340-1383), "He guarded his monastic commitments with great subtlety, not allowing even a hair's breadth of meat or wine into his presence."<sup>13</sup> In many ways this report is quite valuable: not only does it point to Rolpé Dorjé as a vegetarian, but it also highlights both the diet's connection with monasticism and the fact that it was admired. At the same time, however, its brevity gives little insight into the details of vegetarianism in fourteenth century Tibet.

*The Blue Annals* includes hundreds of short biographies, and with so many individuals to discuss, the brevity of Gö Lotsawa's description of Rolpé Dorjé's vegetarianism is understandable. What is more surprising is the often brief mentions of vegetarianism in full length biographical works. The *Autobiography* of Sera Khandro (1892-1940), for instance, mentions her vegetarianism twice over the course of more than

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<sup>12</sup> Two excellent examples of more critical, self-reflexive autobiographies are those of Jigmé Lingpa and Shabkar.

<sup>13</sup> 'gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 592. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 499.  
'dul ba'i bcas pa phra mo rnam kyang bsrung zhing/ sha dang chang spu rtse tsam yang spyen lam du mi 'grim/

four hundred pages.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Künga Tenpé Gyeltsen's (1885-1952) *The Life of Ngawang Lekpa* mentions only once, in ninety-one pages, that Ngawang Lekpa (1864-1941) was a lifelong vegetarian.<sup>15</sup> With a few notable exceptions, including the autobiographies of Jigmé Lingpa (1730-1798) and Shabkar (1781-1851), such brief discussions of vegetarianism are standard for this material. Thus, while these sources offer valuable insight into who practiced vegetarianism, they are often frustratingly incomplete on the details, difficulties and social context of the diet.

Fortunately, the brief descriptions found in biographical and autobiographical literature are supplemented by longer discussions in works of religious advice. Some of these works offer advice on many topics, and include discussions of vegetarianism as a relatively minor tangent. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is Patrül Rinpoché's aforementioned *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, a commentary on a set of meditation instructions that also includes several scathing critiques of meat eating.

Such passages are complemented by texts focused on monastic vows. These texts can be either commentaries on the monastic code itself, or works addressing the three vows—monastic vows, Bodhisattva vow and tantric vows—as a group. In both formulations, these texts sometimes discuss the place of meat in the performance of correct monastic conduct. Further, some commentaries on the three vows also discuss the role of meat in the Bodhisattva and tantric vows. Meat is viewed very differently in

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<sup>14</sup> se ra mkha' 'dro, *Autobiography*, 130-131, 356. Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 56, 295.

<sup>15</sup> kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Biography of Ngawang Lekpa*, 10.

each of these perspectives, making such texts an important window into the place of vegetarianism in Tibetan religiosity both inside and outside a monastic context.

Still, as with Patrül's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, these texts rarely devote more than a few pages to the question of vegetarianism. In order to find longer treatments of this topic, we need to turn to those few texts that focus entirely, or almost entirely, on the question of vegetarianism. To date, I have identified six such texts written prior to the Chinese invasion. Another half-dozen have been composed over the last two decades. These texts range in length from Nyakla Pema Dödül's (1816-1873) three page *Advice on Abandoning Meat* to Ngorchon Künga Zangpo's (1382-1444) fifty page *Letter to Benefit Students*. Given their length and specific concern with meat, these texts provide the clearest insight into the arguments and debates that surrounded vegetarianism.

In addition to granting insight into their own authors' opinions, these texts also help to give a more general sense of the arguments prevalent at a given time, helping to contextualize the shorter passages found in other texts. As an example, *The Blue Annals'* brief mention of Rolpé Dorjé's vegetarianism makes clear that it was a part of his monastic vows. This, by itself, seems incongruous as the monastic code is generally understood to permit meat eating. However, both Dolpopa and Ngorchon Künga Zangpo's works on vegetarianism, written within a century of Rolpé Dorjé's life, discuss the place of meat in monasticism at length, arguing strongly that it is not permitted. Within this context, *The Blue Annals'* brief comments make much more sense.

One type of text that I have not found is a defense of meat eating written prior to the last three decades.<sup>16</sup> There could be many reasons for this lacunae, but the simplest is probably the fact that vegetarianism remained rare enough not to challenge those who chose to eat meat, so they may not have felt a need to defend their diet in writing. In order to understand the arguments supporting meat eating, therefore, I have had to rely on anti-meat works. Fortunately, these texts often systematically critique what they understand to be the arguments in support of meat eating, making it fairly simple to re-create pro-meat positions. What is much more difficult, however, is determining the extent to which actual people held these positions, or whether they may have been straw-man arguments, set forward for easy critique by authors opposed to meat.

Collectively, these materials provide a broad vision of vegetarianism across Tibetan history. They also present a number of difficulties, however. As already mentioned, many of these sources are frustratingly brief in their discussion of vegetarianism. They may help to identify individuals who were vegetarian, or to establish the general type of argument being used, but with only a few exceptions, they omit the details.

Perhaps more importantly, these texts are difficult to locate and identify. This is particularly true of those texts that only mention vegetarianism briefly. In order to find references such as these, I have relied heavily on both previous scholarship and interviews

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<sup>16</sup> Since the late nineteen seventies, several such texts have been written by Tibetan lamas living in exile, often in response to questions from their western students. Given the new context these texts emerged out of, however, I have not included them in this work, which deals primarily with vegetarianism in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion of the nineteen fifties.



with Tibetan scholars. A good example of the former can be found in Sarah Jacoby's dissertation, *Consorts and Revelations in Eastern Tibet*. This work, which discusses Sera Khandro's life in detail, also mentions her vegetarianism.<sup>17</sup> Jacoby does not discuss Sera Khandro's vegetarianism in detail, but she does provide the necessary reference for me to query the text itself. Several of the texts at the core of this dissertation were found through a similar process of working backwards from brief mentions in previous scholarship or English translations.

Other sources were found through interviews with contemporary Tibetan lamas and scholars. During my field research, I queried numerous knowledgeable Tibetans about both the contemporary vegetarian movement and vegetarians of earlier generations. This process is exemplified in my interactions with a Sakya Khenpo<sup>18</sup> from the Minyak region of Kham.<sup>19</sup> A mutual friend introduced me to the Khenpo in Chengdu. At the time, he mentioned that he thought Ngawang Lekpa was a vegetarian. Two months later, when I visited his monastery in Minyak, he was able to provide me with a biography of Ngawang Lekpa that included an explicit reference to his vegetarianism.

Finally, many of the texts used in this study were found through a process of browsing catalogs of Tibetan texts and, frequently enough, the texts themselves. Given the voluminous nature of Tibetan literature, it is impossible to read, or even skim, more

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<sup>17</sup> Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 56, 295.

<sup>18</sup> tib: *mkhan po*. The title Khenpo signifies that an individual has completed many years of scholastic study. It is roughly equivalent to a western PhD.

<sup>19</sup> With the exception of a few prominent religious leaders, I am withholding the names of my informants in Tibet, in order to preserve their privacy.

than a tiny fraction of the potential sources available. Further, few relevant texts mention vegetarianism in their titles. As I accumulated source material, however, I began to understand what types of text were likely to contain references to meat and where in those texts such references might be found. This allowed me to focus my browsing habits, making the process much more productive. Not every text I examined proved fruitful, but some of my most important sources were located through such targeted browsing.

Finally, this dissertation has been informed by my fieldwork in Kham. This research began in the summer of 2010 with a six week visit to the region, and continued with a ten month period during the 2011-2012 academic year, as well as a brief visit to Tibetan exile communities in India and Nepal in February of 2012.<sup>20</sup> Because of political tension in post-2008 Kham, I was unable to spend any long periods of time at individual monasteries.<sup>21</sup> I was unable, therefore, to conduct the detailed research that I had initially hoped to accomplish. Instead, I tried to substitute breadth for depth and travelled widely throughout the region, visiting several dozen monasteries and conducting hundreds of interviews.

This fieldwork forms the core of my analysis of the contemporary vegetarian movement, which I found to be strikingly vital, spreading rapidly throughout the Tibetan

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<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to the Fulbright U.S. student program and the Julian Green Fellowship for their support of this fieldwork.

<sup>21</sup> In 2008 the entire Tibetan region experienced a series of riots in opposition to Chinese control. By the time I arrived, the large demonstrations had been replaced by a wave of self-immolations. The police presence was widespread, and all foreigners were regarded with deep suspicion.

cultural region. Most of this dissertation, however, is concerned with vegetarianism in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion, and few of my informants were old enough to remember this time. Given the massive political and social shifts of the last sixty years, it is clear that my fieldwork among contemporary Tibetans cannot represent Tibetan practices during that earlier time.

With that said, there have been a few instances where contemporary practice clearly reflects issues similar to those found in my textual sources. In those instances I have drawn on this fieldwork to help illustrate behavior and beliefs found in the textual material. A good example of this can be found in the idea of eating only meat that had died naturally. Some figures, most notably Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1935), ate only this type of meat, refusing the meat of any animals that had been slaughtered. When I first read this, I was skeptical that such a diet was feasible. Subsequently, however, I spent more than a week in a village whose residents refused to slaughter their animals, deriving enough meat from wolf-kills, accidents and lightening strikes to sustain themselves. If it had not been for this experience, my understanding of Shardza's text would be quite different. Thus, the fieldwork I conducted in Kham is important not only for the light it shines on contemporary practice, but also for its ability to illuminate past issues as well.

## Chapter Outline

Above, I outlined two fundamental sections in this dissertation, the first concerned with the practice of vegetarianism itself, and the second focussed on the practice's cultural context. The chapter structure I have adopted addresses these issues more or less in order, with the first chapter focused on the history of vegetarianism in Tibet, the second looking at arguments used to support vegetarianism and the third through fifth chapters addressing the diet's social context.

In order to present the religious and historical context within which Tibetan vegetarianism arose, the first chapter of this dissertation opens with a discussion of vegetarianism in Indian Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. Indian Buddhist texts in particular were often cited by later Tibetan proponents of vegetarianism, and in many ways set the terms of debate that would be followed by later Tibetan exegetes.

The chapter then turns to vegetarianism in Tibet itself, beginning with the earliest references. Dating to the early decades of the second dissemination, these references are usually brief, but set the stage for the first period during which vegetarianism was relatively widely adopted: the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. Numerous individuals adopted vegetarianism during this time, including several of the most important figures of this time. Further, this time features the first two texts that I am aware of that specifically focus on meat.

After the fifteenth century, however, vegetarianism seems to have decreased in importance, at least until the late eighteenth century, when two individuals, Jigmé Lingpa

(1730-1798) and Shabkar (1781-1851), reinvigorated the vegetarian movement. Thanks in large part to their efforts, vegetarianism experienced what was perhaps its period of greatest popularity in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kham. Once again, there are numerous records of individuals adopting vegetarianism during this time, as well as several texts specifically addressing meat consumption. While vegetarianism never became the norm, it does seem to have been quite popular during this time.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of vegetarianism in contemporary Tibet. The political, economic and cultural context of the present day differs considerably from earlier times, and those changes have dramatically impacted the vegetarian movement. Of key importance in this shift is the ease of transmitting information, both as text and video, and the development of modern roads, which have made vegetables and other non-meat foods available even in remote areas. With these changes, and under the leadership of several charismatic individuals, vegetarianism has become broadly popular in contemporary Tibet.

The second chapter of this dissertation seeks to address the arguments put forward in support of vegetarianism. Before getting into those issues, however, I detour slightly to discuss what, exactly, I mean when I use the term vegetarian. As with its modern, western context, where the term ‘vegetarianism’ can refer to a variety of diets ranging from strict veganism to the mere rejection of red meat, Tibet also featured a variety of diets that differ from each other, but are all united by the idea that meat is a sinful food to be avoided.

Following this, chapter two turns towards the arguments themselves, noting that at their root, all of the arguments hinge on the importance Tibetan Buddhism places on compassion, and the assumption that killing an animal for its meat violates that principle. In practice, however, different authors have approached this argument in different ways, and with different emphases. This chapter catalogs and differentiates these various approaches.

Having discussed compassion at length, this chapter turns to two related, but distinct arguments. In the first, some Tibetans have sought to emphasize the idea that eating meat will produce negative karmic repercussions in a future life. Here, instead of focusing on the need to have compassion for the animal, these authors ask their readers to have concern for their own future existences. In the second, adopting vegetarianism is seen to have direct soteriological benefit for an individual. Specifically, by adopting vegetarianism and cultivating compassion towards animals, individuals can provoke powerful religious experiences, making vegetarianism beneficial not only to the animals but also for the practitioner themselves.

This dissertation's third chapter marks a shift to an analysis of the context within which vegetarianism was practiced (or avoided). Specifically, this chapter asks why, given the extensive arguments against meat discussed in the previous chapter, any Tibetans would continue eating it. When asked, almost all Tibetans I interviewed, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, admitted that meat tastes good. This fact, however, seems insufficient to explain the persistence of meat in the Tibetan diet. Sex, after all, is also

pleasant, and yet Tibetan monks are widely expected to be celibate. Sex, however, is clearly forbidden by the monastic code, while meat eating is more ambiguous. Those who supported vegetarianism had no difficulty arguing that it is forbidden, but those inclined to eat meat were also able to point to scriptural passages allowing it.

In addition to meat's pleasant taste, environmental factors mitigated strongly against vegetarianism. More specifically, the dearth of vegetables, fruits or other non-meat foods increased the importance of meat in the diet. For many, there were few other options. And yet, as the first chapter of this dissertation demonstrates, many Tibetans did, in fact, adopt vegetarianism, living long and healthy lives without meat. Like meat's pleasant taste, environmental circumstances mitigated against vegetarianism, but the diet remained a demonstrably viable option nonetheless.

In order to further explain meat's persistence in Tibetan diet, this chapter turns to an examination of the role of meat in Tibetan culture more broadly. Of particular importance is meat's connection with notions of strength and masculinity. Meat eating, I demonstrate, is widely seen as a necessary part of building physical strength, and as such is entwined with a particular vision of ideal masculinity. These ideals, in turn, are associated with the untamed side of Tibetan culture, often explicitly opposed to tamed, Buddhist culture.

Tamed and untamed ideas frequently coexist in an uneasy tension; ethical ideals derived from Buddhism are not always the dominant cultural force. Among other implications, this means that meat eating is frequently celebrated in Tibetan culture,

despite a nearly universal acknowledgement that vegetarianism is good and meat eating is at least mildly problematic according to Buddhist ethical norms. When proponents argue for vegetarianism, other cultural ideals push back. These untamed ideals also celebrate sex and procreation as an essential part of masculinity, but in this case the Buddhistic proscription is clear. Without such a clear proscription, however, proponents of vegetarianism have had a more difficult time taming their carnivorous opponents.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation focuses on the connection between meat and monasticism. This association is widely attested in the source material, with many individuals adopting vegetarianism at the time they ordain, and others explicitly asserting that monks may not eat meat. Indeed, until the late eighteenth century, vegetarianism in Tibet is almost exclusively a monastic affair. This is surprising because the monastic code explicitly allows monks to eat meat.

In order to understand this, I first note that while most authors agree vegetarianism is permitted by the monastic code, many also argue that it is not permitted by the Bodhisattva vow, which all Tibetan monks also take. Further, according to Tibetan theories regarding the three types of vows, the Bodhisattva vow is superior to monastic vows. That is, in cases of conflict, an individual should adhere to the Bodhisattva vow. For monks, then, vegetarianism stems from adherence to a higher level of conduct than the mere monastic code itself.

This helps to explain why some felt vegetarianism was necessary for monks, but it does not yet explain why so many people felt vegetarianism was important for monks, but



not for other types of practitioners. In order to address this, I return to the association between meat eating, strength, masculinity and untamed aspects of Tibetan culture. In the conflict between tamed and untamed aspects of Tibetan culture, both monasticism and vegetarianism are strongly associated with tamed religiosity. On the other hand, non-monastic, non-celibate practitioners are more ambiguous, drawing on both tamed and untamed ideals. While they are generally expected to uphold the ideals of a Bodhisattva just as monks are, they also marry and produce progeny, maintaining their association with untamed ideals. I argue that for such individuals, situated ambiguously between the norms of tamed and untamed religiosity, vegetarianism was much less of a concern.

Finally, chapter five addresses why vegetarianism became more popular during certain periods of time. In particular, the chapter focuses on nineteenth and twentieth century Kham, when vegetarianism achieved what I believe to be its highest level of popularity prior to the present. In order to do this, I first look at the history of this period more broadly, noting a pair of key facts. First, this period was highly unstable, both religiously and politically. This meant that both individual practitioners and sects had to vie with one another for patrons and disciples. In order to be effective in this, both individuals and groups cultivated legitimacy, the sense among potential patrons or students that the figure in question was motivated by genuine religious concerns, and was, therefore, a worthy object of devotion.

Second, monasticism and practices associated with monasticism were becoming increasingly important during this period, making them useful avenues for increasing legitimacy. Scholarship, for instance, was highly praised, making scholastic studies an effective means for developing the legitimacy that could raise an individual's profile. Similarly, vegetarianism, strongly associated with the monastic ideal, was a powerful way to display one's legitimacy. Not only could vegetarianism be used in this way, but I argue that texts and oral histories of this period demonstrate that it was, in fact, functioning in this way.

Overall, this dissertation sets out to present as complete a picture of Tibetan vegetarianism as possible, given the sources available. As further sources come to light and further research into the relationship between humans and animals in Tibet is conducted, it is likely that the conclusions contained in this work will become outdated. Indeed, it is my hope that, rather than serve as a definitive treatment of this topic, this work will be a stepping stone for others, who can, over the coming years, correct its many mistakes and deficiencies.

# Chapter 1

## A Brief History of Tibetan Vegetarianism

The Buddha enshrined avoiding killing as the first ethical rule, to be adhered to by all who follow his path. And yet most Buddhists eat meat. This is true not only of a single Buddhist community, but is broadly true of almost all Buddhist communities across the globe and through history.<sup>22</sup> There have always been some Buddhists, however, who point to the seeming contradiction between eating meat and the Buddha's call to do no harm and argue for the adoption of a vegetarian diet. Such voices have generally remained a minority, yet they are a consistent minority, cropping up again and again over the centuries.

This dissertation will look at these voices as they manifested themselves in Tibet, a vast, cold and arid region between India and China. While meat has always been a staple in Tibet, there has also been a consistent discourse praising, and sometimes even practicing, vegetarianism. Vegetarians in Tibet have always been a minority, but at times they were a sizable and important minority, well worth examination.

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<sup>22</sup> As will be discussed below, China is the notable exception to this rule.

As the first step in that examination, this present chapter will provide an overview of the history of vegetarianism in Tibet. This history begins with the first dissemination of Buddhism in the seventh and eighth centuries, continues through the second dissemination in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and pays particular attention to a surge of vegetarianism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. After a period of decline, vegetarianism emerged again, finding perhaps its highest level of popularity in the eastern region of Kham, from the nineteenth century through the present. By providing an overview of vegetarianism in Tibet, this chapter serves as a foundation for later chapters, which will explore aspects of the Tibetan vegetarian movement in detail.

Before turning to vegetarianism in Tibet, however, it is worth examining the practice in Buddhist India and Buddhist China, as the forms of Buddhism found in these countries influenced the development of the religion in Tibet. In particular, the forms of Buddhism practiced in India, the place where the religion first developed, came to be seen by many Tibetans as the model for correct Buddhist practice. At least in theory, arguments, ideas and practices needed to be rooted in the canonical texts of Indian Buddhism to be considered legitimate. Tibetan discussions of vegetarianism were no different, requiring us to open our discussion of vegetarianism in Tibet with a look at vegetarianism in Buddhist India.

## Vegetarianism in Indian Buddhism

In looking at Indian Buddhist vegetarianism, we should begin with the life and example of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. As the ultimate source of Buddhist teachings, the Buddha's life has been the subject of many biographical and hagiographical accounts. Each of these accounts reflect different concerns on the part of their authors, and we should not be surprised to find that they differ, sometimes significantly, in their details—including on the question of whether or not the Buddha ate meat.

From among these various biographical accounts, a few stories stand out through their frequent recurrence in various editions of the canon, as well as their frequent citation by later interpreters. Perhaps the most important of these is the story of the Buddha's first promulgation of the doctrine of *threefold purity*, which came to govern monks' consumption of meat.<sup>23</sup> This regulation is mentioned in several different Sūtras, but the most important version is contained in *The Foundations of the Vinaya*, a four volume compendium of the rules for monks and accounts of the origin of those rules.<sup>24</sup> Though lengthy, this story is important enough to reproduce in full:

Then the Blessed Buddha was staying at the Monkey Pond in Vaiśālī. In Vaiśālī there was a chieftain named Sengé. One day, [sengé] brought meat specifically for those [monks] living there, [25b] and they came and ate it. At that time, the Blessed One, having seen the truth

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<sup>23</sup> Tib: *snang gsum dag pa / rnam gsum dag pa*

<sup>24</sup> This rule is attested in several different recensions of the vinaya. As my concern in this dissertation is Tibetan Buddhism, I am drawing primarily from Tibetan sources for this account. For a translation of the Pali version, which differs in many details, see: Horner, trans. *The Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol 5*, 324-325.

of karma, did not eat. The meat [sengé] had brought, was given to those monks who had come. Some non-Buddhists<sup>25</sup> criticized those monks who had eaten that food, deceiving [others] and slandering [the monks], saying “Chieftain sengé brought meat specifically [for the monks], so those wise ones should not have eaten it. Yet it was given to the ascetics of the Son of Shakya [the Buddha], and they ate this meat that had been prepared specifically for them.” At that time, the monks asked the Blessed One about this, and the Blessed One responded, *I have said that meat that is not suitable by the three ways should not be eaten. What are these three? Meat that has been seen to have been prepared for one’s own sake is unsuitable to be eaten. Meat that you have heard from trustworthy sources to have been prepared for your own sake is unsuitable to be eaten. Meat that you think, based on suspicions that have arisen in your mind, to have been prepared for your own sake is unsuitable to be eaten.*<sup>26</sup> (Emphasis added.)

In this account, it is not the consumption of meat that upsets the non-Buddhists, but the consumption of meat that was killed *specifically* for the consumer. Thus, the

<sup>25</sup> Many contemporary accounts describe these non-Buddhists as Jains, though I find nothing in this or other canonical accounts to justify this specific attribution.

<sup>26</sup> Shakyamuni, *Foundations of the Vinaya*, vol 3, 25a-25b.

For a translation of the corresponding passage from the Pali canon, which features several important differences, see: Horner. *The Book of the Discipline*, 324-435.

[25a] sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das yangs pa can gyi spre'u rdzang gi 'grim na khang pa ba rtsegs pa'i gnas na bzbughs so/\_yangs pa can sde dpon seng go zhes bya ba zbig gnas te/\_de'i nyi 'khor na gnas pa rnams kyis de'i ched [25b] du sha khyer te 'ongs nas de yang za bar byed do/\_gang gi tshe des bcom ldan 'das las bden pa mthong ba de'i tshe mi za bas khyer te 'ongs nas yang dge slong rnams la sbyin par byed do/\_dge slong rnams kyis kyang de dag zos pa dang mu stegs can rnams smod par byed/\_gzhogs 'phyas byed/\_kha zer bar byed de/\_shes ldan dag sde dpon seng ge'i ched du byas te sha khyer te 'ongs na ni des de dag ma zos la/\_shAkya'i sras kyi dge sbyong rnams la byin pa dang /\_shAkya'i sras kyi dge sbyong rnams kyi ched du byas pa'i sha ni zos so zhesapa'i skabs de dge slong rnams kyis bcom ldan 'das la gsol pa dang / bcom ldan 'das kyis bka' stsal pa / ngas gnas gsum gyis rung ba ma yin pa'i sha bza' bar mi bya'o zhes gsungs pa gsum gang zhe na / bdag gi ched du byas par mngon du mthong ba rung ba ma yin pa'i sha bza' bar mi bya'o zhes gsungs pa dang / yid ches pa las khyod kyi ched du byas pa yin no zhes thos pa rung ba ma yin

Buddha proscribes any meat that the monk even suspects was killed specifically for him, but, by extension, allows monks to eat any meat that was not specifically slaughtered for that monk. As will be discussed in the following chapters, there is considerable debate among Tibetan commentators about the exact situations in which this rule applies. Some, for instance, argue that since a butcher does not kill animals for one specific person, any meat purchased in a butcher shop is permitted. Others argue that this meat is forbidden and the only meat that truly meets the standards of threefold purity is meat that comes from animals that have died naturally. For now, however, there are two key points to draw from this story: the Buddha himself ate meat, and he allowed his monks to eat meat.

Another, similar, story involves an attempt by Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin and frequent foil, to steal some of the Buddha's followers and patrons for himself. In this instance, Devadatta institutes a series of five austere practices among his followers, including vegetarianism. Devadatta knows that the Buddha does not condone these practices, and by promulgating them hopes to prove his own superior holiness.<sup>27</sup> Again, this account makes clear that the Buddha allowed his monks to eat meat.<sup>28</sup>

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*pa'i sha bza' bar mi bya'o zhes gsungs pa dang / rang nyid kyi blo la rnam par rtog pa skyes ba tshul las 'di ni bdag gi ched du byas pa yin no snyam du rung ba ma yin pa'i sha bza' bar mi bya'o zhes gsungs pa yin no //*

<sup>27</sup> Shakyamuni, *Foundations of the Vinaya*, vol 4, 289a-289b.

Again, this paraphrased version is based primarily on the account contained in the Degé edition of Tibetan canon. The version in the Pali canon differs in some important respects, however, including the fact that the Buddha explicitly rejects Devadatta's suggestion to mandate vegetarianism, terming it excessively austere. For a translation of the Pali version, see: Horner, trans. *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, vol 5. 275-279.

<sup>28</sup> Another famous account that has been extensively studied by western scholars features the contents of the Buddha's final meal, variously described as having been rancid pork, healthy pork or any of a variety of

As this dissertation is principally concerned with vegetarianism among Tibetans, I have drawn primarily on the accounts preserved in the Tibetan recension of the Buddhist canon, but similar stories occur in the Pali canon, as well as the Sarvāstivāda, Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka recensions within the Chinese canon as well.<sup>29</sup> The complexity, diffusion and often contradictory nature of Buddhist canonical literature makes it difficult to assess what the Buddha taught with any degree of certainty. Nevertheless, as Chandra Prasad has noted, the wide diffusion of these episodes across the various Buddhist canons probably indicates that they are derived from a very early strata of Buddhist teachings.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while it is impossible to say with certainty that the Buddha did eat meat, and while some later texts explicitly claim that he did not, these early accounts seem to suggest that the Buddha was comfortable with eating meat, as long as he did not suspect that the meat had been specifically killed for him.

In addition to showing the Buddha's own tolerance with meat, these stories also make clear that this tolerance was at odds with other elements of India's religious culture at the time. Both Jain and Hindu traditions of this time contained significant pro-vegetarian discourses.<sup>31</sup> As Wendy Doniger has recently demonstrated, however,

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mushrooms. While this is an interesting topic, the details of this debate are not immediately relevant, and I have not mentioned it in this study out of concern for space.

See: Waley, *Did the Buddha Die of Eating Pork?*; Wasson & O'Flaherty, *The Last Meal of the Buddha*.

<sup>29</sup> For translations from the corresponding passages from the Pali, see: Horner, *Cullavagga*, 275-279; Horner, *Mahavagga*, 324-435.

For the corresponding passages from the Chinese, see: 十誦律 [*Shi Song Lü*, *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*], Taisho 1435. 26. 190b; 四分律 [*Si Fen Lü*: *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*], Taisho 1428. 22. 0872b;

彌沙塞部和醯五分律 [*Mi Sha Sai Bu He Xi Wu Fen Lü*, *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*], Taisho 1421. 22. 149c

<sup>30</sup> Prasad, "Meat-Eating and the Rule of Tikoṭīparisuddha," 295

<sup>31</sup> Alsdorf, *Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India*, 6-23.



vegetarianism was never a foregone conclusion for Hindus of the Buddha's time. At least as early as the *Upaniṣads*, a tendency towards vegetarianism seems to have been tempered by a recognition that meat eating is a normal part of life. Doniger highlights The Laws of Manu as a good example of such ambivalence, "There is nothing wrong with eating meat, nor drinking wine, nor sexual union, for this is how living beings engage in life, but disengagement yields great fruit."<sup>32</sup> For Hindus of this time, Doniger argues, vegetarianism was commendable, but not mandatory.

The Buddha's middle of the road approach to meat fits well in this context. He uses the rule of threefold purity to restrict the consumption of meat, but refuses to ban it entirely, seemingly to recognize that meat is problematic without mandating excessively difficult austerities. Such a middle of the road approach to meat, however, led to conflicts within the Buddhist community.

Some centuries after the Buddha's death, a new Buddhist movement began to emerge, later dubbed the Mahāyāna, or Great Vehicle, (in contrast to other teachings, which were dubbed the Hīnayāna, or lesser vehicle).<sup>33</sup> Among other differences, Mahāyāna Buddhists revered the figure of the Bodhisattva, an advanced sage who had renounced his own final liberation in order to benefit others. Among the chief attributes

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<sup>32</sup> Doniger, *The Hindus*, 319.

Doniger's translation. Original passage from chapter 5, verse 56 of the *Laws of Manu*.

<sup>33</sup> The exact time of the emergence of Mahāyāna ideas is debated by both scholars and practitioners, with many suggesting that it was a gradual emergence over the course of centuries, rather than a sudden schism. There is no room in this dissertation for a full analysis of the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Instead, it is sufficient to know that strong voices opposing meat consumption were raised within a few centuries of the Buddha's death.

For details, see: Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*.

of a Bodhisattva was an emphasis on compassion for others, typified by the Bodhisattvas' renunciation of their own final advancement to liberation in favor of helping others progress on the path. Given this emphasis on compassion and placing the needs of others above one's own, it should not be surprising that vegetarianism found renewed vigor among early Mahāyāna Buddhists.

There are several early Mahāyāna texts that advocate vegetarianism, but few do it as forcefully or fully as the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*.<sup>34</sup> This text, which D.T. Suzuki notes could have been composed no later than the third century CE, when it was first translated into Chinese, contains an entire chapter devoted to criticizing meat.<sup>35</sup> Among other arguments, this text asserts that meat is fundamentally incompatible with a compassionate attitude.<sup>36</sup> It also asserts, in direct contradiction to the accounts presented above, that the Buddha himself never ate meat.<sup>37</sup> Further, the text claims that any assertion that meat is allowed is not a legitimate interpretation of the *Vinaya* code, but simply an expression of desire, "They will think about the many aspects of the *Vinaya*, their ego clinging will increase, and they will have a strong attachment to the taste [of

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<sup>34</sup> Eng: *Sūtra of the Descent onto Lanka*

Tib: *lang kar gshegs pa'i mdo*

In this work, I am relying on the version of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* contained in the Degé edition of the Tibetan canon. While this Tibetan edition has not, to my knowledge, been translated, the Chinese edition of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, the earliest extant version, has been fully translated by Red Pine in 2012. (Red Pine, *Lankavatara Sutra*) A Sanskrit version, dating to later than the Chinese, was translated in 1932 by D.T. Suzuki. (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*)

<sup>35</sup> Suzuki, *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 153a-153b.

<sup>37</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 157a.

meat]. They will teach all kinds of reasons for eating meat, repeatedly denying that it is impure.”<sup>38</sup>

This idea is taken further in another early Mahāyāna text, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*,<sup>39</sup> which Stephen Hodge has suggested was composed around the second century CE.<sup>40</sup> Like the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* directly critiques meat consumption on the grounds that it is incompatible with the practice of compassion. This text also directly critiques the validity of the rule of threefold purity, “Kaśyapa asked, ‘In the past, why did the Tathagata [the Buddha] permit the consumption of meat examined in the three ways?’ The Buddha replied, ‘Kaśyapa, I allowed the consumption of meat examined in the three ways as a means to gradually eliminate meat eating. ... In short, this was taught so that meat eating might be brought to an end.’”<sup>41</sup> Thus, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* argues that the rule of threefold purity was never meant to be definitive, but was simply an expedient means of helping people move towards full

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<sup>38</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 156a.

'dul ba la rnam pa mang por rnam par rtog pa/\_smra ba'i 'jig tshogs la lta ba rgyas pa/\_ro'i sred pa la chags pa rnam sha za ba'i gtan tshigs su snang ba/\_de dang de dag ston te/\_nga la yang yang dag pa ma yin par skur pa 'debs par sems so/

<sup>39</sup> Eng: *Sūtra of the Great, Final Nirvana*

Tib: myang 'das chen po'i mdo

<sup>40</sup> Hodge, *Eschatology*.

The text under consideration here is the version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* that belongs to the Mahāyāna tradition, as preserved in the Tibetan canon. Another similarly named text, the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta*, is preserved in the Pali canon, but its contents are largely different. I have heard that Hodge has translated the entirety of the Tibetan version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, but this translation remains unpublished, and I have not been able to acquire a copy.

<sup>41</sup> Shakyamuni, *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, 57b.

'od srungs kyis gsol pa/\_sngon bcom ldan 'das kyis sha brtag pa rnam gsum 'tshal du gnang ba ma lags sam/\_bka' stsal pa/\_od srungs sha brtags pa rnam gsum zer gnang ba ni/\_bags kyis bcad pa'i thabs su gsungs so/ ... mdor na sha bcad pa'i don du bstan pa yin no/

vegetarianism. As with the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* clearly shows that vegetarianism was a vital issue for early followers of the Mahāyāna, and that it was a point of debate with other Buddhist schools.

The arguments presented here will be discussed more fully in chapter two of this dissertation, but for now it is important to note that Mahāyāna practitioners whose concerns are reflected in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* clearly felt that meat was incompatible with Buddhism, to the point that they felt it necessary to contradict assertions that the Buddha had eaten meat. Further, through its repeated critiques of those who support the legitimacy of meat consumption, it is also clear that these *Sūtras* were responding to a real debate in Buddhism as practiced at that time.

Another intriguing glimpse into vegetarianism in Buddhist India is provided by the Chinese monk Yijing (653-713), who travelled in India between 673 and 689 CE.<sup>42</sup> One of Yijing's main purposes was to study the *Vinaya* as it was practiced in India at this time, and when he returned, he reported that the Indian Buddhist leaders he had studied with did not feel vegetarianism was necessary.<sup>43</sup> Vegetarianism was already a well established practice for Chinese Buddhists, and Yijing's report seems to have been intended as a critique of the way Buddhism was practiced by his own countrymen.<sup>44</sup> Of course, as Yijing did not visit every monastery in India, his report does not mean that vegetarianism was unheard of among Indian Buddhists of the seventh century. For our

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<sup>42</sup> Ch: 義淨

<sup>43</sup> Yijing, *Record*, 213.a06-213.a10. I-Tsing, *Recond*, 58.

<sup>44</sup> Benn, *Where Text Meets Flesh*, 316.

purposes, however, it does demonstrate that despite the Mahāyāna objections to meat we have seen in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, meat remained a standard part of the diet for many Buddhist monks in India.

The texts cited here should not be taken as a definitive list of the sources available for the study of vegetarianism in Buddhist India. Such a comprehensive analysis has never been done, and while such a study is highly desirable, it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. What should be clear from the sources that have been presented here, however, is that the question of whether or not monks should eat meat was not a settled issue in India, either at the time of the Buddha himself or during later centuries. As we will see, those same debates carried over into Tibet.

## Vegetarianism in Chinese Buddhism

Before turning to vegetarianism in Tibet, it is worth addressing the history of this practice in Chinese Buddhism. While Tibetan Buddhism is usually said to derive primarily from Indian sources, it is also true that Chinese religious practices—and culture more broadly—have had a strong influence on Tibet. Further, there are a number of interesting convergences and divergences between the practice of vegetarianism in Tibet and China which warrant a brief discussion of the latter.

If a truly comprehensive survey of the history of vegetarianism in Chinese Buddhism remains unwritten, John Kieschnick's article, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China" has gone a long way towards addressing this issue. Rather than repeating

Kieschnick's work, therefore, I will limit myself to paraphrasing some of his key conclusions. Chief among these is that vegetarianism became a standard practice in Chinese Buddhism sometime in the fourth to fifth century CE. Kieschnick notes that the Chinese edition of the *Vinaya* allows meat with threefold purity, but he also notes that, under the influence of texts such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, this came to be seen as a provisional, rather than a definitive teaching.<sup>45</sup> By the sixth century, biographies of eminent monks reveal that vegetarianism had become common, but was still unusual enough to warrant inclusion in a monk's biography.<sup>46</sup>

Within the next century, vegetarianism had become the norm for Chinese monastics, while most lay Buddhists continued to eat meat.<sup>47</sup> This pattern was to continue during the Song and Yuan Dynasties (960-1368). Barend Ter Haarh has noted that while full vegetarianism was the norm for monks and nuns of this period, it was restricted to particular holy days among lay people.<sup>48</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, however, vegetarianism had become a standard practice among lay Buddhists, as well as among monastics. Eric Reinders has noted that some Christian missionaries made eating meat a part of the ritual of conversion from Buddhism to Christianity. Without eating meat, an individual's conversion would be incomplete and their Christian belief doubted.<sup>49</sup> In some areas, at least—Reinders is

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<sup>45</sup> Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," 188-189.

<sup>46</sup> Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," 194.

<sup>47</sup> Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," 201, 206.

<sup>48</sup> ter Haarh, "Buddhist Inspired Options," 132-3.

<sup>49</sup> Reinders, "Blessed are the Meat Eaters," 521-523.

discussing the region surrounding Shanghai—vegetarianism had become normative for all Buddhists, so much so, in fact, that eating meat could be used as proof one had given up Buddhism.

China is the only region where vegetarianism ever became normative for Buddhists. Even there, however, there was at least one category of monks where meat eating remained the norm: those monks whose discipline was focused on the practice of the martial arts. In his study of Shaolin Monastery, perhaps the most famous redoubt of such ‘martial’ monks, Meir Shahar has noted that while a certain group of core monks have maintained a vegetarian diet since at least the eighteenth century, most other monks at Shaolin ate meat regularly.<sup>50</sup> Shahar notes this consumption of meat was justified by the idea that meat was necessary for personal strength. Meat was so closely associated with the development of physical prowess that these monks felt they must eat it in order to be successful in their practice of the martial arts.

A similar idea can be found in one of China’s great literary works, *The Water Margin*.<sup>51</sup> Among the many characters in this novel is Lu Zhishen,<sup>52</sup> a soldier of superhuman strength who becomes a monk in order to escape capital punishment.<sup>53</sup> Lu Zhishen’s conduct does not conform to monastic norms, however, and he repeatedly engages in combat, as well as epic bouts of drinking and meat eating. As with the monks

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<sup>50</sup> Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 45-47.

<sup>51</sup> Ch: 水滸傳

<sup>52</sup> Ch: 花和尚

<sup>53</sup> He kills a young man assaulting a woman, but is unjustly pursued by the young man’s father, a local magistrate. Even the magistrate, however, is unable to punish someone who has become a monk.

of Shaolin, Lu Zhishen's meat eating is intimately connected with his physical prowess. This connection is so clear to those in the story, in fact, that his ability to eat large amounts of meat is often held up as proof of his strength.<sup>54</sup>

For Lu Zhishen and the monks at Shaolin, there was a strong identification between physical prowess and the consumption of meat. For a monk to become a martial hero, therefore, they had to discard some of the rules of monastic life, including vegetarianism. As will be discussed in chapter three of this dissertation, very similar conceptions exist in Tibet, where male strength and martial prowess are often aligned with the consumption of large quantities of meat.

A final aspect of Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism that should be noted here is the pervasive concern with one's own karma that seems to have been the driving force propelling the adoption of vegetarianism. Kieschnick has noted that as early as the sixth century, "the focus of the debate was on the general problem of karmic culpability for eating animals killed by others."<sup>55</sup> Ter Haarh has also noted the central role of the idea that eating meat created bad karma in motivating Chinese Buddhists.<sup>56</sup> Reinders has concluded that it was precisely this aspect of vegetarianism, the idea that one could improve one's future life through one's own practice of vegetarianism, that incensed nineteenth century Christian missionaries in Shanghai.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Shi Nai'an & Luo Guanzhong. Shahr, *Shaolin Monastery*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," 201.

<sup>56</sup> ter Haarh, "Buddhist Inspired Options," 134.

<sup>57</sup> Reinders, "Blessed are the Meat Eaters," 522-523.



The idea that eating meat creates negative karma is found, of course, in pro-vegetarian discourses from many parts of the Buddhist world. The centrality of this argument for Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism, however, distinguishes it from other traditions, such as Tibetan Buddhism. As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter of this dissertation, the central argument for vegetarianism found in most Tibetan works involves the animal suffering eating meat entails and the prospect of negative karma for the consumer is only invoked as a secondary, or even tertiary reason to adopt vegetarianism.

## Vegetarianism in Tibet

### *Imperial Period*

According to traditional accounts, Buddhism was first introduced to Tibet in the seventh and eighth centuries, under direct supervision of the Tibetan Emperors. Tibet was a regional military power at the time, and hunting was widespread. Large, imperially sponsored hunts, in fact, are frequently noted in historical materials from this period.<sup>58</sup> Further, Tibetan religiosity at the time did not shy away from violence towards animals, as can be seen in the rituals used to solemnize treaties between Tibet and China in 783 and 821, where the participants slaughtered many animals and smeared their own mouths

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<sup>58</sup> Dotson, "Princess and the Yak," 70.

with the blood.<sup>59</sup> Records of these treaties also contain unmistakable references to Buddhism, making it clear that such animal sacrifices were not wholly opposed by Buddhists.

I am only aware of a single reference to vegetarianism from this period, from *The Testament of Ba*.<sup>60</sup> This text, a history of Tri Songdetsen's (742-796) reign at the height of the Tibetan Imperial Period, claims to have been written by Ba (n.d.), one of the emperor's ministers. In this text, the author notes that, "At that time, Namchiwé Senggo Lhalung Zik (n.d.), who had taken the vow of refraining from eating meat, drinking alcohol and even eating butter, accompanied [Khenpo Bodhisattva] to Langné Drutsuk."<sup>61</sup> In their analysis of this passage, Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger observe that *namchi* is the title of a common official.<sup>62</sup> It thus seems likely that this individual was a layperson, rather than a monk. It is also worth noting that in China at this time, while Buddhist vegetarianism was largely limited to monks, abstaining from meat and alcohol was sometimes used for non-Buddhist social reasons, such as

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<sup>59</sup> Liu Xu, *Old Tang Annals*, 5247-5249. Kapstein, "Treatise Temple," 25. Richardson, *Corpus*, 126-127.

<sup>60</sup> Some modern authors have claimed that, despite this contemporary evidence of animal sacrifice, the emperors who supported Buddhism also supported vegetarianism, at least among the earliest monks. Geshe Thubten Soepa, for instance, cites an edict in which the Emperor Tri Songdetsen says that monks should avoid meat and alcohol. (*Examining the Permissions and Prohibitions*, 12) If true, this would be the earliest reference to vegetarianism in Tibet that I have seen. The source of this quote, however, *The Chronicle of Padma*, is unlikely to date to the Imperial Period. It is a terma, or treasure text, and as such claims to have been written during the Imperial Period, and then hidden for centuries, until being rediscovered by a pre-destined treasure revealer. In this case, this text was revealed by Orgyen Lingpa (1326-n.d.) in 1346, and can only be reliably used as a source to describe this period.

<sup>61</sup> Wangdu & Diemberger, *dB'a Bzbed*, 47, 133.

<sup>62</sup> Wangdu & Diemberger, *dB'a Bzbed*, 47.

demonstrating mourning.<sup>63</sup> Tibet and China had extensive contacts during this period, and given that this text gives no indication of a Buddhist context for Senggo Lhalung Zik's vegetarianism as well as his status as a lay official, I suspect that he was vegetarian for non-religious, or at least non-Buddhist reasons. Still, this passage, assuming that it does, in fact, date to the Imperial Period, at least demonstrates that vegetarianism was known during that period.

Unfortunately, we cannot make this assumption, as scholars have disputed the dating of *The Testament of Ba*, with some arguing that it could have been written as late as the fourteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Recently, however, Sam van Schaik and Kazushi Iwao have discovered a small fragment of the text contained in the materials unearthed at Dunhuang, indicating that at least a portion of the text dates to no later than the first decade of the eleventh century, when the caves at Dunhuang were sealed.<sup>65</sup> It is impossible to know for certain whether the single reference to vegetarianism in this text dates to this period, or whether it is a later interpolation. Still, the nature of the reference, seemingly unconnected to the Buddhist discourses which govern all later vegetarian references in Tibet, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary, suggests to me that it could well date to the Imperial Period.

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<sup>63</sup> Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," 193.

<sup>64</sup> Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, 23.

<sup>65</sup> van Schaik & Iwao, "Fragments."

## *Second Dissemination*

When compared with the situation during the imperial period, references to Tibetan vegetarianism improve somewhat during the period known as the second dissemination. This name is derived from an understanding that Buddhism declined and became corrupted by violence following the collapse of the empire in the mid-ninth century, requiring a new transmission from India for rejuvenation. While modern scholarship has cast doubt on the idea of a decline, there can be no question that, beginning in the eleventh century, Indian Buddhist leaders and their Tibetan disciples exerted a strong influence on the direction Tibetan Buddhism would take.<sup>66</sup>

Among the most famous and influential of these Indian figures was Atiśa Dīpaṃkara-śrījñāna (980-1054). Atiśa travelled to Tibet in the late 1030s, and spent the rest of his life teaching Buddhism there. Among the texts he purportedly left behind is *The Book of Kadam*, a series of dialogues between himself and his main Tibetan disciple, Dromtön Gyelwé Jungné (1004-1064). Among other themes, including a general concern with the proper performance of ethical discipline and monastic vows, *The Book of Kadam* repeatedly critiques meat. As an example, Atiśa says of unnamed others, “They claim to belong to the Mahāyāna, but they disrespect the fundamentals: the profound law of cause and effect. They eat the three foods of outcastes: meat, alcohol and garlic.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> On the notion of the decline of Buddhism after the empire, see: Dalton, *Taming of the Demons*; Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, *Book of Kadam*, 45. Jinpa, *Book of Kadam*, 99.  
rang theg pa chen por kbas blangs nas/ gzhi las 'bras zab mo khyad bsad de/ zas sha chang sgog gsum gdol pa'i zas/

In this and other passages, *The Book of Kadam* is clear in its opinion that meat is a sinful substance not suitable for those who aspire to practice Mahāyāna Buddhism. As with other texts from this period, however, it is unclear how much of the text was actually composed by Atiśa and Dromtön. The translator and scholar Thubten Jinpa has noted that while the final redaction of the text known to us today dates only to 1302, a significant core of the text probably does date to recorded conversations between Atiśa and Dromtön in the eleventh century.<sup>68</sup> If this is the case, given the widespread condemnation of meat in various parts of the text, it seems likely that Atiśa and his heirs advocated, and presumably practiced, vegetarianism in early eleventh century Tibet.

Writing less than a century after Atiśa and Dromtön, Metön Sherab Özer (1058-1132) included a critique of meat in his *Vinaya Compendium*. Sherab Özer was not a Buddhist, but a leader of Bön, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. As we have seen, Tibetan religious practices from the Imperial Period did not shy away from harming animals. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, Bön religiosity in Tibet had turned away from its shamanic origins and begun embracing Buddhist style monasticism.<sup>69</sup> Sherab Özer was a seminal member of this movement, and his *Vinaya Compendium* is frequently quoted in later Bön *Vinaya* commentaries. For this reason, it is worth quoting his anti-meat arguments in full:

By definition, this thing called ‘meat’ comes from the killing of animals.  
Being without mercy sends one to hell. With great regret, abandon

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<sup>68</sup> Jinpa, *Book of Kadam*, 25-28.

<sup>69</sup> Cech, “A Bonpo Bca’ Yig,” 69.

eating [meat]. The causes and conditions of this thing called ‘meat’ are the white and red [conjugal substances] of both a father and mother. If you saw this with your eyes, you would tremble with fear. How pitiful it would be to take it in your hands! Just smelling it brings on nausea. Once it is tasted by the tongue, how can it be kept down? For these reasons, it should be abandoned.<sup>70</sup>

This passage touches on arguments that we will see repeated through later centuries, including the equation of meat with killing, the negative karmic repercussions of eating meat, and the fact that the meat on the table once had a mother and father. It is worth noting that Sherab Özer’s critique of meat is contained in a work addressed to monks. As will be discussed in detail in chapter three, Tibetan vegetarianism is often strongly connected to the practice of monasticism.

Atiśa and Dromtön were not the only Buddhist leaders from this period who were practicing vegetarianism.<sup>71</sup> At least two disciples of Pakmodrupa (1110-1170), Jikten Sumgön (1143-1217) and Taklung Tangpa (1142-1209), are also said to have practiced vegetarianism. Both of these figures were later regarded as lineage founders, and,

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<sup>70</sup> I have not managed to locate a complete copy of this text. This passage is quoted in the fifteenth century work: mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Commentary on the Received Vinaya*, p 49.

*sha zhes bya ba'i mtshan nyid ni/ sems can srog gcod rgyu las byung/ snying rje med pas dmyal bar ltung/ shin tu ya nga mi bza' spang/ sha zhes bya ba'i rgyu rkyen ni/ pha ma gnyis kyi dkar dmar yin/ mig gi mthong na skyi re 'jigs/ lag tu blang na ya re nga/ sna yi dri tshor skyug re bro/ lce yi ro la blang nas su/ khong tu stim pa'i lugs ci yod/ de yi phyir yang spang bar rigs/ zhes sogs dang/*

<sup>71</sup> Another famed Tibetan figure from this period who modern Tibetans often cite as a vegetarian is Milarepa (1052-1135). The evidence of his vegetarianism, however, is thin. I am aware of only one of Milarepa’s recorded poems that claims he is a vegetarian. (Milarepa, *Drinking the Mountain Stream*, 37) At the same time, however, early biographies of Milarepa, such as Dorjé Dzeö’s *Great Kagyü Biographies* of 1245 recall Milarepa eating meat with some frequency. (rdo rje mdzes ‘od, *great Kagyü Biographies*. Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen, *Great Kagyü Masters*.) My suspicion is that Milarepa’s pro-vegetarianism poems is an exception, and possibly a later interpolation.

especially in the case of Jikten Sumgön, their modern<sup>72</sup> successors have been at the forefront of the modern Tibetan vegetarian movement.

Evidence that both of these figures practiced vegetarianism comes from *The Blue Annals*, a massive history of Tibetan Buddhism compiled in 1478 by Gö Lotsawa (1392–1481).<sup>73</sup> For Jikten Sumgön, corroborating evidence also comes from the much earlier *Great Kagyü Biographies*, where he is said to have advised his followers to avoid meat, even in the context of tantric ritual.<sup>74</sup> Based on an internal analysis of this text, John Roberts has claimed that while the text’s final form was established in 1344 by Dorjé Dzeö (14<sup>th</sup> century), the portion of the text that includes Jikten Sumgön’s biography was written in 1245 by Ritro Wangchuk (13<sup>th</sup> century), a direct disciple of Jikten Sumgön.<sup>75</sup> The text thus provides strong, early evidence that Jikten Sumgön asked his disciples to avoid meat, and presumably practiced vegetarianism himself. While the evidence is fragmentary, it does seem that vegetarianism was a known, if optional, aspect of Buddhist practice during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

### *Renaissance*

By the fourteenth century, we start to see more widespread references to vegetarianism. Again, *The Blue Annals* offers important insight into the vegetarianism of

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<sup>72</sup> Throughout this work I use the term ‘modern’ in a loose, non-technical, sense, generally to refer to the period following the Chinese invasion of the early 1950s.

<sup>73</sup> ‘gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 707, 727. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 599, 619.

<sup>74</sup> rdo rje mdzes ‘od, *great Kagyü Biographies*, 425. Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen, *Great Kagyü Masters*, 254.

<sup>75</sup> Roberts, *Biographies of Rechungpa*, 9–11.

this period, with references to at least four vegetarians from the fourteenth century.

Perhaps the most important of these is the fourth Karmapa Hierarch, Rolpé Dorjé (1340-1383). Rolpé Dorjé was one of the most important religious figures in Tibet at the time, and according to *The Blue Annals*, “He guarded his monastic commitments with great subtlety, not allowing even a hair’s breadth of meat or wine into his presence.”<sup>76</sup>

What *The Blue Annals* does not tell us, however, is how many of the Rolpé Dorjé’s disciples also adopted vegetarianism. Indeed, while this text mentions four vegetarians active in the fourteenth century, it also includes biographies of dozens of non-vegetarian lamas from this same period. Clearly, vegetarianism was not the norm. That said, when a lama of the Karmapa’s stature adopts a strict vegetarian diet, it seems likely that some of his followers would have followed suit. This is the case in the modern context, where a relatively small number of charismatic lamas have adopted vegetarianism, but a much larger number of their disciples have followed suit. It is also the case with those few pre-modern lamas who have provided details about the numbers of their vegetarian disciples. Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl (1781-1851), for instance, claims that of his eighteen hundred disciples, three hundred followed him in adopting vegetarianism.<sup>77</sup> I see no reason why this pattern would be different in the fourteenth century. Thus, while neither *The Blue Annals* nor any other source specify numbers of vegetarians, it seems likely that

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<sup>76</sup> ‘gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 592. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 499.

‘dul ba’i bcas pa phra mo rnams kyang bsrung zhing/ sha dang chang spu rtse tsam yang spyen lam du mi ‘grim/

<sup>77</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 480b. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 542.



there would have been at least a reasonable number of vegetarians in the retinue of figures such as Karmapa Rolpé Dorjé.

If the actual numbers of vegetarians during this period remains a topic of debate, the context in which vegetarianism was adopted is more clear: vegetarianism was a practice for monks. Atiśa, for instance, suggests, “As for enjoying meat and alcohol: Look through the section of the *Sūtras* on monastic conduct. If permission is strongly granted, then it is acceptable. But the teachings of the Buddha are never deceived.”<sup>78</sup> Perhaps taking this advice to heart, figures such as Jikten Sumgön, Taklung Tangpa and Karmapa Rolpé Dorjé all adopted vegetarianism at the time they took monastic ordination. For his part, Metön Sherab Özer included his critique of meat in a commentary on the Bön *Vinaya*.

Writing only a few decades after Karmapa Rolpé Dorjé, the seminal Gelukpa scholar Khedrub Jé (1385-1438) also incorporated vegetarianism into his vision of monasticism. In his *Outline of the Three Vows*, he states, “Some say, ‘The *Vinaya* says it is suitable to eat meat out of desire for the taste.’ We would never say this. Even in a dream, I would never say this is not a fault.”<sup>79</sup> Khedrup thus forbids monks to eat meat under normal circumstances (when it is eaten out of desire), but allows it in others, thinking, perhaps, of situations of dire need, or about those practitioners who have

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<sup>78</sup> Anonymous, *Book of Kadam*, 96. Jinpa, *Book of Kadam*, 174.

*sha kbrag chang gi long spyod rnams/ 'dul ba mdo sde rab ltos la/ gngang shas che na rung ba yin/ sangs rgyas gsung ni slu med yin/*

<sup>79</sup> I have not yet found this passage in Khedrub's original text. This passage is taken from a citation in: thub bstan bsod pa, *Examining the Rules*, 11.

entirely transcended desire. While this is not a complete rejection of meat, it enshrines the idea that meat is sinful under normal circumstances in one of the Geluk school's most important works on the monastic vows.

Finally, there was a strong tradition of vegetarianism among Bönpo of this time, again associated with monasticism. In 1404, Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen (1356-1415) founded Menri monastery, which quickly became the most important monastery in Bön. Drawing on Metön Sherab Özer's earlier works, Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen wrote an important commentary on the *Vinaya*, *A Commentary on the Received Vinaya*, in which he says that monks must not eat meat, memorably declaring, "meat is a food of sinful demons."<sup>80</sup> As with many other references from this time period, Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen's critique of meat is intimately bound up with the monastic code.

This connection between vegetarianism and monasticism recurs again during later periods, but seems to have been particularly strong during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. While there are exceptions to this pattern—*The Blue Annals* recounts two individuals whose vegetarianism was associated with retreat, rather than monasticism per se—vegetarianism was primarily a monastic phenomenon. This is striking, as the *Vinaya* explicitly permits monks to eat meat, at least under certain circumstances. The reasons why, despite these permissions, vegetarianism became embedded in monastic ideals will be explored in detail in chapter four of this dissertation, but given the

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*sha yi ro la chags pa'i dbang gis sha za rung bar 'dul ba las gnang ngo zhes kho bo cag ni rnam pa thams cad du mi smra'o/\_de lta bu la skyon med ces kho bo ni rmi lam du yang mi smra'o//*

<sup>80</sup> mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Received Vinaya*, 50.  
*sdig can bdud rigs kyi kha zas su gyur pa'i sha 'di ni/*

importance of this relationship in Tibetan vegetarianism of this period, it is worth emphasizing here as well.

The fourteenth century also features the first text I am aware of specifically dedicated to promoting vegetarianism, Dolpopa Sherab Gyeltsen's (1292-1361) *Prohibition of Meat and Alcohol*. Most critiques of meat from this period are only a few lines long, but Dolpopa's text devotes ten of its seventeen pages to opposing meat (the first seven pages are dedicated to alcohol), allowing us important insight into the arguments for and against meat that were current in this period. Initially, it is worth noting that Dolpopa's text is structured around the three vows that Tibetan monks take—Monastic, Bodhisattva and Tantric—explaining why meat is unsuitable according to each system. Like the sources surveyed above, therefore, Dolpopa's critique is firmly connected to ideas about monasticism and what is, or is not, permitted for monks.

In terms of the arguments themselves, Dolpopa's chief concern is that eating meat contradicts the compassion expected of someone who has adopted the Bodhisattva vow (as all Tibetan monks do). He notes in a single line of text that meat with threefold purity is permitted in the *Vinaya*, but then immediately moves into an extended discussion of the incompatibility of even this type of meat with the compassion required of those with the Bodhisattva vow.<sup>81</sup> Dolpopa also argues that in general, the Mahāyāna precepts are still in place in a Tantric context, so meat should not be eaten.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Prohibition*, 659-665. Mochizuki, "Scriptures," 36-41.

<sup>82</sup> dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Prohibition*, 665-668. Mochizuki, "Scriptures," 41-44.

Less than a century later, Ngorchen Künga Zangpo (1382-1444), the founder of the Ngor branch of the Sakya school, also wrote a text explicitly criticizing meat, *A Letter to Benefit Students*. This work largely follows Dolpopa's arguments, asserting that meat is incompatible with a compassionate orientation. Also like Dolpopa, Ngorchen Künga Zangpo structures his text around the three sets of vows Tibetan monks take, with one section dedicated to a discussion of meat according to each set of vows.<sup>83</sup> Once again, this text demonstrates the close relationship between vegetarianism and monasticism during this period.

Between Dolpopa and Ngorchen Künga Zangpo, we have our first detailed glimpse of why an individual might become vegetarian. The detailed arguments provided by these texts, however, also give insight into the arguments used to support eating meat. These arguments, pro and con, will be discussed in detail in chapters two and three of this dissertation, but it is worth mentioning the existence of these texts here as well.

### *Jigmé Lingpa, Shabkar and the Eighteenth Century*

As should be clear by now, vegetarianism experienced a sustained level of interest throughout the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. The first texts specifically condemning meat and praising vegetarianism were composed during this time and the diet was encouraged by figures as prominent as Dolpopa, Karmapa Rolpé Dorjé, Ngorchen Künga Zangpo and Khedrup Jé. Following this period, however, references to vegetarianism become much less common. This could be because the practice became common enough

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<sup>83</sup> ngor chen kun dga' bzang po, *Letter to Benefit Students*.

that it no longer warranted attention in official biographies, but given that vegetarians never seem to have risen beyond minority status in Tibet, this seems unlikely. It seems more likely that the practice simply experienced a lower level of popularity than it had previously. Indeed, vegetarianism does not seem to have experienced a level of interest comparable to the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries until its re-emergence in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham during the nineteenth century.

This should not suggest that vegetarianism disappeared, however. Scattered references remain, including one fascinating story found in British explorer Samuel Turner's account of a visit to Bhutan. In 1783, Turner, only the second Englishman to enter Tibet (at least in an official capacity), was sent by the East India Company as an ambassador to the court of the Panchen Lama. Along the way, he spent some time in the court of Jigmé Sengé (1742-1789), king of Bhutan. While there the king explained the lack of meat in his diet, "My food consists of the very simplest articles, grain, roots of the earth, and fruits. I never eat of any thing that has had breath, for then I should be the indirect cause of putting an end to the existence of animal life, which, by our religion, is forbidden."<sup>84</sup> Turner, perhaps comparing Jigmé Sengé's diet with those enjoyed by European royalty, was suitably impressed. His account, published in 1800, was the most important description of Tibet available in Europe for several decades, and strongly influenced a generation of European scholars. One such scholar was the encyclopedist Frederic Shoberl, who wrote in 1824, "Hence we may infer that all sorts of animal food

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<sup>84</sup> Turner, *Embassy*, 82.

are forbidden to the religious, who abstain also from every kind of strong liquors.”<sup>85</sup> For a time, it seems, many Europeans believed that all Tibetan monks were vegetarian.

More significantly for the history of vegetarianism in Tibet, the Nyingma luminary Jigmé Lingpa (1730-1798) was a strong proponent of vegetarianism. Jigmé Lingpa was a prolific author who lived most of his life in Central Tibet. He became a monk while still young, but quickly abandoned his vows for a non-celibate lifestyle typical. In his mid-twenties, he undertook two three year retreats during which he received, in a series of visions, the cycle of teachings and practices known as the *Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*. This text would go on to become his most famous revelation and one of the most widely used practice cycles in the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Throughout his adult life, Jigmé Lingpa displayed a striking level of concern and empathy towards animals. This is seen in his response to animal suffering—most notably in an early scene in which the sight of sheep awaiting slaughter provokes a religious experience he terms, “the most important event of my life.”<sup>86</sup> Further, he frequently purchases animals in order to prevent their slaughter, and once even buys an entire mountain in order to stop the killing of bees for their honey.<sup>87</sup> Finally, Jigmé Lingpa repeatedly encourages others, including powerful politicians and patrons, to stop hunting. Jigmé

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<sup>85</sup> Shoberl, *Tibet, and India Beyond the Ganges*, 26.

<sup>86</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 14.  
*di bdag gi rnam thar bzang shos yin/*

<sup>87</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 281.

Lingpa clearly had an unusual degree of empathy for animals, and he repeatedly tried to pass this on to his students.

As part of this project, Jigmé Lingpa consistently criticized the consumption of meat, declaring, “Meat is sinful food, so think of it with deathly fear.”<sup>88</sup> In articulating this critique, Jigmé Lingpa focuses on generating an empathetic response towards animal suffering, often using vivid descriptions of animal suffering. In his *Autobiography*, for instance, he recounts that animals awaiting slaughter, “tremble with fear, panting for breath with tears streaming from their eyes. In that state they wonder what to do. Alas, there is no refuge!”<sup>89</sup> Jigmé Lingpa’s propensity to directly challenge his audience’s ability to empathize with animals contrasts with previous generations of Tibetan vegetarians, who tended to emphasize the incompatibility of meat with a monastic vocation. As mentioned above, for most of his career Jigmé Lingpa was not a monk, and he structured his arguments in a way that applied to all, irregardless of their ordination status.

Interestingly, however, it is unclear if Jigmé Lingpa himself was a vegetarian. In *An Ocean of Wondrous Advice for Mountain Retreat*, Jigmé Lingpa recalls eating meat during his own retreats, after purifying it with mantras.<sup>90</sup> Further, his *Autobiography*, which otherwise emphasizes Jigmé Lingpa’s compassion towards animals, makes no

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<sup>88</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Well-Established Rabbit*, 772.

*sha ni sdig pa’i zas yin pas/ gsad pa’i ‘jigs pa dran par bya/*

<sup>89</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 125-126.

*ma rgan de dag lus ‘dar phri li li/ mig mchi ma khram khram/ dbugs spud pa lhed lhed pa’i ngang nas ‘di snyam du/ da ci drag kyi hud/ ‘bros sa ni med/*

<sup>90</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Ocean of Wondrous Advice*, 705. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, *Wondrous Ocean of Advice*, 5.

mention of a vegetarian diet at any point in his life. If Jigmé Lingpa was a vegetarian, even for just a short time, it seems likely that he would mention this.

One particularly interesting source for this discussion of Jigmé Lingpa's own vegetarianism is his short *Tale of the Deer*. In this text, written when Jigmé Lingpa was in his early thirties, he presents a dialogue between two figures, a hermit and a hunter.<sup>91</sup> The hermit critiques the hunter for his immoral conduct, while the hunter argues that it is the hermit who is truly immoral, because it is his desire to buy meat that motivates the hunter's actions.<sup>92</sup> In the exchange, we can almost see Jigmé Lingpa arguing with himself over the question of eating meat. Ultimately, the hermit wins the debate, but in the process he acknowledges the validity of the hunter's argument, perhaps reflecting Jigmé Lingpa's ultimate decision to continue eating meat, while also reflecting his recognition that by doing so he is implicated in unethical activity. While it is unclear if Jigmé Lingpa himself was a vegetarian, there can be little doubt that he saw such a diet as morally superior, and he actively encouraged others to take it up.

Active roughly half a century after Jigmé Lingpa, Shabkar Tsokdrük Rangdröl also penned several strong critiques of meat. Shabkar was born and raised in Amdo, but spent many years of his life on pilgrimage to the holy sites of Ü and Tsang, though he never made it to Kham. Unlike Jigmé Lingpa, it is clear that Shabkar himself was a practicing vegetarian for most of his life. In his *Autobiography*, he claims to have been

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<sup>91</sup> This text is undated, but Jigmé Lingpa's *Autobiography* mentions that it was composed shortly after his retreats concluded (160).

<sup>92</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Tale of the Deer*, 759. Jigme Lingpa, *Story of the Hunted Deer*, 7.



distressed by animal suffering early in his life.<sup>93</sup> Later, during an extended pilgrimage to Lhasa, Shabkar was upset by the sight of some sheep prepared for slaughter and took a vow never to eat meat again. Shabkar's vegetarianism is so strict that his patrons were afraid to even let him see meat.<sup>94</sup>

Interestingly, both Shabkar and Jigmé Lingpa had strong responses to the sight of sheep prepared for slaughter. Encounters like this, in fact, became something of a trope, repeated by many individuals over the following centuries. Shabkar lived half a century after Jigmé Lingpa, and was well versed in Jigmé Lingpa's writings. In his *Autobiography*, he recalls being exposed to some of Jigmé Lingpa's teachings at an early age.<sup>95</sup> Further, he specifically cites Jigmé Lingpa's own *Autobiography* in his works on vegetarianism, indicating his familiarity with this work.<sup>96</sup> It is, therefore, likely that Shabkar was familiar with Jigmé Lingpa's encounter with the sheep, and with Jigmé Lingpa's encouragement to others to respond similarly. This does not, of course, mean that Shabkar was mimicking Jigmé Lingpa, but I cannot help but wonder if Shabkar was interpreting his experiences through a lens provided by Jigmé Lingpa.

Wherever his motivation came from, Shabkar went on to become one of the most well known vegetarians in Tibetan history. In his descriptive catalog of Shabkar's writings, Matthieu Ricard describes them as, "The most sweeping indictment of meat

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<sup>93</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 16b. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 201a-201b. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 232.

<sup>95</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 19b. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 21.

<sup>96</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Wondrous Emanated Scripture*, 62-63. Shabkar. *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 85-86.

eating to be found in Tibetan literature.”<sup>97</sup> The same catalog notes three different texts dedicated wholly, or in large part, to a discussion of meat, and many others that treat on the topic in passing.<sup>98</sup> Like Jigmé Lingpa, Shabkar’s arguments focus primarily on the incompatibility of meat and compassion, offering vivid descriptions of animal suffering. He discusses the incompatibility of meat with monastic and Bodhisattva vows on several occasions, but his writing tends to privilege emotional reflection on animal suffering instead of legalistic arguments about such vows.

It is also clear that Shabkar played an important role in the later spread of vegetarianism in his native region of Amdo. His *Autobiography* notes that three hundred of his eighteen hundred disciples adopted vegetarianism.<sup>99</sup> Some of these disciples would, presumably, have transmitted a vegetarian ideal to their own students. Evidence for such a transmission, and, indeed, for vegetarianism in Amdo in the century following Shabkar’s death, is thin, however. Without further evidence, therefore, it is impossible to know the extent of Shabkar’s influence on vegetarianism in Amdo.

Between Jigmé Lingpa and Shabkar, we can see something of a shift in the arguments used by pro-vegetarian authors. Prior figures had framed the debate largely in terms of whether or not meat was allowed for monks. Following Jigmé Lingpa and Shabkar, however, the focus turned towards the importance of compassion, with a strong emphasis on the emotional impact of witnessing animals in distress. Both Jigmé Lingpa

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<sup>97</sup> Ricard, *Catalog*, 21-22.

<sup>98</sup> Ricard, *Catalog*, 21-22, 31.

<sup>99</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 481a. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 542.

and Shabkar agree that meat is inappropriate for monks, and earlier figures such as Dolpopa and Ngorchon Künga Zangpo clearly associate vegetarianism with compassion. There is a shift in emphasis, however, between Jigmé Lingpa and Shabkar on the one hand and Dolpopa, Ngorchon Künga Zangpo and other early vegetarians on the other hand, with the former emphasizing the suffering animals undergo and the latter emphasizing the rules for monks. The details of these two arguments will be discussed fully in the next chapter, but it is important to note the shift here as well.

Before turning our attention to the rise of vegetarianism in nineteenth century Kham, it is worth returning briefly to the Bön monastery of Menri, located in Central Tibet. We noted above that Menri's founder, Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen, promoted vegetarianism in his commentary on the *Vinaya*. As a *Vinaya* commentary, however, this text was meant to be applied to all monks, not only those at Menri. In 1810, however, Kudön Sönam Lodrö (1784-1835) reinforced the connections between Menri and vegetarianism by writing *A Menri Customary*, a customary, or monastic rulebook, for Menri.<sup>100</sup> Rather than discuss the rules under which all monks should live, as the *Vinaya* and its commentaries do, customaries such as this one delineate the rules of conduct at a specific monastery and often deal with such prosaic topics as seating arrangements, monastic dress, and so forth. In addition to these, the *Menri Customary* also notes that monks, "may not eat meat, alcohol, garlic or onions."<sup>101</sup> Kudön Sönam Lodrö based his

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<sup>100</sup> Krystyna Cech has noted evidence of a similar customary written by Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen himself, but I have not been able to locate a copy. ("A Bönpo bCa' Yig," 70)

<sup>101</sup> Cech, "A Bönpo bCa' Yig," 74, 80.

*kha zas sde la mang thun sha dang yu ti chang/sgog gcong rigs/phyi dro'i kha zas*

work on Metön Sherab Özer and Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen's *Vinaya* commentaries, so it should not be surprising that he repeats these authors' positions. It is notable, however, that this text elevates these authors' opposition to meat from the level of a suggested practice to a (theoretically) binding rule.

Still, we should not take the existence of this text to mean that all monks at Menri were vegetarian. Indeed, this text is still in use at present day Menri Monastery in Dolanji, India, and while there is a sense that meat is frowned upon inside the monastery, monks may eat as they please outside the monastery, and often eat meat clandestinely within the monastery as well.<sup>102</sup> Thus, the presence of the *Menri Customary* does not mean that all present day monks at Menri are vegetarian, and it is reasonable to assume that this was the case in the past as well. Nevertheless, this text makes clear that vegetarianism was maintained as an ideal among Bönpo monastics well into the nineteenth century.

### *Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Kham*

Having seemingly faded in Central Tibet after the fifteenth century, vegetarianism re-emerged as a widespread practice in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham during the mid-nineteenth century. Kham, separated from Central Tibet by a rugged journey of several months, had long been seen as something of a cultural backwater by the scholars and exegetes of Central Tibet. As Jann Ronis has demonstrated, however,

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<sup>102</sup> Personal communication with Jed Verity, August 2012. In a telling anecdote, Verity reports that one monk asked for a piece of beef jerky, then asked him to not tell anyone about it.

Kham experienced a sustained religious revival beginning in the seventeenth century. Centered on the kingdom of Degé, but incorporating many independent kingdoms as well, this movement raised the profile of religious practice in Kham, entwining religious devotion with political power and needs.<sup>103</sup> Drawing on influences provided by Shabkar, Menri Monastery and, most importantly, Jigmé Lingpa, lamas from this region began adopting vegetarianism on a relatively widespread basis in the mid-nineteenth century. The political and social contexts for the movement will be discussed in detail in chapter five of this dissertation, so for now I will content myself with a historical survey of vegetarians in Kham.

The fact that vegetarianism emerged as a widespread movement in the nineteenth century, however, does not mean that there were no vegetarians in Kham prior to that period. Before looking at their nineteenth century heirs, therefore, it is worth examining what seems to have been a locally powerful movement towards vegetarianism centered on Pelyül Monastery. According to *A Garland of Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, Tsering Lama Jampel Zangpo's (1900- ?) biographical history of Pelyül monastery in Kham, this monastery's first two abbots, Künzang Sherab (1636-1698) and Padma Lhündrub Gyatso (1659-1727), were both vegetarian and encouraged the practice among their disciples.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ronis, *Celibacy*.

<sup>104</sup> tshe ring bla ma 'jam dpal bzang po, *Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 45, 67. Tsering Lama Jampal Zangpo, *Garland of Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 63, 76.

It is worth noting that at least one other biographical history of Pelyül, *An Abridged History of Glorious Pelyül*, by the current abbot, Tülku Tübtan Pelzang (c. 1930s- ), does not mention vegetarianism in its account of either of these figures, despite vegetarianism being widespread in modern-day Pelyül. Combined with the absence of any mention of meat in Künzang Sherab's *Torch of the Teachings on the Three Vows*, this may cast doubt on Tsering Lama Jampel Zangpo's account.

At the same time, it is unclear how important this vegetarianism was. In Künzang Sherab's commentary on the cycle of monastic vows, *A Torch for the Three Vows*, he argues that not harming others is one of the core practices of Buddhism, and he includes farming and cutting animals' hair as examples of the type of practice that causes harm and should be abandoned.<sup>105</sup> He does not, however, include any comments on eating meat, possibly indicating that even if he was a vegetarian, it was not a key aspect of his practice.

On the other hand, there is at least one piece of evidence composed during this time that does suggest that vegetarianism was a known practice in the region. Karma Chakmé (1613-1678), a famed meditator intimately associated with Pelyül, goes to great lengths in his biography of Migyur Dorjé (1645-1667), to justify the latter's consumption of meat, saying that since Migyur Dorjé was a realized being rather than an ordinary person, he was not bound by ordinary rules.<sup>106</sup> While this passage does not explicitly claim that Karma Chakmé, or anyone else, was a vegetarian, it does suggest that he was uncomfortable enough with meat eating to feel he had to justify it in his depiction of Migyur Dorjé. While it is unclear if anyone else shared Karma Chakmé's discomfort with meat, this passage at least suggests that there may have been a culture of vegetarianism, or at least discomfort with meat, in the Pelyül area at the time the monastery was founded.

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<sup>105</sup> kun bzang shes rab, *Torch*.

<sup>106</sup> karma chags med, *Biography of Migyur Dorjé*, 242. Karma Chagme, *All-Pervading Melodious Sound of Thunder*, 133.

Such a reading would fit well with Jampel Zangpo's assertions regarding Künzang Sherab and Padma Lhündrub Gyatso, and would also predate the emergence of vegetarianism in other parts of Kham by almost two centuries. No later figures in Jampel Zangpo's account, however, are portrayed as vegetarians, suggesting, perhaps, that even if vegetarianism was important for the founders of Pelyül, that tradition may have been discontinued prior to the nineteenth century. Without further evidence, therefore, it seems that the vegetarian tradition at Pelyül was a localized tradition, with little influence on the later flourishing of vegetarianism in Kham.

Of far more importance were the writings and teaching lineage of Jigmé Lingpa. Jigmé Lingpa's influence in Kham began during his own life, despite never traveling to the region personally. His *Autobiography* recalls that the king and queen of Degé visited him regularly and sponsored the production of printing blocks for his writings, greatly easing their dissemination across Kham.<sup>107</sup> Jigmé Lingpa belonged to the Nyingma sect, and his influence in Degé grew so strong that, after the king's death, members of the Sakya school used the queen's devotion to him as an excuse to remove her from power.<sup>108</sup>

Above, I have suggested that despite his pro-vegetarian rhetoric, Jigmé Lingpa may not have been a vegetarian himself. Whether or not this is the case, later generations sometimes remembered him as one. Shabkar, for instance, cited Jigmé Lingpa as a

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<sup>107</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 330, 360-361, 402, 407-423.

<sup>108</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 129-131. Smith, *Autobiography of Khenpo Ngakchung*, 25. Alex Gardner has cast doubt on how authentic this was, or whether it was simply a convenient justification for the coup. Either way, it is clear that Jigmé Lingpa had considerable influence at the Degé court.

vegetarian, as have modern lamas such as Chatrel Sangyé Dorjé (b. 1913)<sup>109</sup> Even when later authors may not have thought of Jigmé Lingpa as a vegetarian, he was still remembered for his attitude towards animals. In a commentary on Patrül Rinpoché's (1808-1887) *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Khenpo Ngakchung (1879-1941) notes:

When meditating on compassion, the system of Apu [Patrül Rinpoché] and Jowo [Atiśa] is to meditate on one's present mother. According to Rigdzin Jigmé Lingpa's intention, when you observe a being that is about to be killed, such as a sheep awaiting slaughter, or when you observe someone with a painful illness, imagine that they are either yourself or your old mother. Whichever method you want to use is fine.<sup>110</sup>

Khenpo Ngakchung was deeply engaged with transmitting Jigmé Lingpa's *Longchen Nyinthik* practice system in Kham. By comparing Jigmé Lingpa with Atiśa and Patrül—both of whom were also notably sympathetic to animals—Khenpo Ngakchung makes clear that Jigmé Lingpa's own lineage saw him as particularly devoted to animals.

Jigmé Lingpa had several disciples from Kham, but two were of particular importance in the transmission of his lineage, the first Dodrupchen, Jigmé Trinlé Özer (1745-1821) and Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu (1765-1842). Dodrupchen, working in concert

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<sup>109</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Wondrous Emanated Scripture*, 62-63. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 85. Kyabje Chatral Rinpoché, *Powerful Message*.

<sup>110</sup> ngag dbang dpal bzang, *Notes on The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 214. Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, *Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 148.



with the Degé royal family, helped to ensure that Jigmé Lingpa's texts were printed and distributed throughout Kham. It is unclear, however, to what extent he included Jigmé Lingpa's attitude towards animals and support for vegetarianism in this mission. His *Commentary* on Jigmé Lingpa's *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, for instance, makes no mention of meat.<sup>111</sup> As we have seen, Jigmé Lingpa's own auto-commentary on this same work, *The Chariot of the Two Truths*, spends several pages criticizing meat eating.<sup>112</sup> *The Chariot of the Two Truths* was printed in Degé during the early 1790s, making it one of the first of Jigmé Lingpa's works to be printed there, and it is inconceivable that Dodrupchen was not aware of it when he composed his own commentary.<sup>113</sup> While this does not indicate that Dodrupchen was opposed to vegetarianism, it does suggest that he did not find it to be an important part of his teacher's legacy.

Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu, on the other hand, was both a vegetarian himself and central to the spread of vegetarianism in Kham. *The Biography of Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu* recalls that while in retreat near Mt. Tsari, Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu watched a nomad couple butcher a sheep for him, distressing him so much that he never ate meat again.<sup>114</sup> Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu's *Biography* is unsigned and undated, but Matthieu Ricard, citing oral tradition, asserts that it was written during the life of Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu's disciple

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*snying rje bsgom pa la a bu dang jo bo'i lugs la/ rang gi rtsa ba'i ma nas bsgom/ rig 'dzin 'jigs med gling gi dgongs pa ltar na/ bsha' lug la sogs pa sems can gsod du nye ba'am nad pa dang sdug bsngal can zbig la dmigs nas rang ngam rang gi ma rgan gyi 'du shes bzbag nas bsgom pa yin/ gang ltar bsgom kyang chog la/*

<sup>111</sup> 'jigs med phrin las 'od zer, *Commentary*.

<sup>112</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Chariot of the Two Truths*.

<sup>113</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 402.

<sup>114</sup> Anonymous, *Biography of Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu*, 69-70.

Patrül Rinpoché<sup>115</sup>. Further, this account is repeated in the *Autobiography* of Khenpo Ngakchung, written in 1933, so the story must have been current by then.<sup>116</sup>

Whether or not this account of Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu's personal vegetarianism accurately reflects his life, however, he strongly influenced the later spread of vegetarianism in Kham through his contributions to one of the most popular pieces of religious advice composed during this period, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. This text was written by Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu's disciple Patrül Rinpoché, though the latter claims to have been merely repeating what he had heard from Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu, his 'perfect teacher'. Such attribution in Tibetan works can often feel like something of a trope, an attempt to gather legitimacy by associating the work with a famous forebear. In this case, however, it is worth noting that despite the strident anti-meat rhetoric in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrül does not mention meat in any of the other works of his that I have investigated. Similarly, neither of Patrül's traditional biographies mention him becoming vegetarian, though the third Dordrupchen, Jigmé Tenpé Nyima's (1865-1926) *Short Biography of Patrül* does credit him with putting an end to the practice of slaughtering animals to serve to lamas performing rituals.<sup>117</sup> The contrast between the powerful anti-meat passages in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and the complete lack of mention in any other text leads me to suspect that in this case, Patrül really may have simply been repeating what he had heard from his teacher.

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<sup>115</sup> Anonymous, *Biography of Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu*, v-vi.

<sup>116</sup> ngag dbang dpal bzang, *Autobiography*, 79-80.

<sup>117</sup> 'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, *Biography of Patrül*, 458.

Whoever the text is attributed to, the author was not afraid to denounce what he saw as the hypocrisy of contemporary religious leaders:

These days, those who have the appearance of lamas are drawn in when a patron slaughters a fat, greasy sheep and [cooks] the quivering meat with the gullet and organs, piling the lot atop the still trembling ribs of a yak. These lamas pull their monastic shawls over their heads and suck away at the entrails like a baby sucking at its mother's breast.<sup>118</sup>

Similarly strong language is also used to describe the experience of animal suffering, concluding that anyone who can eat meat after this process must be a demon:

At the time a sheep or other animal is to be slaughtered, it first has inconceivable terror as it is taken from the flock. Blood blisters form wherever it is seized. Then it is flipped upside down, its limbs are bound with cord and its muzzle is tied.<sup>119</sup> The in and out flow of the breath is cut off, and it experiences the terrible suffering of death. If it requires a little time to die, the evil butcher beats it, calling out angrily, 'This one won't die!'. ... Anyone who can eat such things is a true demon!<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 103. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 70.

*da lta bla ma rnam pa tsho yang/ yon bdag gi bsha' lug tsho ba dang rgyag pa re bshas nas mid pa dang mtsher pa sogs sha khrag gis g.yos/ tshang 'brong gi rtsib sha 'dar cum me ba'i steng du bzahag nas drangs tsa na/ mnabs gzan de dbu la 'then nas/ nang cha rnams byis pas nu ma nu nu mdzad/*

<sup>119</sup> Refers to a popular method of slaughtering where the animal is suffocated by binding a cord around its muzzle. The meat produced by this method, still rich with blood, is said to be particularly tasty.

<sup>120</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 314-315. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 203.

*khyad par bsha' lug sogs gsod pa'i skabs/ dang po mang po'i khyu nas bzung ba'i tsho/ de la 'jigs skrag gi snang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa yod pas/ dang po gang du bzung sa der sha la khrag tshom 'byung/ de rjes lus gnam sa bsgyur/ yan lag 'breng pas bkyig mchu tha gus dkris/ dbugs phyi nang gi rgyu 'grul bcad de gnad gcod kyi sdug*

In this and other passages, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* focuses on the suffering animals' experience, presumably with the hope that such description will provoke an emotional response on the part of its readers. In this focus on animal suffering, as well as the vivid language used to describe that suffering, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* clearly reflects the concerns found in Jigmé Lingpa's writings on meat. This should not be surprising, given the text's lineage, but it serves as confirmation of the importance Jigmé Lingpa's views would hold in Kham generations after his death.

It is also clear that *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* had a strong influence on religious practice in Kham, at least among the Nyingma school. While I have not been able to arrive at any hard numbers, anecdotal evidence suggests that Patrül taught this text widely. Jigmé Tenpé Nyima's *Biography*, for instance, notes that Patrül taught the *Longchen Nyingthik* preliminaries widely throughout Kham.<sup>121</sup> *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is a commentary on these same practices, so it seems likely that it, or at least the ideas in it, would be featured at any such teaching session. There is also at least one full commentary on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* written during this period, again suggesting that the work found a wide audience. Interestingly, this commentary, by Khenpo Ngakchung (1879-1941), does not repeat the critiques of meat found in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.<sup>122</sup> Instead, Khenpo Ngakchung simply skips over these

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*bsngal dos drag po myong ba'i skabs su yang da dung cung zad 'chi ba 'gor na shan pa las ngan phal cher zhe sdang langs nas 'di la 'chi rgyu mi 'dug zer te brdung rdeg sogs byed/ ... za phod pa 'di las kyi srin po dngos so 'dug/*

<sup>121</sup> 'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, *Biography of Patrül*, 458.

<sup>122</sup> ngag dbang dpal bzang, *Notes on The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, *Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

passages, neither condoning nor contradicting the original. This can only be an intentional omission by Khenpo Ngakchung, reminding us that while *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* may have been widely read and admired, that does not mean that its advice concerning meat was always followed!

If it is clear that Jigmé Lingpa's ideas were important in the spread of vegetarianism in Kham, the same is less clear for Shabkar. He never personally visited the region, though there is evidence that he was known there. Patrül Rinpoché, for instance, is said to have begun traveling to Amdo in order to meet Shabkar, though he turned around when he heard of Shabkar's death in 1851.<sup>123</sup> Following this, Patrül composed *A Supplication for Shabkar's Rebirth*, praising many of Shabkar's qualities, but not mentioning his vegetarianism.<sup>124</sup> It is clear, therefore, that Shabkar's reputation had spread to Kham, though the fact that Patrül makes no reference to Shabkar's vegetarianism suggests that his vegetarianism may not have been part of that reputation. Shabkar's influence on vegetarianism in Kham is, therefore, less clear than Jigmé Lingpa's. Still, given the strength and frequency of Shabkar's attacks on meat, as well as the fact that he was known in Kham, it seems likely that his ideas may have supported the movement.

In addition to Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu and Patrül Rinpoché, the Nyingma lama Nyakla Pema Dödül (1816–1873) also actively propagated vegetarianism in Kham during the mid-nineteenth century. As recalled in his *Advice for Abandoning Meat*, Nyakla Pema

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<sup>123</sup> 'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, *Biography of Patrül*, 457.

Düdül became vegetarian after a vision in which Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, appeared to him and reprimanded him severely for his consumption of meat.<sup>125</sup> Following this reprimand, Nyakla Pema Düdül adopts a vegetarian diet and encourages his disciples to do the same.

Like Jigmé Lingpa's works and *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Nyakla Pema Düdül emphasizes the suffering that eating meat causes. Despite these echoes of Jigmé Lingpa's sentiments, however, it is unclear to what extent Nyakla Pema Düdül may have been influenced by his lineage. Like Jigmé Lingpa, he was strongly associated with the Nyingma school. However, Nyoshül Khenpo's *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, a modern encyclopedic history of the *Longchen Nyinthik* teachings, does not list him as a holder of Jigmé Lingpa's specific lineage. The same text does, however, note that Patrül gave teachings at Nyakla Pema Düdül's camp, so the two likely met.<sup>126</sup> Unfortunately, *Advice for Abandoning Meat* does not say when it was written, so it is impossible to know whether it was composed before or after these meetings. While it is possible, therefore, that Nyakla Pema Düdül was responding to calls for vegetarianism spreading from Jigmé Lingpa's lineage, it is also possible that he was responding to a broader vegetarian movement no longer associated with that specific lineage. In either case, this is the first evidence that vegetarianism was beginning to spread in Kham beyond the circle of those associated with Jigmé Lingpa.

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<sup>124</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *Supplication*.

<sup>125</sup> nyag bla padma bdud 'dul, *Advice*. Nyala Pema Duddul, "Song of Advice."

Whether associated with Jigmé Lingpa's lineage or not, all of these figures are drawn from the Nyingma school, and it is impossible to avoid the impression that, at least through the mid-nineteenth century, the vegetarian movement in Kham was largely a Nyingma phenomena. That begins to change in the late nineteenth century, however, and by the early twentieth all of the religious schools active in Kham—with the striking exception of the Geluk—had at least a few vegetarian representatives. This is not surprising, as many of these religious leaders sought out teachings from a variety of schools, to the extent that late nineteenth century Kham has sometimes been said to have experienced a *rimé*, or non-sectarian movement.

Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé (1813-1899) was among the most important Kagyü lamas of this time and a central member of the so-called *rimé* movement. Kongtrül himself was not a vegetarian and does not seem to have actively supported vegetarianism in any of his many written works. And yet, in his addendum to Jamgön Kongtrül's own *Autobiography, The Marvelous Gem-Like Vision*, Nesar Tashi Chöphel (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> C) recalls, "I repeatedly heard [Kongtrül] say, 'I pray that I will be born as one who doesn't have to eat meat.'"<sup>127</sup> Thus, while Kongtrül does not seem to have practiced vegetarianism, it is clear that he held it up as an ideal.

Reported Kagyü vegetarians of this period include Karmé Khenpo Rinchen Dargyé (1835-19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), a primary disciple of both Jamgön Kongtrül and the Nyingma

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<sup>126</sup> smyo shil mkhan po, *Garland of Rare Gems*, vol 1, 202b. Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, 243.

<sup>127</sup> gnas gsar bkra shis chos 'phel, *Gem-Like Vision*, 7a. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 378. *de'i tshe bdag ni sha za mi dgos pa zbig tu skye ba'i smon lam byed pa yin ces yang yang bka' stsal pa'ang thos mod/*

luminary Chokgyur Lingpa (1829-1870).<sup>128</sup> Karmé Khenpo's vegetarianism is attested in *Blazing Splendor*, the memoirs of Tülku Urgyen Rinpoché (1920-1996), who lauds him for his commitment to ethics, including strict vegetarianism and teetotaling.<sup>129</sup> Karmé Khenpo may also have authored a short prayer specifically for reducing the negativity associated with eating meat.<sup>130</sup> Attribution of this prayer to Karmé Khenpo is tenuous, however, and I have been able to retrieve little information about his vegetarianism from other sources.

Within the Sakya school, the most prominent vegetarian of this period that I am aware of was Ngawang Lekpa (1864-1941). According to Künga Tenpé Gyeltsen's (1885-1952) biography, *The Life of Ngawang Lekpa*, Ngawang Lekpa was deeply revolted at the repeated sight of sheep being slaughtered while on a pilgrimage to Lhasa. Such sights would cause him to lose his appetite for several days, until he finally gave up all meat when he took his monastic vows.<sup>131</sup> Again, this account echoes Jigmé Lingpa's experience with watching sheep being slaughtered, indicating that this pattern had spread beyond the confines of the Nyingma school.

Beyond these Buddhist schools, members of Bön adherents also practiced vegetarianism during this period, with the most prominent being Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1935), who renounced all slaughtered meat at the same time as he took monastic

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<sup>128</sup> Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 394. Tülku Urgyen, *Blazing Splendor*, 62-66.

<sup>129</sup> Tülku Urgyen, *Blazing Splendor*, 66.

Tülku Urgyen's memoirs were collected and edited by his European disciples, then published in English. As far as I am aware, no Tibetan edition has been published.

<sup>130</sup> Anonymous, *Prayer to Purify*, 6.



vows.<sup>132</sup> Shardza also wrote one of the more interesting anti-meat tracts that I have come across. In this work, *The Shortcomings of Eating Meat*, Shardza argues at length that meat is inappropriate, pointing out that it conflicts with the ideal of compassion, leads to rebirth in hell, and is, simply, disgusting. After this discussion, however, Shardza turns around and *mandates* meat consumption, arguing that meat is necessary for health and so refusing it would be like throwing away your precious human life. Finally, Shardza tries to resolve this contradiction by advocating the consumption of ‘pure meat’, including meat that has died naturally and meat that was prepared for someone else and then discarded.<sup>133</sup>

During his youth, Shardza had studied extensively at Menri Monastery in Central Tibet. His anti-meat writings do not mention Kudön Sönam Lodrö’s *Menri Customary*, which explicitly prohibited meat for Menri monks, but they do cite the same commentaries that informed that text. It is speculation, but it seems likely that Shardza’s anti-meat views were, at the least, nurtured during his time at Menri. The anti-meat position held at Menri, therefore, provides another important inspiration for the rise of vegetarianism in Kham.

Further, while Shardza was the most well known Bönpo vegetarian of this period, he was certainly not the only one. *The History of the Makser Bön Lineage*, a biographical history written by Jampel Pawo Dorjé Tsal (1943-2010), also recalls several vegetarians

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<sup>131</sup> kun dga’ bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, *Life of Ngawang Lekpa*, 10.

<sup>132</sup> dbra ston skal bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, *Biography of Shardza*, 122-123.

<sup>133</sup> shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, *Shortcomings*, 333.

active during the early twentieth century.<sup>134</sup> Further, interviews with the author's son, Tsewang Tenzin (1988- ) indicate that several other figures from this lineage were vegetarian, including Jampel Pawo Dorjé Tsal himself, though this is not mentioned in the text itself. Tsewang Tenzin also indicated that, despite the popularity of the practice among members of this lineage, vegetarianism was considered a personal choice rather than a strict requirement for lineage holders.

While the members of this lineage were locally respected and significant, they did not have the pan-Kham stature of figures such as Shardza. *The History of the Makser Bön Lineage*, therefore, provides valuable insight into the lives of non-elite lamas, indicating that vegetarianism was practiced by these local figures as well as elite figures like Shardza. A similar point was made by Lopön Tenzin Namdak (1926- ), one of the most important Bön lineage holders alive today. During an oral interview, Lopön Tenzin Namdak recalled that during his youth in Kham, vegetarianism was relatively widespread among Bön lamas, and that he himself adopted the diet from time to time. Between *The History of the Makser Bön Lineage* and Lopön Tenzin Namdak's recollections, it seems likely that vegetarianism was relatively common among early twentieth century Bönpos, perhaps more so than among other lineages.

It should also be noted that vegetarianism continued to be practiced by members of the Nyingma school through the early and mid-twentieth century. In addition to Karmé Khenpo, Tülku Urgyen also recalls that two uncles, both Nyingma lamas,

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<sup>134</sup> 'jam dpal dpa' bo rdo rje rtsal, *History of Makser Bön Lineage*.

Sangngak Rinpoché (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> C) and Samten Gyatso (1881-1945) were both practicing vegetarians.<sup>135</sup> Likewise, the female lama Sera Khandro (1892-1940) was a lifelong vegetarian.<sup>136</sup> Thus, while vegetarianism was spreading among the other Buddhist schools in Kham, it also remained strong among the Nyingma.

Surprisingly, however, I have found no evidence of vegetarianism among members of the Geluk school in Kham. Even during the course of many interviews with monks currently residing in Gelukpa monasteries in Kham—many of whom were vegetarian—I could not uncover any stories or other evidence of Gelukpa vegetarianism in Kham prior to the arrival of the Chinese army in the 1950s. There is evidence for Gelukpa vegetarian prior to this period and in other regions, but none in Kham.<sup>137</sup> I can only assume that there were at least a few, unrecorded Gelukpa vegetarians during this time, but the lack of evidence strongly suggests that Geluk individuals and institutions did not participate in the vegetarian movement to the same degree as the other schools. There is not room in this present chapter to discuss the reasons for this, but they will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

It should be clear at this point that vegetarianism went through a rapid increase in popularity in Kham during the nineteenth century, despite the apparent lack of Geluk participation. Prior to the beginning of that century, I have uncovered evidence of only a few vegetarians in the region, and even then the evidence is uncertain. By the early to

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<sup>135</sup> Tülku Urgyen, *Blazing Splendor*, 87, 198.

<sup>136</sup> se ra mkha' 'dro, *Autobiography*, 130-131, 356. Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 56, 295.

mid-twentieth century, however, I have found textual references to more than twenty specific, named vegetarians. As the oral tradition suggests, there were presumably many more vegetarians whose names have not been remembered. Collectively, therefore, it seems clear that vegetarianism experienced a sustained level of interest throughout Kham beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.

### *Contemporary Tibet*

Further, while the arrival of Chinese military forces in the early 1950s severely disrupted Tibetan religious life, vegetarianism did not completely disappear. The Democratic Reforms<sup>138</sup> movement, launched in Tibet in 1958, brought with it the forced laicization of most monks and nuns, the destruction of many monasteries and the public burning of countless books. After a few years of relative respite in the early sixties, the Cultural Revolution,<sup>139</sup> with its rabid opposition to all things associated with the feudal past, nearly finished the job begun during the Democratic Reforms. Those few monks who remained were forced to return to lay life, and most of Tibet's remaining monasteries and temples were destroyed or turned to other purposes.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Khedrup Jé is perhaps the most prominent example, though Shabkar also had many Geluk disciples in Amdo.

<sup>138</sup> Tib: *dmangs gtso bcos bsgyur*  
Ch: 民主改革

<sup>139</sup> Tib: *rig gnas gsar brje*  
Ch: 文化大革命

<sup>140</sup> Despite the importance of this period to understandings of contemporary Tibetan religion, it has remained remarkably understudied. Among the works that treat this period in detail, see: Goldstein, *On the Cultural Revolution in Tibet* and Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*.

It goes without saying that the upheavals of this period had a strong, negative impact on religious practice. Many individual lamas were forced from their positions and were often forced to work in dangerous conditions.<sup>141</sup> And yet, religious practice did sometimes continue in secret.<sup>142</sup> Some lamas even managed to continue practicing vegetarianism. One lama presently living in Xining,<sup>143</sup> for instance, claimed that he had been a vegetarian since the age of four (his father, also a lama, was a strict vegetarian), including during the entire period of the Democratic Reforms and Cultural Revolution. Similarly, a Sakya lama living in a hermitage near the town of Lhagang, in Kham, claimed that his teacher had maintained a vegetarian diet throughout this period. These stories are extraordinary, but they demonstrate that not all religious practice ceased during this period, as well as the importance some individuals gave to vegetarianism.

With the loosening of rules governing religious practice and the reestablishment of religious centers in the early 1980s, vegetarianism started to be revitalized among both an older generation who remembered the pre-Chinese past, and a younger generation seeking to reestablish Tibetan Buddhist practice. Indeed, the vegetarian movement in contemporary Tibet is arguably stronger than at any time in Tibet's past history. For the rest of this chapter, I will look at the practice of vegetarianism among contemporary Tibetan Buddhists.

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<sup>141</sup> Arjia Rinpoche, *Surviving the Dragon*. thub bstan phun tshogs, *Life of Thangla Tsewang*.

<sup>142</sup> thub bstan phun tshogs, *Life of Thangla Tsewang*.

<sup>143</sup> Ch: 西寧

Before looking at vegetarianism in Tibet proper, however, it is worth digressing slightly and looking at the vegetarian movement among Tibetans living in exile in India and Nepal. In a 1983 article, Tsepa Rigzin and Francesca Hampton describe debates surrounding meat eating in the exile community, citing the opinions of several prominent lamas and thereby making clear that this was a debated topic at that time. Among other observations, Rigzin and Hampton note that much of the discomfort with meat eating is being driven by western converts to Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>144</sup> At the same time, however, the actual terms of the debate outlined by these authors align closely with the debates we have already seen. The lamas they cite make reference to the same idea and texts—such as the idea of threefold purity and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*—that governed the discussion in pre-modern Tibet as well. Thus, while contact with western ideas helped instigate these debates among the exile community, the debates themselves were conducted along traditional lines.

By 2005, vegetarianism had achieved a potent new supporter: the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (1935– ). The Dalai Lama was sympathetic to vegetarianism even prior to going into exile, insisting that all state banquets in Lhasa be meat free.<sup>145</sup> He also experimented with vegetarianism himself around the year 2000, though he ultimately decided it was too hard on his health. In 2005 and 2006, however, the Dalai Lama made a series of speeches praising vegetarianism and encouraging his audience to adopt the

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<sup>144</sup> Rigzin & Hampton, “Buddhism and Meat Eating,” 8.

<sup>145</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “Non-Vegetarian Food,” 57.

diet.<sup>146</sup> Similarly, the seventeenth Karmapa, Urgyan Trinlé Dorjé (1985– ), himself a committed vegetarian, asked members of the Karma Kagyü order he oversees to become vegetarian in early 2007. As will be discussed soon, the strong statements in support of vegetarianism from both the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa have been highly influential in spreading vegetarianism, both among the exile community and in Tibet itself.

Before returning to Tibet, however, it is worth noting the emergence of a group known as Tibetan Volunteers for Animals (TVA). TVA emerged in the first years of the twenty-first century, with a mission focused on promoting vegetarianism and humane treatment of animals. They have produced videos and magazines supporting vegetarianism, and were an important force in making the Dalai Lama's 2006 Kalachakra Initiation in Amaravati—attended by more than two hundred thousand Tibetans from India and Tibet—an entirely vegetarian event.<sup>147</sup> Importantly, TVA is not an explicitly religious organization. They mark, therefore, the first time that vegetarianism has been promoted in Tibet by individuals and groups outside of a formal, religious context.

At roughly the same time vegetarianism was gaining traction among exile Tibetans, the diet was also becoming increasingly popular in Tibet itself. In 2004, Drigung Könchok Gyatso (1968– ), a senior lama of the Drigung branch of the Kagyü school who resides near Lhasa, published a text titled *The Benefits of Vegetarianism*, in

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<sup>146</sup> bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, *Dalai Lama's Talks on Environment*, 131–134. His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama, *His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama on the Environment*, 86–94.

<sup>147</sup> I attended this event in January of 2006, and the entire grounds truly were meat-free. One restaurant that did serve meat, off menu, was ransacked by Tibetans, incensed at this violation of the event's vegetarian status.

both Tibetan and Chinese. This short text consists of two sections, the first dedicated to the flaws of killing and the second to the benefits of not-killing.<sup>148</sup> Notably, it includes minimal references to the Vinaya or other vows, focusing instead on the suffering animals undergo and the karmic repercussions for those that cause this suffering.

In addition to this book, Könchok Gyatso has been instrumental in supporting the development of vegetarian restaurants in Lhasa, three of which were active in 2010.<sup>149</sup> As with other areas in contemporary Tibet, it is impossible to conduct surveys or other quantitative studies to determine how many members of a given population are vegetarian, but reports from recent visitors indicate that there is a strong vegetarian community among Tibetans in contemporary Lhasa, and particularly among the Drigung Kagyü.

Within contemporary Tibet, however, the vegetarian movement has established itself most securely in Kham. As we saw, Kham experienced a strong vegetarian movement from the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, and some individuals even managed to maintain a vegetarian diet through the period of the Democratic Reforms and Cultural Revolution. After the relaxation of restrictions on religious practice in the early eighties, Kham embarked on a sustained religious revival, often centered around charismatic individuals.

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<sup>148</sup> 'bri gung dkon mchog rgya mtsho, *Benefits of Being Vegetarian*.

<sup>149</sup> Oral communication from Francoise Robin. Due to travel difficulties, I have not been able to visit Lhasa recently.



Among the most important of these lamas was Khenpo Jigmé Püntso (1933–2003).<sup>150</sup> Khenpo Jigmé Püntso was not, himself, a vegetarian. I have been told by a close disciple that he was diabetic, and felt vegetarianism would be too hard on his health.<sup>151</sup> He did, however, emphasize compassion for animals in his vision for modern Buddhist practice, arguing strongly against the slaughter of animals for their meat.<sup>152</sup>

Khenpo Jigmé Püntso's close disciple and religious heir, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö (c. 1970s– ), has taken this emphasis on compassion towards animals and used it to support vegetarianism. Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö has been a vegetarian himself since 1998, following an unpleasant visit to a slaughterhouse. He has written at least two significant works on vegetarianism and compiled a collection of similar works, *The Faults of Meat, Alcohol and Tobacco*.<sup>153</sup> This is the only book on vegetarianism widely available in Kham, and I have seen pirated copies for sale as far away as Xining, in Amdo. Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö has also published a series of fliers denouncing meat that have been widely distributed across Kham, even into very rural areas. (Fig. 1) Finally, he has also produced a series of VCD disks containing his religious teachings, several of which promote vegetarianism.<sup>154</sup> As Holly Gayley has noted, the widespread availability of such

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<sup>150</sup> Germano, "Re-membering."

<sup>151</sup> Personal communication with Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, summer 2010.

<sup>152</sup> Gayley, "Ethics of Cultural Survival."

<sup>153</sup> tshul khrims blo gros, *Faults*.

<sup>154</sup> VCDs are a precursor to DVDs, and contain video files (though not as much as a DVD can hold). They remain popular in Kham and other parts of Tibet, though they have been supplanted by DVDs in most other parts of China.



Fig 1: One of the most common fliers distributed by Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö. Photographed here at a remote truck stop near Pelyül, but seen frequently across Kham.

disks has altered the dynamics of spreading a religious message, encouraging a much broader spectrum of society to engage in these debates.<sup>155</sup>

Khenpo Tsültrim

Lodrö's influence is also felt through his association with Larung Gar, the largest monastic complex in Kham.<sup>156</sup> Larung Gar, near the town of Serta, was founded by Khenpo Jigmé Püntsok. It is organized as a *gar*, or encampment, rather than a traditional monastery,

meaning that most residents come only for a period of years, rather than for their lifetime. This allows the complex to skirt official residency requirements, and also promotes the spread of the *gar*'s teachings, as monks and nuns return to their home

<sup>155</sup> Gayley, "Ethics of Cultural Survival."

<sup>156</sup> It is extremely difficult to know exactly how many monks and nuns reside at Larung Gar, but I have heard estimates of as many as twenty thousand. As such, I believe it is not only the largest monastic complex in Kham, but the largest such institution the world has ever seen.

institutions following their training.<sup>157</sup> As Khenpo Jigmé Püntso's principle heir, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö has assumed leadership of Larung Gar, offering him a powerful platform from which to spread his vision of Buddhist thought and practice, including vegetarianism.

Larung Gar does not require vegetarianism among its residents, but interviews suggest that a majority of the monks and nuns resident there are vegetarian. One senior monk explained that when young monks or nuns arrive, they usually eat meat. After two or three years residence at Larung Gar, however, he claimed that most had adopted vegetarianism. When these individuals return to their home monastery, many promote vegetarianism there as well, spreading Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö's vegetarian message across the Tibetan world.<sup>158</sup>

Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö is one of the most important lamas in contemporary Kham. One young monk at Pelyül Monastery told me, "In India, they have the Dalai Lama. In Tibet, we have Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö." This anecdote does not mean that Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö truly enjoys the same stature as the Dalai Lama. It does suggest, however, the degree to which he is respected in Kham. Further, his teachings on vegetarianism are widely known. When I would ask both monastics and laity in Kham about vegetarian lamas, I was almost invariably referred to Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö.

Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö is not the only lama to promote vegetarianism in Kham; I have

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<sup>157</sup> Terrone, "Tibetan Buddhism Beyond the Monastery," 764-765.

<sup>158</sup> Interestingly, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö is little known among the Tibetan exile community in India and Nepal. Some had heard his name, but few knew any details about either his life or teachings.

collected texts by seven different authors from the region that are specifically aimed at promoting vegetarianism.<sup>159</sup> Further, some of these authors, such as Pema Kelzang (b. 1943) of Dzogchen Monastery and Tülku A-sung (b. circa 1970s) of Yachen Gar are senior lamas. None, however, have Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö's pan-Kham stature, and none, therefore, have influenced the contemporary vegetarian movement to the degree he has.

Further, it is worth emphasizing that vegetarianism is not limited to monastics, or even to religious professionals. There is also a strong vegetarian movement among religiously devout laity as well. As mentioned above, Lhasa is able to support three vegetarian restaurants. Similarly, a Tibetan businessman in the eastern city of Dartsedo with strong personal commitment to vegetarianism has founded a restaurant there that serves only vegetarian meals. Further, interviews with many lay Tibetans indicate that vegetarianism has spread rapidly over the last five to seven years, though it remains a minority

practice. In many cases, I was told that people had adopted vegetarianism after seeing Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö's fliers, or watching one of his VCDs. (Fig. 2) One woman in



Fig 2: Villagers reading one of Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö's fliers. Yachen Gar, Summer 2010.

<sup>159</sup> It is worth noting that few of these texts were readily available in bookstores. Instead, most were privately printed, with a limited distribution.

her mid-fifties described how she had cried after watching a VCD with horrific scenes of animal slaughter, and immediately resolved to become vegetarian. Later, she invited her friends over to watch the same VCD, and reported proudly that several of them had become vegetarian as well.

It remains to be seen how many people who adopt vegetarianism based on such graphic videos maintain the practice over the long term. Officers from Tibetan Volunteers for Animals, the Dharamsala-based organization mentioned previously, said that the group no longer used such graphic images. They produced an initial surge of converts to vegetarianism, but many of these individuals resumed eating meat after the shock of the images wore off. Instead, therefore, TVA has shifted its strategy to emphasize developing a lasting relationship with animals that, they hope, will encourage people to maintain their vegetarian diet over a longer timeframe.

Finally, vegetarianism is not the only means through which Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö and other lamas promote animal welfare in Kham. Starting in 2010, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö promulgated a set of vows known as the ‘new ten virtues.’<sup>160</sup> Unlike most religious vows, these ten vows are taken by communities, with stiff fines for families or villages who have a member that transgresses the vows.<sup>161</sup> The new ten virtues do not include vegetarianism, but they do include a vow to not slaughter animals. Communities that take these vows, therefore, are bound to only eat the meat of animals that have died naturally. I have heard many stories of individuals finding creative ways around this

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<sup>160</sup> tib: *dge bcu gsar pa*

prohibition, but in at least some cases, villages do avoid slaughtering their animals. Residents of the town of Lhagang, near Dartsedo, for instance, insisted that they slaughtered no animals, relying instead on the meat of animals that had died naturally. Sources of such meat included wolf-kills,<sup>162</sup> lightning strikes,<sup>163</sup> maternal deaths in calving and other accidental deaths, though meat from aged or ill animals was considered fit only for dogs. Few in this village practiced vegetarianism, but they all were committed to upholding the prohibition against slaughtering their animals. The anti-slaughter movement is distinct from the vegetarian movement, but both draw on similar sentiments: discomfort with the killing animals for their meat.

As should be clear at this point, vegetarianism has spread rapidly in Kham over the last decade, as well as in other regions of the Tibetan cultural zone, such as the exile communities in India and Lhasa. In the process, vegetarianism has achieved a level of popularity never before seen among Tibetans. This does not mean, however, that the movement is something novel. While there has been outside influence, such as the concerns of western converts mentioned above, the terms of the debate itself align closely with traditional debates that have occurred periodically from at least the eleventh century onwards. Contemporary vegetarianism, therefore, should not be thought of as a new movement in Tibetan Buddhist practice, but a new implementation of ideals that have existed for centuries.

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<sup>161</sup> Gayley, "The New Upāsaka."

<sup>162</sup> Even a large wolf pack could not eat an entire yak before being driven off the carcass by herders in the morning, leaving a significant quantity of meat behind.

## Conclusion

As noted earlier, the history recounted here is governed—and limited—by the available source material. The vegetarianism practiced by some figures, such as Dolpopa, Jigmé Lingpa, Shabkar, Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen and a few others is represented by a rich textual record. For many others, however, the relevant source material is much more limited, often little more than a brief line or two in a biography. Accordingly, the historical description I have provided above has privileged some individuals and some texts above others. This certainly distorts the story, and it is likely that as further sources become available, the patterns noted above will become more complex.

That said, the evidence we do have is consistent enough to conclude that some of the patterns identified above are accurate. Vegetarianism does, for instance, seem to have experienced heightened popularity in Central Tibet between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and in Kham from the nineteenth century onwards. It also seems clear that there was a notable shift in the tone of the arguments made during these two periods, with the earlier period preferring to support vegetarianism through an appeal to monastic regulations, and those of the latter period, perhaps under the influence of Jigmé Lingpa and his lineage, preferring to focus on the suffering the animals experience. While the details may change as further evidence emerges, broad trends such as these seem well established.

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<sup>163</sup> I was told that a single summer storm could kill as many as forty animals from a large herd.

Throughout the history presented here, I have largely avoided the question of just how many vegetarians there were at any given time. As should be obvious, given the source material, it is impossible to answer this question with any degree of certainty. Due to restrictions on research imposed by the Chinese government, it is impossible to come up with even a rough estimate of the number of present day vegetarians.<sup>164</sup> But this does not mean I shouldn't try, and there are a couple of sources which can tell us something.

*The Blue Annals*, for instance, contains hundreds of short biographical accounts,<sup>165</sup> yet mentions vegetarianism of one type or another for only ten individuals.<sup>166</sup> Even if these are only approximate numbers, it suggests that vegetarians were a small minority of the religious population surveyed in this work.

Tsering Lama Jampel Zangpo's *Garland of Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, on the other hand, suggests that Padma Lhündrub Gyatso, the second abbot of Pelyül monastery, induced *thousands* of his followers to adopt vegetarianism as part of a strict monastic regimen.<sup>167</sup> It is unlikely that Pelyül had more than a few hundred monks at the time, so this number appears to have been inflated significantly.<sup>168</sup> Still, it holds out the

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<sup>164</sup> Surveys or other quantitative analysis are impossible, a situation that seems unlikely to change in the near future.

<sup>165</sup> I have not counted the actual biographical entries in this text, but the index to Roerich's translation contains approximately five thousand personal names. Presumably not all of these individuals are given full biographical entries, however.

<sup>166</sup> 'gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*. Roerich, *Blue Annals*.

<sup>167</sup> tshe ring bla ma 'jam dpal bzang po, *Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 67. Tsering Lama Jampal Zangpo, *Garland of Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 76.

<sup>168</sup> Jann Ronis has noted that in the mid 18th century, Situ Panchen (1700-1774) performed large ordination ceremonies at Pelyül, ordaining a total of one hundred fifty monks. (Ronis 154). Given that this seems to have been considered a large number, I find it hard to believe that Pelyül would have harbored



possibility that vegetarianism may have been at least relatively widespread in seventeenth century Pelyül.

Somewhat more plausibly, Shabkar, writing in Amdo in the 1840s, recalled that of his eighteen hundred disciples, three hundred adopted vegetarianism.<sup>169</sup> Given the strength and frequency of Shabkar's anti-meat rhetoric, it is likely that the percentage of vegetarians among his disciples was much higher than among the general population, suggesting that vegetarianism in Amdo at the time was present, but rare.

In his study of Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism, John Kieschnick has observed that by the sixth century, vegetarianism appeared with some frequency in Chinese Buddhist biographies, but that the very fact that it was worth mentioning meant that it had not yet become the norm.<sup>170</sup> A similar pattern seems to hold with vegetarianism in Tibet. Vegetarianism is mentioned frequently enough that we can say it exists, but the very fact that it is discussed at all proves that it was uncommon enough to be worth mentioning. Thus, while it remains impossible to come up with an accurate number of Tibetan vegetarians for any period, it does seem like vegetarians remained a relatively small minority, with only a handful present in any one area at a given time, even in nineteenth and twentieth century Kham.

That said, we cannot discount the possibility that vegetarianism was locally common. This is particularly likely in monasteries under the direction of lamas who

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thousands of monks during this period, a conclusion with which Ronis has agreed. (Personal Communication) At present, monks at Pelyül suggest the monastic population numbers about 500.

<sup>169</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 481a. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 542.

strongly supported the practice. One such place could be Menri Monastery, the important Bön complex in Central Tibet. As we have seen, Kudün Sönam Lodrö's *Menri Customary* explicitly bans meat among monks. Further, there is some evidence that this edict is followed in the present day incarnation of Menri in India, where monks only eat meat clandestinely within the monastery walls. While further evidence would be needed to support this, it is at least possible a similar situation could have prevailed at pre-modern Menri, so that the monastery as a whole may have upheld a vegetarian ideal.

This general picture would align with observations made during extended fieldwork in present-day Kham. Ease of transport has made vegetables and other produce more widely available, greatly simplifying the practice of vegetarianism. Further, few monasteries in the region will openly eat meat in communal settings, though individual monks at most institutions will eat meat outside the monastic complex and while in private. At the same time, there are a few institutions, such as Larung Gar, Yachen Gar, Dzogchen Monastery and Pelyül Monastery, whose monks are overwhelmingly vegetarian in practice, as well as in theory. Despite the strong advocacy of figures such as Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, however, on the whole vegetarianism is practiced by only a small minority of the monastic population, and an even smaller percentage of the laity. Reflecting back across Tibetan history, it seems likely that vegetarianism was never widespread among Tibetans, with the possible exception of some specific localities.

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<sup>170</sup> Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," 194.

Still, as this chapter has shown, vegetarianism existed in Tibet and occurred throughout Tibetan history in most parts of the Tibetan cultural zone. It experienced periods of expanded popularity, such as thirteenth through fifteen century Central Tibet and nineteenth and twentieth century Kham. However, even when its popularity waned—or, more accurately, evidence for its popularity waned—vegetarianism continued to exist, at least as an ideal. Furthermore, while vegetarianism may have been more popular among one or another school at any time or place, overall it has been practiced and upheld by representatives of all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as Bön. Vegetarianism may never have been the norm, but it was a real and important aspect of Tibetan Buddhist practice.

## Chapter 2

# Compassion in Practice

As the last chapter demonstrates, Tibet has a long history of vegetarianism. Religiously inclined leaders from all schools have adopted the practice, and we can safely say that someone, somewhere was practicing vegetarianism at any given moment in Tibetan history from at least the eleventh century onwards. Given the importance of meat in the Tibetan diet, the next question is why so many individuals and communities decided to adopt vegetarianism.<sup>171</sup> The short answer to this question is compassion and the importance Tibetan Buddhism places on compassion. The following chapter will provide a longer, more complex answer, exploring the multiple arguments and debates supporting vegetarianism. While this debate is rooted in a perceived conflict between eating meat and the practice of compassion, the arguments that emerge from this conflict branch in a variety of ways. Many authors highlight the suffering meat eating inflicts on animals, for instance. Others invoke the specter of negative karma for the consumer, or hold out the possibility that vegetarianism can provide direct soteriological benefits to the practitioner. Before discussing the intricacies of these arguments, however, it seems

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<sup>171</sup> Some of the reasons for this importance will be discussed in the next chapter.

appropriate to spend a few pages exploring the various practices that can all fall under the rubric ‘vegetarianism.’

## White Food

In the modern English speaking world, the term vegetarianism can encompass practices as diverse as fruitarianism (only fruits and nuts which can be harvested without harming the plant), veganism (the strict rejection of all products derived from animals), and pescetarianism (in which red meat and chicken are rejected, but fish is permitted).

Likewise, Tibetan culture includes a variety of dietary practices that can all be included, if sometimes tenuously, within the category of vegetarianism.

The Tibetan term that most closely overlaps with the English term vegetarianism is *karsé*<sup>172</sup>, which literally means ‘white food,’ contrasted with *marsé*,<sup>173</sup> or ‘red food.’ Thus, the term itself highlights the idea that such a diet is free from bloodshed, free from killing.

In Tibet, therefore, vegetarianism primarily



Fig. 3: Tibetan restaurant in Manigego advertising both *karsé* and *marsé* foods.

<sup>172</sup> Tib: *dkar zas*

<sup>173</sup> Tib: *dmar zas*

entailed the rejection of all forms of flesh, whether derived from mammals, birds or fish.

Vegetarianism, however, is an imperfect gloss for the Tibetan term *karsé*. While vegetarianism implies an ongoing dietary practice, *karsé* refers simply to the food itself. Thus, an individual who generally eats meat can order vegetarian food on any given day, and be said to be eating *karsé*. Further, Tibetan literature lacks a consistent term for someone who adopts such a diet, the equivalent of the English term ‘vegetarian.’ In modern oral usage, both the term *karsépa*,<sup>174</sup> ‘one who [eats] white food’ and *sha maza ken*,<sup>175</sup> ‘one who does not eat meat’, are used in this way. In older textual material, however, these terms are rarely, if ever, attested, and I have not come across a standard term for vegetarian.

Instead, the idea that an individual maintains a consistent vegetarian diet is usually indicated through description. One example (among many) of such descriptive phrasing can be found in Ngawang Lekpa’s (1864-1941) biography, “Since the time he requested monk’s vows, he abandoned eating meat, drinking alcohol and eating after noon.”<sup>176</sup> The verb used in this and many other, similar description is *pang*<sup>177</sup>, to abandon. In this case, *pang* refers to meat<sup>178</sup>, though it is also commonly used to refer to negative traits that someone chooses to reject, such as anger, desire, and so forth. Unlike

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<sup>174</sup> Tib: *dkar zas pa*

<sup>175</sup> Tib: *sha ma za mkhan*

<sup>176</sup> kun dga’ bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, *Life of Ngawang Lekpa*, 9.  
gong smos dge slong gi sdom pa zhus nas bzung/ sha chang gi bza’ btung/ phyi dro’i kha zas rnams spangs

<sup>177</sup> Tib: *spangs, spong, spang, spongs*

<sup>178</sup> Tib: *sha*

karsé, it does carry connotations that the object abandoned will stay abandoned; while karsé can refer to a single meal, the use of pang implies that meat will not be eaten again.

It is worth noting that the use of the term pang to describe the rejection of meat is remarkably consistent across Tibetan history. We have already seen it used in Ngawang Lekpa's twentieth century biography, but very similar formulations also appear in *The Blue Annals* of 1478, and *The Great Kagyü Biographies* of 1245.<sup>179</sup> If the terminology used to describe it is any indication, vegetarianism seems to have been adopted in a fairly consistent manner by Tibetans widely separated in terms of time and space.

Speaking broadly, therefore, vegetarianism in Tibet generally entailed the rejection of all forms of flesh, often for an individual's entire life. Such a diet forms a baseline against which other forms of vegetarianism can be measured and seems to be what most authors had in mind when they discuss a vegetarian diet. When I speak of vegetarianism in this dissertation, I will usually be referring to such a diet.

At the same time, the term karsé, especially when contrasted with *marszé*, emphasizes the rejection of meat rather than the adoption of a specific, named diet. Conceptualizing vegetarianism in this way, as the negative rejection of certain foods rather than the positive adoption of a particular diet, allows a certain flexibility, uniting under a single umbrella a broad range of practices that all reject meat in one way or another, but which differ in terms of their scope and duration.

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<sup>179</sup> On the dating of *The Great Kagyü Biographies*, see Roberts 9-11.

One obvious variant on the theme of vegetarianism is the reduction—but not elimination—of meat in an individual’s diet. Several modern Tibetan religious leaders have advocated this position, including the fourteenth Karmapa, Urgyen Trinlé Dorjé<sup>180</sup> (b. 1985), who has said that it is best if his followers can give up meat entirely, but that if this is impossible, they should at least reduce their consumption.<sup>181</sup> Similarly, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), has suggested that in the contemporary age, when non-meat foods are widely available, it would be best if Tibetans could at least reduce their meat consumption.<sup>182</sup> The Dalai Lama himself embodies such an approach, eating meat occasionally, but maintaining a vegetarian diet “most of the time.”<sup>183</sup>

Inside contemporary Tibet, lamas such as Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö (b. circa 1970s) have also advocated reducing meat consumption as much as possible, even if that does not entail full vegetarianism.<sup>184</sup> Perhaps following the advice of the Dalai Lama, Karmapa and Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, many informants told me that while they were not vegetarian *per se*, they did try to reduce their meat consumption. In the context of contemporary Tibetan Buddhism, therefore, it is clear that reducing one’s consumption of meat is seen as a viable alternative, if full vegetarianism is too difficult.

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<sup>180</sup> Urgyen Trinlé Dorjé is one of two claimants to the title of Karmapa, along with Trinlé Tayé Dorjé (1983– ). This is not the place for a long discussion of this controversy, but within contemporary Tibet itself, Urgyen Trinlé Dorjé is almost universally accepted as the rightful Karmapa.

<sup>181</sup> Karmapa 17 Orgyen Trinle Dorje, *Talk on Not Eating Meat*, 5.

<sup>182</sup> bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, *Dalai Lama's Talks on Environment*, 131. His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama, *His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama on the Environment*, 93.

<sup>183</sup> The Dalai Lama has sometimes been said to eat meat only every other day. (Phelps, 156) The Dalai Lama himself, however, reports only that he tries to reduce his meat consumption by eating vegetarian “most of the time.” (His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “Non-Vegetarian Food,” 7, 58)



Interestingly, however, I have found much less evidence of this in pre-modern literature. Pema Nyinjé Wangpo, the ninth Tai Situ incarnation (1774-1853), makes a passing reference to such a practice, “Giving up meat and alcohol for a week, bathing on auspicious days and giving beings life by ransoming them, when connected with pure aspirations, binds benefit for oneself and others.”<sup>185</sup> Temporary vegetarianism is thus cataloged with other virtuous practices as a way of creating positive karmic results in the future.

Another brief reference to such practices comes from *Briliant Moon*, the autobiography of Dilgo Khyentsé (1910-1991). Dilgo Khyentsé recalls that in his youth, he read texts by Jigmé Lingpa (1730-1798) that detailed animal suffering. Feeling inspired, “[he] took a vow to eat meat only once a day.”<sup>186</sup> The texts Dilgo Khyentsé was reading explicitly critique meat, but do not mention reducing meat consumption. Further, Dilgo Khyentsé makes no suggestion that this once-a-day vow was unique to himself. These references, therefore, hold out the possibility that reducing, but not eliminating, meat consumption may have been a culturally sanctioned response to the anti-meat statements found in texts like these. Still, these are the only two references to

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<sup>184</sup> tshul khriims blo 'gros, *Words to Increase Virtue*, 196.

<sup>185</sup> padma nyin byed dbang po, *Treasury of the Qualities of Amrita*, 235.

*zhag bdun sha chang spangs zhing/ gza' skar 'phrod sbyor dge bar rdo rje rnam 'joms kyi khrus zhu shing/ sems can gyi srog bslu tshe thar nges shig byas te dge pa'i 'dun pa bzang po'i mtshams sbyor dang bcas rang gzhan gyi mgul du 'chang*

<sup>186</sup> Dilgo Khyentsé, *Brilliant Moon*, 80.

I am unaware of a Tibetan edition of this text.

reducing—but not eliminating—meat consumption that I have found, making it difficult to conclude that this was a common practice prior to the last few decades.

Another variant on vegetarianism that is commonly mentioned by contemporary informants, but which has few attestations in pre-modern literature is a preference for eating large animals, such as yaks, rather than smaller ones, such as goats, chickens, pigs or fish. Many informants told me that it was better to eat a larger animal, as such animals could provide more meat with only a single death. You have to kill a lot of chickens to come up with the quantity of meat derived from a single yak.<sup>187</sup> While this attitude was mentioned several times by contemporary Tibetans, I have not found any evidence for it in textual sources. Further, few of the Tibetans who mentioned this idea claimed to have actually given up the consumption of smaller animals because of it. Meats such as chicken and fish are rare among Tibetans anyway, and many Tibetans find fish, in particular, to be distasteful. It is hard, therefore, to resist the conclusion that such arguments are an *ex post facto* justification for Tibetan dietary preferences, rather than a motivating force for a form of partial vegetarianism.

One potential variant of vegetarianism that I have not found in a Tibetan context is veganism, the strict rejection of all animal products, including dairy, eggs and even honey.<sup>188</sup> In her *Autobiography*, the eighteenth century nun Orgyen Chökyi (1675-1729)

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<sup>187</sup> This attitude is the direct inverse of some western vegetarians, who reject red meat but eat fish (pescetarianism) and / or chicken (pollotarianism). The attitude here seems to be that animals with higher mental capacities suffer more when killed, while chickens and fish, with presumably lower mental capacities, do not suffer as much.

<sup>188</sup> At least, not until quite recently: Tibetan Volunteers for Animals began promoting veganism at the Dalai Lama's 2012 Kalachakra initiation.

laments that when she milks her goats, she is taking the milk away from the goat's kids, but the text makes clear that she does not translate this sadness to a rejection of dairy products.<sup>189</sup> Likewise, while some recent Tibetan vegetarians have argued that eggs are a form of meat and should be rejected, I have found little evidence for this attitude in earlier literature.<sup>190</sup> One recent work suggests that Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147-1216) rejected eggs along with meat and alcohol, but I have been unable to find similar claims in earlier texts.<sup>191</sup> Eggs were rare in Tibet, however, so authors may not have felt a need to explicitly include them in their anti-meat works. Finally, Jigmé Lingpa's *Autobiography* mentions that he purchased a mountain in order to protect the bees that lived there from being killed in the process of harvesting honey.<sup>192</sup> As with Orgyen Chökyi's *Autobiography*, however, the text gives no indication his concern for bees extended to a rejection of honey in his diet.

Beyond these specific forms of what we might term partial vegetarianism, vegetarianism may also be adopted during specific circumstances, rather than on a long term basis. Among the most common of these are specific festival dates, most prominently *Saga Dawa*.<sup>193</sup> This holiday, commemorating the Buddha's birth, death and enlightenment, is nominally observed on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month but is often expanded into a month of festivities. As with other special dates, the karma that

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<sup>189</sup> o rgyan chos skyid, *Autobiography*, 8. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 22.

<sup>190</sup> Kyabje Chatral Rinpoché, *Powerful Message*.

<sup>191</sup> Chogyé Trichen, *Four Attachments*, 14-15.

<sup>192</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 395.

<sup>193</sup> Tib: *sa ga zla ba*

is accumulated during this time—either good or bad—is believed to be magnified; a bad deed will accrue worse karma during Saga Dawa than during other times, while a good deed will bring more positive karma.

Drawing on this idea, many contemporary Tibetan informants reported that they adopted vegetarianism for the month, or even just the day, of Saga Dawa, a practice that has been encouraged by local religious leaders. One unsigned text message that was being circulated among Tibetans during Saga Dawa in 2012, for instance, specifically called upon people to avoid meat during the month-long festivities.<sup>194</sup> Similarly, Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö's *Words to Increase Virtue*, one of his most important works on vegetarianism, was first given as an oral teaching on Saga Dawa in 2003.

Unlike reducing meat consumption and preferring only large animals, there is also significant textual evidence for the adoption of vegetarianism on specific holy days. Karma Pakshi (1202-1283), the second Karmapa, recalls with some pride that he convinced the Mongol Emperor Möngke (1209-1259) to ban animal slaughtering and meat consumption during the four phases of the moon each month.<sup>195</sup> As with Saga Dawa, the effects of karma are held to be heightened during these times, making morally upstanding practices more important on these days.

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<sup>194</sup> Anonymous text message received by author, June 23, 2012.

<sup>195</sup> karma pakShi, *Autobiography*, 102-103.

Karma Pakshi's *Autobiography* mentions that meat was not eaten on "the four times of the eleventh month" (*zla ba bcu gcig dus bzhi*). The specifics of this reference are unclear to me, and in the paraphrase here I follow Karma Thinley's interpretation. (Karma Thinley, *History*, 50)

Some individuals also abandoned meat during periods of intensive religious practice. This is found in contemporary texts, such as Khenpo Karthar's (b. 1924) *Mountain Dharma*, where he notes that while meat is generally permitted, it is not allowed during periods of retreat.<sup>196</sup> There is also good evidence for such practices during earlier periods. *The Blue Annals*, for instance, a religious history written in 1478, recalls several lamas who abandoned meat during extended periods of retreat.<sup>197</sup> Likewise, Dilgo Khyentsé, whom we have just seen take a vow to eat meat only once a day, also claims to have abandoned meat completely during a retreat that lasted five or six years.<sup>198</sup> In these instances, it is clear that vegetarianism—or, in Dilgo Khyentsé's case, full vegetarianism—is adopted only during periods of intensive meditation and ritual practice.

One interesting question raised by these various diets is what, exactly, vegetarians ate in pre-modern Tibet. Meat, after all, was a staple part of the diet for almost all Tibetans. Unfortunately, few sources give explicit information about the meals eaten by vegetarians, but there are enough hints that we can outline a few of the options available beyond meat. *Tsam pa*, roasted barley flour, was a staple for most Tibetans, and fully compatible with vegetarianism. Butter and other dairy products such as curd and dried cheese were also eaten by most Tibetans, and as veganism seems to have been mostly unknown, generally considered compatible with vegetarianism. Many regions also

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<sup>196</sup> Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, *Karma Chakme's Mountain Dharma, Vol 2*, 161-162.

<sup>197</sup> 'gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 794, 818. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 677, 699.

<sup>198</sup> Dilgo Khyentse, "Journey to Enlightenment," 33.

harvested the wild *troma*<sup>199</sup> root, a kind of small, wild sweet potato that the explorer William Rockhill lists as the only vegetable available to nomads in Kham towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>200</sup> As Rockhill suggests, one food that was not available was fruits or vegetables, which were rarely grown in Tibet prior to the last few decades.

While the evidence is limited, it seems that all of these foods were regularly eaten by vegetarians. Shabkar (1781-1851), for one, suggests that rather than meat, people should, “eat other food instead, troma, for instance, curd or other things.”<sup>201</sup> In some regions, however, other foods were available, notably rice. Writing in early twentieth century Kham, Sera Khandro (1892-1940) notes that her patrons regularly gave her any food they had that wasn’t meat, including rice and troma.<sup>202</sup> Sera Khandro does not say where the rice came from, but as the Tibetan climate is not suitable for its cultivation, it seems likely to have been imported from China. As such, it seems unlikely that rice would have been a significant part of the diet for most Tibetan vegetarians, bringing us back to tsampa, butter, curd and troma as the most likely staples.

In addition to the actual adoption of a vegetarian diet, Tibetans have a variety of ritual methods for reducing the problematic nature of meat. There are a variety of prayers, for instance, that can be used to ameliorate some of the negativity that is associated with eating meat. One such text, composed by the nineteenth century lama

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<sup>199</sup> Tib: gro ma

<sup>200</sup> Rockhill, *Land of the Lamas*, 190.

<sup>201</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 584. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 102.

<sup>202</sup> se ra mkha’ dro, *Autobiography*, 130. Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 295.

Karmé Khenpo<sup>203</sup> (1835-19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), takes the form of an apology, acknowledging that the practitioner's consumption of meat has harmed the animal.<sup>204</sup> The prayer then proceeds to ask that the animal be re-born in a pureland,<sup>205</sup> and that the practitioner's negative karma be cleansed, and even that the butcher who slaughtered the meat be purified of negativity.<sup>206</sup> Thus, while this prayer is not promoting vegetarianism per se, it clearly reflects a general understanding of meat as sinful.

Such prayers form an important part of many Tibetans' relationship with meat. The eighteenth century lama Jigmé Lingpa, for instance, claims to have recited prayers such as this one during periods of retreat early in his life.<sup>207</sup> Later, he suggested the recitation of prayers and mantras to students who recognized the negative aspects of eating meat, but who did not feel capable of adopting a vegetarian diet.<sup>208</sup> For Jigmé Lingpa and others, offering prayers before eating a meat-based meal was a way to recognize the negativity of meat without having to actually abandon it.<sup>209</sup>

Some Tibetans have also drawn a distinction between meat that comes from animals that have been intentionally slaughtered and meat that comes from animals who

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<sup>203</sup> Attribution of this prayer to Karmé Khenpo is speculative at best. the text's colophon lists the author as a Khampa named 'Vinaya-holding Ratna', a name which the Rangjung Yeshe website lists as a pseudonym for Karmé Khenpo. ([http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/gter\\_slob\\_'dul\\_'dzin\\_ratna](http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/gter_slob_'dul_'dzin_ratna) - retrieved 8/27/2012)

<sup>204</sup> Anonymous, *Prayer to Purify*, 6.

<sup>205</sup> A land that forms around a Buddha, said to be exceedingly pleasant and a perfect environment for making rapid advances on the path to one's own enlightenment.

<sup>206</sup> Anonymous, *Prayer to Purify*, 7.

<sup>207</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Ocean of Wondrous Advice*, 705. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, *Wondrous Ocean of Advice*, 5.

<sup>208</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Engaging the Path*, 723. Jigme Lingpa, "Entering the Path of Enlightenment," 133.

<sup>209</sup> For more on Jigmé Lingpa's use of prayers to ameliorate meat's negativity, see: Barstow, "Buddhism Between Abstinence and Indulgence," 90-91.

have died naturally. As will be discussed below, meat's negativity derives from the belief that killing an animal causes it to suffer greatly. By eating only the meat of animals that have died naturally, an individual can avoid any complicity with the death of the animal, and can eat with a clear conscience.

One lama who advocated this position was the polymath Jamgön Kongtrül (1813-1899), whose 1865 *Encyclopedia of Knowledge* labels “meat that has been killed for either food or profit” as impure food.<sup>210</sup> This idea is expanded upon by the Bönpo master Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1935), in his short work, *The Shortcomings of Eating Meat*. Shardza argues strenuously that meat is an evil food. He then argues, however, that meat is necessary for human health, and that to abstain would be to reject the possibilities inherent in a human life. His solution to this dilemma is to eat only ‘pure meat,’ meat derived from animals that have died naturally.<sup>211</sup>

Ethnographic data indicates that a diet that relies solely on meat from animals that have died naturally is feasible. As mentioned previously, residents of villages in the Lhagang region of Kham took a communal vow to not slaughter any of their animals, a vow which was largely kept at least until the summer of 2012.<sup>212</sup> Instead of slaughtering their animals, residents relied meat that had died accidentally, including through

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<sup>210</sup> ‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, *Treasury of Knowledge*, 379. Jamgon Kongtrül, *Buddhist Ethics*, 247.

*kha na ma tho ba'i zas ni rin dang bza' ba'i don du bsad pa'i sha sogs pa*

<sup>211</sup> shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, *Shortcomings*, 333.

<sup>212</sup> This was in response to a call from Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö for communities to adopt, en masse, a set of vows he terms ‘the new ten virtues,’ as discussed in the previous chapter. All residents interviewed, including nomads and restaurateurs, insisted that the vow against slaughtering animals was kept strictly.



lightning strikes, wolf-kills and other accidents. Despite the ban on slaughtering, meat continues to be consumed in these villages, though residents report that it is not as plentiful as it had been.<sup>213</sup>

The anthropologist Geoff Childs has reported that in Nubri, an ethnically Tibetan region of Nepal, some herders have been known to intentionally lead their animals close to cliffs, with the hope that the animals will fall and die, allowing the herder to harvest their meat without actually slaughtering them.<sup>214</sup> This raises the possibility that some of these animals' 'natural' deaths may not have been so natural. While it is difficult to intentionally induce lightening strikes, accidents are another matter. That said, one well-travelled Tibetan, writing a century ago, insisted that he had never encountered such phenomena, declaring such stories (which have circulated among European scholars for more than a century) to be European fabrications.<sup>215</sup> Further, nomads and villagers that I questioned insisted that they would never engage in such deception, ridiculing anyone who thought they could avoid the sin of killing in this manner. Thus, while I have no cause to doubt Childs' account of practices in Nubri, I am skeptical that such intentional accidents are widespread among Tibetans more broadly.

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<sup>213</sup> Some village residents admitted that some meat was imported from nearby Dartsedo, but all insisted that this was only a small amount.

<sup>214</sup> Childs, "Methods, Meanings and Representations," 2.

<sup>215</sup> Richardus, *Tibetan Lives*, 100.

While not specifically concerned with diet, it is also worth noting the practice of *tsetar*,<sup>216</sup> or ‘life-ransoming.’ In *tsetar*, a practitioner purchases an animal otherwise destined for slaughter and releases it into the wild, sometimes after being marked so that its ransomed status is apparent. Often, the actual purchase and release of the animals is incorporated into a larger ritual context, and several different liturgies exist. In this way, the animals are blessed, so that their liberation from slaughter in this life will be mirrored in a liberation from samsaric suffering in a future life.<sup>217</sup>

Ritual manuals for *tsetar* emphasize that the karmic benefits of the practice extend beyond the animals themselves, also benefiting the practitioner who ransoms the animals. Specifically, saving lives through *tsetar* is said to increase the practitioner’s own life-span. This relationship between intentionally saving the lives of animals and increasing one’s own life-span is strong enough that some Tibetan lamas have specifically prescribed *tsetar* rituals as a means to alleviate poor health.<sup>218</sup> Further, *tsetar* is sometimes said to specifically counteract the sin of meat eating. One unsigned and undated Gelukpa text, for instance, claims that, “If one who has consumed the lives of beings is going to die in three days, but ransoms thirteen beings, they will certainly live for three years.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Tib: *tshe thar*

<sup>217</sup> Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, *Increasing Life and Prosperity*. Chatral Rinpoche, “The Benefits of Saving Lives.”

<sup>218</sup> Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, *Increasing Life and Prosperity*, 1.

<sup>219</sup> Anonymous, *Benefits of Tsetar*, 50.

*tshe zad pa'i mi zbig zhag gsum 'chi nges pa la tshe thar bcu gsum btang na mi de lo gsum tshe bsring nges par 'gyur ro*

Despite this passage, it is important to note that *tsetar* is not necessarily connected with vegetarianism; many individuals ransom animals in this way while continuing to maintain a meat-based diet. That said, the animals ransomed during *tsetar* are generally domestic animals raised for food, or fish caught for consumption. While it does not imply an abstinence from meat, therefore, it both draws upon and reinforces the idea that killing animals for meat is a negative act.

As reflected in the Tibetan terms themselves, there is no set vegetarian diet in Tibet. As a baseline, we may speak of vegetarianism in Tibet as the rejection of all forms of flesh. When I speak of vegetarianism in this dissertation, this is generally what I am referring to. At the same time, however, we have seen that there are a constellation of other practices that are related to this baseline notion of vegetarianism, but which differ in important ways. Whatever their differences in scope, duration or object, however, all of these practices are united by the understanding that meat is a bad thing to eat and the commitment to do something to ameliorate that negativity.

## The Demands of Compassion

This raises an obvious question: why would some Tibetans consider meat a negative, sinful food? As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter of this dissertation, meat plays an important role in the Tibetan dietary, cultural and economic systems. So why would some Tibetans reject it, even partially? The rest of this chapter will attempt to answer this question, investigating the specific ways in which the doctrine

of compassion is invoked to support a vegetarian diet, as well as those ancillary arguments, such as the fear of negative karma, that derive from Tibetan Buddhism's understanding of compassion.

It is hard to overstate the importance of compassion in Tibetan conceptions of their religion. Tibetan Buddhism defines itself as a branch of the Mahāyāna, or 'Great Vehicle', school of Buddhism. Adherents of the Mahāyāna, in turn, define themselves as those who strive to place the needs of others before their own, contrasting this with other schools of Buddhism, which they claim are interested only in personal religious achievement. This attitude is embodied in the figure of the Bodhisattva,<sup>220</sup> a spiritual hero who has vowed to postpone their own enlightenment until all other beings have achieved the happiness of nirvana. Such a mental orientation, placing others' needs before one's own, is termed 'compassion.'<sup>221</sup> For Tibetan Buddhists and other Mahāyānists, compassion is held to be the highest form of religious motivation and becoming a Bodhisattva is the highest form of religious accomplishment. Rather than being primarily concerned with one's own suffering, therefore, individuals are called upon to practice religion out of concern for the sufferings of others.

In addition to its adherence to Mahāyāna Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism also claims allegiance to Tantric Buddhism. Tantra differs considerably from other forms of Buddhism, often idealizing antinomian practices. As will be discussed in detail below,

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<sup>220</sup> Tib: *byang chub sems dpa'*

<sup>221</sup> Skt: *bodhicitta*

Tib: *byang chub gyi sems*

Literally, 'The Mind of Enlightenment'.

Tibetan Buddhism's allegiance to Tantric ideals complicates the religion's relationship with meat and vegetarianism. At the same time as Tantric practices invoke antinomian ideals, however, most Tibetan commentators insist that the underlying motivation for Tantric practice should be compassion, just like other forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism. While Tantra involves a collection of esoteric practices, the underlying compassionate motivation remains the same: to relieve the suffering of other beings.

Ultimately, beings suffer because they remain mired in samsara, the endless cycle of birth and death characterized by suffering. The only escape from this cycle is enlightenment. For practitioners who have resolved to relieve beings' suffering, therefore, the primary goal is to lead those beings to enlightenment. In order to do this, one must first become enlightened oneself (or at least get close). For most religious Tibetans, therefore, the practical result of a compassionate perspective is dedicated religious practice and, in either this life or the next, a career teaching Buddhism.

It is worth emphasizing at this point that Tibetan conceptions of compassion are explicitly directed towards animals as well as humans (and other non-human beings such as gods, ghosts and hell-beings, for that matter). Like humans, animals are trapped in the wheel of samsara. Also like humans, animals will eventually die and have the potential to achieve birth in a higher—or lower—realm. The sufferings animals undergo differ from those humans' experience, but, ultimately, both categories of beings suffer in samsara and both are worthy of being approached with compassion.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> This differs dramatically from the Judeo-Christian tradition, which strongly emphasizes the disparity between animals and humans. (White, "Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis")

A compassionate motivation, therefore, is primarily focused on helping other beings—human, animal, god or ghost—achieve religious goals. At the same time, there is an expectation that compassion should be more than an abstract motivation for other religious practices. Ideally, a compassionate individual should not other beings' worldly needs. Accordingly, occupations that are seen as running counter to a compassionate mindset, such as butchering and soldiering, are almost universally reviled among Tibetan Buddhists. The taboo against butchering explains the intentional accidents mentioned by Childs and also helps to explain the predominance of this profession among non-Buddhist Tibetans, such as the Muslims of Lhasa and Amdo.<sup>223</sup>

The importance Tibetan Buddhism places on compassion also results in an emphasis on practices that directly help others. When directed towards people, this can be seen in the beggars that congregate near temples and the donations they receive. When directed towards animals, this emphasis on practical compassion can be seen in *tsetar*, the ransoming of animals discussed above. The purchase and release of animals undertaken in this context is understood to be a practical application of compassion, freeing the animal from the suffering of slaughter.

Tibetan Buddhism's understanding of compassion also forms the ethical basis for vegetarianism. Eating meat, after all, is impossible without the death of an animal. Like other forms of Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism assumes the existence of past and future lives, and the transition from one life to the next is believed to be highly traumatic. The

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<sup>223</sup> Childs, "Methods, Meanings and Representations," 2. Berzin, "A Buddhist View of Islam," 238.

process is described most famously in the *Liberation Upon Hearing in the Intermediate State*, more popularly known as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. This text describes the death process in intricate detail, beginning with the forced separation from everything the dying individual knows and loves, then continuing with a series of horrific visions.

Traumatic under the most peaceful circumstances, the death process becomes even worse when a being dies violently. In such circumstances, the traumatic emotions of the death experience compound the inherent trauma of dying, increasing the suffering of the intermediate period and ultimately leading to an inferior birth.<sup>224</sup>

Such theoretical claims are supported by the recollection of individuals who claim to have returned from the dead, and, therefore, to have experienced the dying process. Analyzing several biographies of such individuals, Brian Cuevas notes that, “First and foremost, the death experience is described as extremely frightening and physically unpleasant.”<sup>225</sup> Whether or not we accept that these individuals did, in fact, die and return, it is clear that in Tibetan conceptions death is not a peaceful process of slipping quietly into a new body, but a horrific and confusing barrage of sense stimuli. In a word, death is suffering.

This same process occurs for animals as well as humans. Again aligning with other forms of Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhists generally assert that animals participate in the same samsaric cycle of which humans are part. They are believed to be less intelligent, but they suffer in ways that are fundamentally similar to the suffering

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<sup>224</sup> Padmasambhava, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

experienced by humans. Patrül Rinpoché (1808-1887) makes this point clearly, “As soon as a lamb is born, its senses are complete. It can feel comfort and discomfort. But it is immediately killed, just as it first begins to enjoy life. It may be only a stupid animal, but it is afraid of dying. It loves life, but experiences the pain of dying.”<sup>226</sup> It is worth noting that in Tibetan conceptions, plants are not believed to be sentient, and do not, therefore, suffer in the same way that animals and humans do.<sup>227</sup>

Given these beliefs about the death process, it is not surprising that most Tibetans find the idea of killing animals to be incompatible with the compassionate orientation advocated by Tibetan Buddhism. Butchering is an almost universally reviled profession. As we have seen, however, this does not mean that most Tibetans were vegetarian. Using Tibetan Buddhism’s compassionate ideal to argue for vegetarianism requires making a connection between the consumption of meat and the killing of the animal in question. As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, many Tibetans seeking to explain their consumption of meat make a distinction between the killing of the animal and the eating of its meat. By the time they purchase the meat, they argue, the animal is already dead, so they have no responsibility for the animal’s death.

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<sup>225</sup> Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld*, 26.

<sup>226</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 121. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 80.

*lu gu 'phral du skyes pa de dbang po thams cad rdzogs/ bde sdug gi tshor ba dang ldan/ lus kyang nyams brtas/ gson pa'i dang po skyid par yod pa'i dus su 'phral du bsad pa yin/ rmongs pa dud 'gro yin yang 'chi ba la ni 'tsher/ gson pa la ni dga/ gnad gcod kyi sdug bsngal ni myong/*

<sup>227</sup> Some forms of Indian religion, do, in fact, hold this belief. The *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa* of roughly 600 BCE, for instance, mentions that vegetables ‘scream silently’ when cut. (Doniger, *The Hindus*, 148) Similarly, some early Buddhists believed that plants had a level of sentience and were able to suffer. (Schmithausen, “Plants as Sentient Beings,” 1991)



It should not be surprising that many pro-vegetarian authors reject this idea. Again, we can turn to Jigmé Lingpa for an illuminating example. As mentioned previously, Jigmé Lingpa's short *Tale of the Deer* presents a dialogue between a hunter and a hermit. The hermit accuses the hunter of being non-virtuous, but the hunter responds by accusing the hermit of hypocrisy, "Even if it is hunters like me who do the actual killing, the meat is bought and eaten by all of the so called 'religious ascetics.' It is laughable to claim there is a difference between the sin of killing and the sin of eating."<sup>228</sup> While the hermit wins the overall argument, he is forced to agree on this point, "It is true: the religious ascetics who behave immorally, and the monks who uphold the 250 vows of the monastic code will all be pursued by their karma."<sup>229</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the strength of his opposition to meat eating, Shabkar also rejects this idea in no uncertain terms, "If there are no meat-eaters, there will be no killers. This is just like India and Nepal, where there are no tea merchants because people do not drink tea."<sup>230</sup> For Shabkar, Jigmé Lingpa and others, it is obvious that while someone who buys meat in a market is not killing the animal with their own hand, they are responsible for the economic system that supports the activity of butchers.

<sup>228</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Tale of the Deer*, 759. Jigme Lingpa, *Story of the Hunted Deer*, 7.

<sup>229</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Tale of the Deer*, 759. Jigme Lingpa, *Story of the Hunted Deer*, 7.  
 gsod pa rñgon pa ngas gsod kyang/ za ba dge spyong rnams kyis za/ za dang gsod pa'i sdig pa la/ khyad par yod na  
 gad mo bro/ ... tshul min spyod pa'i dge sbyong dang/ 'dul khrims srung ba'i nyan thos kyi/ nyis brgya lnga bcu'i  
 khrims rtsal/ las kyis bda' ded 'phyugs ba med/

<sup>230</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 582. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 101.

At this time, India and Nepal had not yet begun growing or drinking tea.

sba za po med na gsod pa po mi 'byung ste/ dper na rgya gar bal po'i mis ja mi 'thung bas ja btsong mkhan med pa  
 bzbin no

Claiming it is acceptable to purchase meat from a hunter or a butcher is, in the words of Jigmé Lingpa's feisty hunter, "hypocritical."<sup>231</sup>

In seeking to bolster this argument, authors such as Dolpopa (1292-1361), Jigmé Lingpa, Shabkar, Nyakla Pema Dūdül (1816-1873), Patrül and many others also turn to the authority of canonical scripture, particularly the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, the Tibetan version of this canonical sūtra includes an entire chapter dedicated to the faults of eating meat. In particular, one oft-cited passage explicitly connects the killing of the animal and the eventual consumption of its meat, "If nobody ate meat, living beings would not be killed."<sup>232</sup> By citing this passage, these pro-vegetarian authors place meat eating squarely in the category of actions that harm beings, and which are, therefore, at odds with Tibetan Buddhism's compassionate ideal.

Having made clear that eating meat is directly responsible for the killing of animals, these authors claim that meat is incompatible with a compassionate orientation. Often, this claim is made using extremely vivid language, urging their readers to sympathize with animals awaiting slaughter. In one of his longer passages about meat, Jigmé Lingpa discusses an occasion when villagers offered meat to an assembly of lamas, reflecting that, "Having now become animals, our previous lives' fathers, mothers, siblings, friends, and so forth, all tremble with fear in these butchers' hands, panting for

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<sup>231</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Tale of the Deer*, 759. Jigme Lingpa, *Story of the Hunted Deer*, 7.

<sup>232</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 155b.

*gal te ji ltar yang su'ang sha mi za na ni de'i phyir srog chags rnams kyang gsod par mi 'gyur na/*

breath with tears streaming from their eyes. In that state they wonder what to do. Alas, there is no refuge!<sup>233</sup> Jigmé Lingpa had a keen sense of animals suffering and tried to communicate that sense to his readers.

Using similarly vivid language, the Bön exegete Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen (1356-1415) asks his disciples to reflect on the suffering that eating meat entails, “How pitiful it would be to take it in your hands! Just smelling it brings on nausea. Once it is tasted by the tongue, how can it be kept down?”<sup>234</sup> Turning such language away from the act of eating and towards the eater, Patrül’s *Words of My Perfect Teacher* evocatively describes a young, meat eating bride as a “red-faced monster.”<sup>235</sup>

*The Words of My Perfect Teacher* is well known for its evocative language and passages which excoriate various sinful behaviors. For Jigmé Lingpa, Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen and others, however, the language used to describe meat is distinctive and notably more vivid than that found in other parts of their work. This suggests that these authors are trying to provoke an emotional response on the part of their readers, hoping, presumably, that readers will identify with the suffering animals undergo for the sake of meat, and thereby reduce their consumption. Patrül makes this point explicit, “When you see animals suffering like this, imagine that you are that animal, and reflect on how

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<sup>233</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 125-126.

lag tu rang gi skye ba sngon ma’i pha dang/ ma dang/ spun zla gnyen bshes la sogs pa de dag mthar chags su rtsis  
sprod byas ba’i tshes/ ma rgan de dag lus ‘dar phri li li/ mig mchi ma kbam kbam/ dbugs spud pa lhed lhed pa’i  
ngang nas ‘di snyam du/ da ci drag kyi hud/ ‘bros sa ni med/

<sup>234</sup> mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Received Vinaya*, 49.

lag tu blang na ya re nga/ sna yis dri tshor skyug re bro/ lce yi ro las blangs nas su/ khong du bstim pas lugs ci yod/

<sup>235</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan ‘jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 157. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 103.

much suffering it is experiencing.”<sup>236</sup> The vivid language used in such critiques of meat eating, therefore, rests on an emotional identification with the suffering an animal undergoes as it is killed, combined with what the authors assume to be an internalized ethic foregrounding compassion.

The idea that animals are deserving of compassion is furthered by the idea that, at one time or another over the course of infinite lives, any being was once your mother. In most forms of Tibetan Buddhism, time is generally held to be beginningless.<sup>237</sup> Since time has no beginning, each being has, essentially, had an infinite number of lives. At one point or another during that time, any given being must have been related to you as a mother, father, friend, lover, and so forth. Given that every being you meet was once related to you as a parent, these texts suggest, they deserve the same consideration and respect that you would give your present mother.

We have already seen this idea in the above quote, where Jigmé Lingpa asks readers to remember that the animal trembling before them was once their loving parent.<sup>238</sup> Jigmé Lingpa, however, is not the only author sympathetic to vegetarianism who has invoked this idea. Almost every author who supports vegetarianism, in fact,

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*srin mo gdong dmar ma*

<sup>236</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 117. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 77.

*de ltar sdug bsngal ba'i sems can mthong tsa na de rang nyid yin pa'i blo bzhag nas sdug bsngal ci tsam 'dug la sogs pa zhib tu bsams nas/*

<sup>237</sup> A notable exception is found in texts related to Dzogchen, which provide a mythology in which time begins as a spontaneous eruption from the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra. (Kapstein, *Samantabhadra and Rudra*)

<sup>238</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 125-126.

makes this argument in one form or another. A further example can be found in Nyakla Pema Dūdül's *Advice on Abandoning Meat*:

In the seven worlds, vast as heaven, there has not been a single being  
who has not been my mother, without exception. All the mother's  
milk we've drunk would fill a billion oceans. Without hypocrisy, I take  
the three jewels as witness: In the future, may the thought of eating  
[meat] not even enter my mind.<sup>239</sup>

Again, by identifying meat with the suffering of what were once loving family members, these authors are asking their readers to engage with the dead animal on an emotional level. We should not assume too much about authorial intention, but it seems clear that these writers hope to provoke an emotional response in their readers, which, in turn, will lead to the decision to renounce meat.

In addition to such emotionally freighted arguments, however, the pro-vegetarian discourse also includes more intellectual strategies, such as questioning the compatibility of a meat-based diet with the Bodhisattva vow. This vow, which commits the individual to placing the needs of others before their own, is taken by almost everyone seriously engaged with Tibetan Buddhist practice. It formalizes the adoption of a Bodhisattva's compassion to the extent that taking this vow is often said to demarcate the boundary between those who adhere to the Hīnayāna path and those who practice the Mahāyāna.

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<sup>239</sup> nyag bla padma bdud 'dul, *Advice*, 164. Nyala Pema Duddul, "Song of Advice," 4.  
*mkha' mnyam 'jig rten bdun po ma lus pa/ bdag gi a mar ma gyur gcig kyang med/ nu 'o 'thung ba stong gsum*  
*mtsho dang nyam/ kha zhe med do mchog gsum dpang po bzbag/ ... /phyin chad za snang yid la shar tsam med/*

Given the connections we have seen pro-vegetarian authors establish between eating meat and the killing of animals, it is not surprising that these writers generally argue that meat is forbidden to those who have taken the Bodhisattva vow. To provide just one example among many, Jigmé Lingpa writes, “Rather than another system, where one pretends to be a follower of the Mahāyāna, but seeks only to eat meat and drink alcohol, those who follow after the Buddha’s great heart-teaching seek only to save the lives of beings.”<sup>240</sup>

Other writers are explicit that meat is permitted for those who have not taken the Bodhisattva vow, but is forbidden for those who have. Sakya Paṇḍita (1180-1251), for instance, asserts that, “Śrāvakas [Hīnayāna practitioners] may eat meat that has threefold purity. To refuse would be the conduct of Devadatta. In the Mahāyāna, meat is repudiated. Eating it is said to be the cause of birth in the lower realms.”<sup>241</sup> For Sakya Paṇḍita, as well as many others, meat is only forbidden once one has become a Mahāyāna practitioner through taking the Bodhisattva vow.

Once again, many authors support their contention that meat is incompatible with the Bodhisattva vow by citing the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Among the most commonly

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<sup>240</sup> jigs med gling pa, *Chariot of the Two Truths*, vol 1, 349.

*theg pa chen po'i gang zag tu khas 'ches nas sha chang gi bza' btung 'ba' zbig don du gnyer ba ni lugs gzhan pa zbig las bdag cag gi ston pa thugs sde chen po dang ldan pa de'i rjes su zhugs pa rnams kyis ni sems can gyi srog skyob pa 'ba' zbig dang du blang zhing*

<sup>241</sup> kun dga' rgyal btshan, *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, 34. Sakya Paṇḍita Kūnga Gyaltsen, *A Clear Differentiation*, 66.

*nyan thos rnam gsum dag pa'i sha/ bza' rung gal te mi za na/ lhas byin gyi ni brtul zhugs 'gyur/ theg pa che las sha rnams bkag/ zos na ngan 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs/*

cited passages from this canonical Sūtra are lines explaining that while Hīnayāna practitioners are allowed to eat meat, it is forbidden to those with Bodhisattva vows:

O Mahamati, you may believe that I have permitted [eating of meat], or that I have permitted it for those Śrāvakas who are near to me. But, I have condemned the eating of meat for those who live in charnel grounds and who perform the yoga of dwelling in love, those sons and daughters of my lineage who have correctly entered the Mahāyāna and who consider all beings to be their only child.<sup>242</sup>

Thus, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* proscribes meat for Mahāyāna practitioners, in explicit contrast to those who adhere to the Hīnayāna, whose consumption of meat is allowed, if only grudgingly. By citing this text, authors ground their argument that meat is incompatible with those who have taken the Bodhisattva vow in canonical scripture. Thus, in addition to the emotionally laden arguments discussed previously, many authors ground their critique of meat in legalistic arguments concerning the conduct that is permitted for holders of the Bodhisattva vow. Whatever an individual thinks of meat eating, this argument goes, it remains forbidden to all who have this vow.

If Tibetan Buddhism's espousal of the Bodhisattva's compassionate ideal is used to support pro-vegetarian arguments, Tibetan Buddhism's Tantric aspect offers significant complications. Drawing on Tantra's antinomian aspects, some Tibetans argue that Tantric practitioners are actually *required* to eat meat.

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<sup>242</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 156a-156b.

*blo gros chen po gal te ngas gnang bar bya bar 'dod dam/ nga'i nyan thos rnams kyis bsnyen par rung ba zbig yin na ni/ byams pas gnas pa'i rnal 'byor can dur khrod pa rnams dang/ theg pa chen po la yang dag par zbugs pa'i rigs kyi*

Tantric practice famously includes many practices considered impure or unethical by more conventional forms of Buddhism.<sup>243</sup> Among these practices is the ritual consumption of meat. Typically, this occurs during collective food offering rituals, where participants gather and ceremonially offer food to the Tantric deities. As part of the ritual, participants eat a portion of this food as a blessing. According to many ritual texts, such Tantric feasts *must* include both meat and alcohol. For many Tibetan lamas, participation in such rituals, including the consumption of meat, is mandatory for all who have received Tantric initiation. Lobsang Yeshé Tenpé Rabgyé (1759-1816), the second throne holder of the Gelukpa monastery of Reting and one of Shabkar's teachers, makes this point clearly, "If you see the meat and beer of the ritual feast as impure and unsuitable, and therefore fail to partake, ... it is a sin against the root and branch vows of secret mantra that must be openly confessed."<sup>244</sup>

Most Tibetans lamas agree that Tantric vows—incurred by all who take Tantric initiation—supersede the Bodhisattva vow. The theory behind this will be discussed in detail in the next chapter of this dissertation, but it is important here to note that for most theorists, when vows conflict, a practitioner should adhere to the requirements of their Tantric vows, rather than the Bodhisattva vows. Thus, lamas who are otherwise staunch vegetarians are willing to consume meat in the context of the ritual feast. Even

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*bu dang/ rigs kyi bu mo rnams la sems can thams cad bu gcig bzbin du 'du shes bsgom pa'i phyir sha thams cad za ba gcod par yang byas so/*

<sup>243</sup> For a good introduction to tantric principles in general, see: White, *Tantra in Practice*, 3-36.

<sup>244</sup> blo bzang ye shes bstan pa rab rgyas, *Explaining the Three Vows*, 162-163.

*tshogs kyi rdzas sha chang sogs la mi gtsang ba dang mi rung ba'i bsam dang du mi len pa dang/ ... rdo rje theg pa'i tsa ba dang yan lag gi nyes ba mtha' dag mthol lo bshags so//*



Shabkar, whose works are among the most rigorously pro-vegetarian to be found in Tibetan literature, followed this principle and ate meat when performing feast rituals.<sup>245</sup>

Jigmé Lingpa, whom we have elsewhere seen argue strongly in favor of vegetarianism, explains this requirement in his *Commentary on the 'Gathered Intention of the Lamas'*:

When performing many ritual feasts, look at base and dirty foods such as the five meats, five nectars, garlic, onions, and impure meats such as fish and pork and [regard them] all as feast substances. Because they are feast substances, dividing things into pure and impure, clean and unclean, all dualistic thinking, must be abandoned. Through regarding it all as non-dual, the nectars naturally become useable.<sup>246</sup>

For Jigmé Lingpa, substances that would otherwise be considered unclean, including meat, are revealed as primordially pure through the feast offering ritual. It is because of this purity that meat is an acceptable offering for the deities and an acceptable food for the practitioner. This attitude towards the use of meat in ritual is not universal—Jikten Sumgön (1143-1217) argued against the use of meat in such contexts—but it was widespread, and many otherwise vegetarian lamas allow, and even mandate the use of meat during such ritual feasts.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 380a. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 449.

<sup>246</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Commentary on 'Gathered Intent'*, 303-304.

*tshogs kyi yo byad ni sha lnga dang/ bdud rtsi lnga dang/ sha chang/ sgog btsong/ nya phag la sogs dman pa dang btsog par blta dgos pa thams cad tshogs pa yin phyir/ de'i dbang gi zhim mngar gtsang btsog thams cad la bzang ngan dang gtsang me'i gnyis rtogs med par/ thams cad mnyam pa nyid du rtogs nas bdud rtsi'i rang bzhin du longs sbyod dgos pa ste/*

<sup>247</sup> rdo rje mdzes 'od, *Great Kagyü Biographies*, 425. Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen, *Great Kagyü Masters*, 254.

Building on this requirement to consume meat in the context of the ritual feast, some Tibetans have argued that Tantric practitioners should also adhere to a meat-based diet outside of ritual contexts. Tantric commitments, this argument claims, require practitioners to adhere to conduct that transgresses Indian social mores, including the consumption of substances, such as meat, that are generally looked down upon. I have found little explicit evidence for this argument in textual sources, but it was mentioned repeatedly by informants in contemporary Kham, as well as Tibetans living in exile. Further, pro-vegetarian authors from several points in history take pains to rebut this idea, suggesting that it was used to support meat eating during earlier times as well.

In responding to this argument—that since meat is required in the ritual feast, Tantric practitioners should eat it at other times as well—many authors sympathetic to vegetarianism point out that the ritual feast requires five *specific* meats, rather than meat in general. These five are usually specified as being human, cow, dog, elephant and horse meat.<sup>248</sup> In his recent analysis of early Tantric practice in India, Christian Wedemeyer has argued that these five meats were specifically chosen because they violated Indian dietary taboos. They were usually eaten only in specific ritual contexts, as a means of ritually rejecting conventional Indian social and religious norms.<sup>249</sup> Eating the five meats,

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<sup>248</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 322. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 207.

<sup>249</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 119.

therefore, was not about moral laxity but was a means of ritually demonstrating that one had transcended social norms.<sup>250</sup>

Wedemeyer's understanding of the role the five meats played in Indian Tantra echoes the presentation of many Tibetan scholars. Lochen Dharmasri (1654-1717), for instance, remarks that those practicing Tantra should, "Eat suitable Tantric substances for the sake of pride in the [Tantric] family, ego, and breaking down the discrimination between clean and unclean. That is, [eat] meats that have died naturally, such as the five approved meats, which are not slaughtered for the sake of their meat in civilized places."<sup>251</sup> The five meats, he points out, are used precisely because they are not eaten under normal circumstances. Eating these unclean meats, therefore, was a particularly powerful way of violating social taboos and demonstrating the primordial purity of the substances. Further, since no one slaughters humans, horses, dogs, and so forth, for their meat, these substances must come from animals that have died naturally, and are, therefore, unstained by killing.

Further, while many Tibetan authors who otherwise support vegetarianism admit that it is acceptable to consume the five meats during the ritual feast, they do not concede that practitioners may consume meat in other contexts. Patrül makes this point nicely, "Eating [the five meats] wantonly in towns, because you are attached to the taste of meat,

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<sup>250</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 122.

<sup>251</sup> lo chen dharma sri, *Wish Granting Grain*, 277b.

*rigs kyis dregs shing nga rgyal dang gtsang dme'i rtog pa gzbig pa'i slad du yul dbus su bza' ba'i don du gsod par mi byed pa'i sha lnga gnang ba ltar rang gi las kyis shi ba'i sha rnams dam tshig gi rdzas su rung bas bza' bar bya zhing'*

is the fault known as ‘behaving carelessly with the Tantric vow of consumption’”<sup>252</sup>

Bringing this back to the importance of compassion, Dolpopa insists that when not in the specific context of the ritual feast, Mahāyāna ethical precepts still apply to Tantric practitioners, who should, therefore, avoid meat.<sup>253</sup> Thus, while the higher Tantric vows supersede the Bodhisattva vows in cases of conflict, the lower vows remain in effect when there is no conflict. For Patrül, Dolpopa and other lamas sympathetic to vegetarianism, it is clear that while the Tantric vows do require the consumption of meat in the context of the ritual feast, this does not give Tantric practitioners license to eat meat whenever they please.

As should be clear by this point, Tibetan arguments against meat are firmly rooted in the rhetoric of compassion. For some religious individuals, Tibetan Buddhism’s compassionate ideal conflicts with the harm and suffering caused by eating meat, and so they turn towards vegetarianism in an attempt to lessen the suffering of animals. While this argument, that vegetarianism should be adopted out of concern for animal suffering, is the foundation of Tibetan arguments against meat, however, it is not the only one. Using a related, but distinct, argument, many of these same authors argue that eating meat produces terrible karmic consequences for the consumer, and should,

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<sup>252</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 323. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 208.

*sha'i ro la sred pas grong yul du bag med du zos na/ dang /blang gi dam tshig bag med du spyad pa zhes bya ste/ de yang 'gal/*

<sup>253</sup> dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Prohibition*, 665. Mochizuki, “Scriptures,” 41.

therefore, be abandoned out of self interest as well as out of concern for the animals in question.

Just as almost all Tibetans recognize that killing an animal causes it to suffer, almost all agree that killing an animal produces horrible karmic consequences for the killer. As discussed above, killing (whether human or animal) causes that being to suffer. This, in turn, produces negative karma for the killer, likely resulting in a birth in one of the hells. Tibetan religious literature often describes the various hells in excruciating detail, including a hell especially reserved for those who kill animals. Citing the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna Sūtra*,<sup>254</sup> Kangyur Rinpoché (1898-1975) explains, “In the Crushing Hell beings are smashed between stone mountains shaped like the heads of beings they have previously killed.”<sup>255</sup> Thus, the karmic fruition of animal slaughter ripens, rather poetically, for the killer.

As with discussions of animal suffering, however, turning this general understanding that killing produces negative karma into a critique of meat eating requires authors to connect the meat that is eaten with the killing itself. Not surprisingly, this is an important part of many pro-vegetarian authors’ agendas. Perhaps the most explicit example of this discussion comes from Patrül Rinpoché’s *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*:

Some of us think that we are free of the sin of killing, merely because  
we have not killed with our own hands. ... But when lamas and

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<sup>254</sup> Eng: *Sūtra of Close Mindfulness*

Tib: *'phags pa dam pa'i chos dran pa nye bar bzbag pa'i mdo*

<sup>255</sup> klong chen ye shes rdo rje, *Quintessence*, 47. Jigmé Lingpa & Longchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche, *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, 162.

*bsdus 'joms ni/ da lta bsad pa'i srog chags kyi mgo brnyan du yod pa'i brag ri phan tshun 'thab pa'i bar bcar ba*

monks visit their patrons' homes, they are served the flesh and blood of many slaughtered beings. Because of their craving for flesh and blood, they eat it without the slightest compassion or regret for the killing of these beings. The sin of killing accrues to both the patron and recipient without distinction.<sup>256</sup>

For Patrül, there is no distinction between the karmic result of killing and the karmic result of eating the meat that results from that killing. Likewise, almost all of the authors I have found who criticize meat at any length take pains to establish this connection. Even some texts that do not specifically forbid meat continue to assume that eating meat has negative karmic consequences for both the butcher and the consumer. Karmé Khenpo's *Prayer to Purify Meat*, for instance, offers readers a means to reduce the negative karmic consequences of meat eating. In it, he prays, "May the butcher who killed them not receive [the karmic punishment of] death himself, and may the fruition not arise for those who ate it."<sup>257</sup> While not specifically forbidding meat, this text assumes that eating it generates negative karma and equates the karma generated by the killer with that generated by the eater.

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<sup>256</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 155. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 102.

da lta rang re rnams nas dngos su rang gis lag bdar te srog ma bcad pa tsam la bsams nas nga la srog gcod kyi sdig pa ni med snyams pa 'dug kyang/ ... bla ma dang ser mo ba rnams ni yon bdag gi khyim du byon skabs/ de dag gis sems can gyi srog bcad nas sha khrag gyos su byas te drang pa'i tshé/ sems can bsad pa la 'gyod pa dang snying rje sogs gang yang med par sha khrag gi ro la sred pas dga' bzhin du gsol tsa na/ srog gcod kyi sdig pa yon mchod gnyis la khyad par med par 'thob/

<sup>257</sup> Anonymous, *Prayer to Purify*, 6.

gsod pa'i shan pa srog len med pa dang/ don gnyer byed po rnam smin mi 'byung shog/

As with the discussion surrounding animal suffering, connecting eating meat and killing the animal is one of the key rhetorical moves made in support of vegetarianism. By establishing this connection, meat becomes the equivalent of killing, universally understood to produce negative karma. Thus, Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen can conclude, “By definition, this thing called ‘meat’ comes from the killing of animals. The merciless descend to hell, so with great regret, abandon eating [meat]!”<sup>258</sup>

If eating meat creates negative karma because it causes the death of animals, the reverse also holds: saving animals from slaughter is a powerful method for developing positive karma. *Tsetar*, the practice of ransoming beings discussed above, is a prime example of this. Specifically, tsetar rituals are often said to be performed with the intention of extending an individual’s life, an idea reflected in the title of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo’s (1820-1892) tsetar manual, *Increasing Life and Prosperity*.<sup>259</sup> While the karmic benefits of tsetar are usually believed to ripen for the ritual’s sponsor, they can also be directed towards others, as when thousands of Tibetans recently incorporated tsetar into a ritual enthronement ceremony for the Dalai Lama. As part of this event, held in Litang, Kham, in July 2011, organizers purchased large numbers of animals from slaughterhouses and set them free, with the explicit hope that this would help lengthen the life of the then seventy-six year old exile leader.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Received Vinaya*, 49.

*sha zhes bya ba’i mtshan nyid ni/ sems can srog gcod rgyu las byung/ snying rje med pas dmyal bar ltung/ shin tu ya nga mi bza’ spang*

<sup>259</sup> Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo. *Increasing Life and Prosperity*.

*srog bslu bya tshul tshe dpal rgyas byed ces bya ba bzugs so*

<sup>260</sup> Sherab Woeser, “Thousands Enthroned the Dalai Lama’s portrait in Tibet.”

The fear of negative karma can be a powerful motivation for vegetarianism, and most of the authors who have written extensively about meat mention its negative karmic repercussions. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that this argument usually takes a back seat in Tibetan discussions to issues of the suffering eating meat causes animals. Dolopoa's *Prohibition of Meat and Alcohol*, for instance, mentions the karmic consequences of eating meat only once in the nine folios of material dedicated to meat.<sup>261</sup> Similarly, while Jigmé Lingpa and Shabkar discuss the karmic consequences of meat with some frequency, they emphasize it much less than the animal suffering that eating meat entails. For most authors who support vegetarianism, the fundamental concern is the suffering of the animals involved, rather than the karmic consequences for the consumer.

A final argument in support of vegetarianism—or at least animal compassion—claims that directing one's compassion towards animals has direct soteriological value. By empathizing strongly with the suffering that animals undergo while being slaughtered, a practitioner can attain exalted religious states. Once again, Jigmé Lingpa provides the preeminent example of this phenomenon. In one of the opening passages in his *Autobiography*, he recalls seeing a group of lambs lined up awaiting slaughter:

In particular, seeing and hearing the killing of these beings, which reminded me of the actions of great dogs, also caused me great suffering. I wanted to immediately liberate these beings from their suffering and wished that I had a safe house to protect them. Horrific

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<sup>261</sup> dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Prohibition*, 328b. Mochizuki, "Scriptures," 37.



activities such as these occurred here, merely because it was the season for slaughtering animals. Thinking like this, uncontrived compassion arose. Until that day, even though I had recited the words of the mind-training of the four immeasurables hundreds of thousands of times, I had never had true, uncontrived compassion of that strength. This experience was the most important event of my life.<sup>262</sup>

This event achieves this level of importance for Jigmé Lingpa precisely because compassion is emphasized so strongly in Tibetan Buddhism. The uncontrived compassion Jigmé Lingpa experiences here is an extremely important event on his religious journey. Indeed, according to his own reckoning, it was the most important event of his life. Further, Jigmé Lingpa explicitly contrasts the strength of this experience, sparked by his compassionate response to animals awaiting slaughter, with the compassion he developed through more conventional practices.

Jigmé Lingpa also codified this idea, that compassion towards animals can spark religious experiences, in his advice manuals. In one work Jigmé Lingpa advises students to think that the animal whose meat they are about to eat was once their kind parent and should be treated with kindness in return. At that time, he concludes, “If you are a normal minded person and you think about this, then your heart will break, and you will

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<sup>262</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 14.

*khyad par sems can gyi srog gcod pa mthong zhing thos pa’am/ khyi rab sogs kyi byed spo yod yid la dran pa tsam nas rang yang shin ti sdug bsngal zhing/ sems can 'di dag sdug bsngal 'di las da lta nyid du thar na snyam pa dang/ 'di thams cad kyi srog bskyab pa'i gnyer khang la yod na snyam pa dang/ sems can gsod pa'i nam zla shar ba tsam nas rnams pa kun tu gnas skabs 'di na mi bzad pa'i las 'di lta bu zhig yod 'ong snyam nas snying rje'i blo bcos min du skye ba 'di da lta'i bar du yod pas tshad med bzhi'i blo sbyong gi tshig tsam 'bum ther gsog pa bo las bcos min gyi snying rje shugs drag skye ba 'di don gyi chod che bar 'gyur grang snyams pa 'di bdag gi rnam thar bzang shos yin/*

necessarily develop compassion towards the animal. Then, even if you can't develop perfect compassion, something similar will definitely arise<sup>263</sup>"

There is also evidence that Jigmé Lingpa had a reputation for this technique among later Tibetans. To recall a passage seen in the previous chapter, Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang writes:

When meditating on compassion, the system of Apu [Patrül Rinpoché] and Jowo [Atisá] is to meditate on one's present mother. According to the intention of Rigdzin Jigmé Lingpa, when you observe a being which is about to be killed, such as a sheep awaiting slaughter, or when you observe someone with a painful illness, imagine that they are either yourself or your old mother. Whichever method you want to use is fine.<sup>264</sup>

This passage comes from a commentary on Patrül's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, which is itself a commentary on Jigmé Lingpa's *Longchen Nyingthik* cycle of teachings. It is, therefore, not surprising to find Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang citing Jigmé Lingpa. Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, however, goes beyond invoking Jigmé Lingpa's example to explicitly contrast his approach to cultivating compassion with that of other revered lamas. As we have seen, both Atisá (980-1054) and Patrül Rinpoché were

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<sup>263</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Engaging the Path*, 723. Jigme Lingpa, "Entering the Path of Enlightenment," 133. *snyam du bsam mno zbig btang na blog zur gnas shig yin phyin chad snying rtsi shum shum ba dad sems can de la snying rje dbang med du mi skye ba'i thabs med/ de'i tshe byang chub kyi sems mtshan nyid dang ldan pa ma byung kyang rjes mthun zbig nges par skye ba*

<sup>264</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 214. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 148. *snying rje bsgom pa la a bu dang jo bo'i lugs la/ rang gi rtsa ba'i ma nas bsgom/ rig 'dzin 'jigs med gling gi dgongs pa ltar na/ bsba' lug la sogs pa sems can gsod du nye ba'am nad pa dang sdug bsngal can zbig la dmigs nas rang ngam rang gi ma rgan gyi 'du shes bzbag nas bsgom pa yin/ gang ltar bsgom kyang chog la/*

concerned with the well-being of animals, and yet Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang singles out Jigmé Lingpa as a proponent of developing compassion by contemplating animals awaiting slaughter. By the early twentieth century, it seems, Jigmé Lingpa had a reputation for using compassion for animals as a soteriological tool.

Nor was Jigmé Lingpa alone in his use of animal compassion to produce advanced religious states. A further example can be found in the writings of Nyakla Pema Dūdül, who takes Jigmé Lingpa's general idea and explicitly applies it to vegetarianism, arguing, "If you renounce [meat], ... then the causes of kindness and compassion will arise spontaneously."<sup>265</sup> In at least one case, a Tibetan lama has explicitly argued that vegetarianism produces heightened mental states.

Up to now, I have discussed the arguments made against meat without too much consideration of the time or place where they were made. Indeed, these arguments show a remarkable degree of consistency across Tibetan history, with fourteenth and fifteenth century figures such as Dolpopa and Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (1382-1444) raising many of the same points raised in the nineteenth century by Shabkar and Patrül, and then again in the late twentieth and early twenty first century by Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö and others. Throughout, the fundamental emphasis is on the suffering experience by animals as a result of eating meat. Whether the argument is made explicitly or implicitly, these authors all assert that causing such suffering by eating meat contradicts the compassionate orientation demanded by Tibetan Buddhism. Further, many of these

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<sup>265</sup> nyag bla padma bdud 'dul, *Advice*, 162. Nyala Pema Duddul, "Song of Advice," 2. *spangs na ... shugs 'byung byams dang snying rje'i rgyu byed cing/*

authors note, if only in passing, that because meat causes suffering for animals, it also causes suffering—in the form of negative karma—for the eater. Finally, many of these authors cite the same passages in the same scriptures, especially the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*.

With that said, there are some differences between earlier and later arguments that are worth noting. Both Dolpopa, writing in fourteenth century Central Tibet, and Ngorchon Künga Zangpo, writing in the same region a century later, structure their anti-meat polemics around the three vows that Tibetan monks undertake. Their arguments, therefore, tend to focus on the question of whether meat is compatible with the Bodhisattva vow and the degree to which Tantric vows affect those responsibilities.

In contrast, authors such as Jigmé Lingpa, writing in Central Tibet in the late eighteenth century, Shabkar, writing in Amdo fifty years later, and Patrül, writing in Kham another generation later, tend to focus their arguments on evocative descriptions of animal suffering. These authors agree that eating meat contradicts the Bodhisattva vow, but their arguments are clearly focused on emotionally engaging with their readers. Instead of appealing to their audience's sense of obligation to uphold their vows, they ask them to reject meat out of empathy with the animals involved.

Further, as noted in the previous chapter, the context in which vegetarianism was adopted varied significantly across time. Prior to the fifteenth century, for instance, vegetarianism was primarily practiced by monastics, with non-celibate practitioners explicitly excused. In nineteenth century Kham, however, this distinction had largely

(though not entirely) collapsed, with both monks and non-celibate practitioners adopting vegetarianism.

Fundamentally, however, these distinctions are questions of degree, rather than kind. Authors from different times or different places may have structured their works differently, but they are all drawing upon the same basic argument: meat causes animals to suffer, and individuals who strive to practice compassion should, therefore, refrain from eating it.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that the degree to which Tibetan authors emphasize the suffering entailed by eating meat contrasts with the way vegetarianism has been promoted in Chinese Buddhism. As mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, China is the only region of the world where vegetarianism became normative among Buddhists. In their studies of Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism, both Barend ter Haar and John Kieschnick claim that from at least the sixth century on, the diet was primarily motivated by fear of the negative karma accrued by eating meat.<sup>266</sup> Describing a sample of conversion narratives, ter Haar notes, “Our sample contains fifteen stories. They tell of individuals who suddenly realize the karmic burden that is caused by selling and/or eating meat or fish, upon which they are converted to a vegetarian lifestyle.”<sup>267</sup> In a footnote, ter Haar notes only a single exception to this rule, reinforcing the impression that much of Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism was driven by concerns about karma and future lives.

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<sup>266</sup> ter Haarh, “Buddhist Inspired Options,” 134. Kieschnick, “Buddhist Vegetarianism in China,” 201.

This emphasis on the karmic consequences of meat eating contrasts strongly with the Tibetan rhetoric surrounding vegetarianism, which we have seen emphasize the suffering of the animal over concerns with the killer's karma. This difference suggests that those Tibetans who did adopt vegetarianism were not responding to Chinese influence. There were extensive contacts and trade between China and Tibet, at least since the Yuan Dynasty, seemingly offering the possibility of such influence.<sup>268</sup> Further, during the early twentieth century, when Tibetan Buddhism experienced a surge of popularity in China, the meat eating habits of several Tibetan lamas (notably the ninth Panchen lama) were the subject of sustained criticism from leading Chinese Buddhist figures. In 1925, for instance, the reformist monk Taixu (1890-1947),<sup>269</sup> who was otherwise deeply interested in Tibetan Buddhist practice, criticized Tibetan lamas for their moral laxity:

When Tibetan and Mongolian lamas come to China and transmit esoteric [teachings] they look and dress like laymen and publicly drink alcohol and eat meat. In our country, we always think highly of the rules for the sangha. [These lamas] discard them like trash!<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> ter Haarh, "Buddhist Inspired Options," 134.

<sup>268</sup> Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhism in the Making of Modern China*, 17.

<sup>269</sup> Ch: 太虛

<sup>270</sup> Luo Tongbing, "The Reformist Monk Taixu," 442.

I have been unable to locate this original text, so have relied on the quotation found in Luo Tongbing's article. The translation is my own.

如藏蒙喇嘛之來華傳密也，形服間俗，酒肉公開，於我國素視為僧寶之行儀，棄若弁髦！

It is unclear if Chinese Buddhist leaders criticized Tibetan monks on these grounds prior to the twentieth century, but this would seem reasonable, given the difference between the normative vegetarianism found in Chinese Buddhist practice and the meat eating that was normative among Tibetan lamas. Further, at least some Tibetans were aware of the importance of vegetarianism in Chinese Buddhism. Tuken Chökyi Nyima (1737-1802), for instance, notes in his *Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems*, one of the most extensive doxographical works to be found in Tibetan literature, that Chinese monks, “Do not eat meat and do not ride on animals.”<sup>271</sup> Tuken lived in Amdo, not far from regions populated by the Chinese, and whether or not he had first hand knowledge of Chinese vegetarianism, it is clear that he understood Chinese Buddhists to be vegetarian. Finally, it is worth noting that many of the nineteenth century vegetarian lamas discussed in this dissertation lived in Kham, a region which hosted a significant Chinese military presence beginning in the late nineteenth century, at roughly the same time that vegetarianism was flourishing.

Assuming that Tuken was not alone in his knowledge of Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism and given the proximity of so many vegetarian lamas with Chinese regions, it seems reasonable to expect Chinese Buddhist vegetarianism to influence the adoption of the diet among Tibetans. The difference between the arguments advanced by Chinese and Tibetan advocates of vegetarianism, however, suggests that any such influence was

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<sup>271</sup> *thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma*, *Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems*, 472. Thukun Chokyi Nyima, *Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems*, 357.  
*sha mi za zhing/ bzbon pa mi zhonpa dang/*

not strong. As we have just seen, the arguments made by Tibetans in support of vegetarianism are remarkably consistent across time. Patrül, writing in nineteenth century Kham, echoes the concerns advanced by Dolpopa, writing in fourteenth century Central Tibet. Thus, while it is certainly possible that some individuals may have responded to a Chinese critique of Tibetan meat eating by becoming vegetarian, the arguments put forward to advocate vegetarianism on a large scale betray little, if any, such influence.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, many religious Tibetans have felt that eating meat was at least problematic, and possibly even forbidden. At the heart of this critique lies Tibetan Buddhism's idealization of compassion, directed not just to other humans but towards all beings. Other arguments, such as the negative karma accrued by eating meat and the soteriological benefits of a vegetarian diet were advanced, but ultimately these arguments all come back to a fundamental conflict between the compassionate orientation demanded by Tibetan Buddhism and the animal suffering caused by consuming meat. Given the centrality of compassion in Tibetan religiosity, it is not difficult to see why so many religious leaders decided to renounce meat and to encourage their disciples to do the same. In fact, the contradiction between meat and compassion is mentioned so frequently that perhaps the pertinent question is not 'why did some



Tibetans adopt vegetarianism,' but 'why did so many Tibetans continue to eat meat.' The following chapter is an attempt to address this very question.

## Chapter 3

### A Necessary Evil

The first chapter of this dissertation outlined a history of vegetarianism in Tibet, making clear that such a diet was well known and at least occasionally practiced. Following this, the second chapter presented the arguments used to support vegetarianism, noting that in the eyes of those opposed to it, meat eating was incompatible with the compassionate focus expected of a Buddhist. As we have seen, the contradiction between meat eating and compassion was widely acknowledged. Even some of those who did eat meat acknowledged vegetarianism's moral superiority. This chapter asks why, given these arguments and the long history of vegetarianism in Tibet, more Tibetans *did not* adopt vegetarianism.

One of the difficulties of this question is the lack of source material. While many Tibetans have argued against meat, few seem to have felt the need to argue for it. To date, in fact, I have not come across a single text that argues in favor of meat eating in any detail and was composed prior to the last three decades.<sup>272</sup> In trying to reconstruct the reasons why an individual would eat meat, therefore, I am left with two somewhat

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<sup>272</sup> As noted in the introduction, footnote 19, several such texts have been written in the last few decades. Given the changed context these texts emerged from, I have not included them here.

problematic collections of sources: interviews with contemporary Tibetans and literary works written in support of vegetarianism. The former allow meat eating Tibetans to articulate reasons for their diet, but also reflect a specific time and place (the present) that cannot be used to represent past opinions without considerable additional evidence. Such evidence can sometimes be found in the arguments critiqued by pro-vegetarian authors, but there is always the danger that such texts may not be representing their opponents fairly.

Still, when these sources are considered together, some patterns do emerge. Broadly speaking, most Tibetans like the taste of meat and find it difficult to give up, particularly as it is not consistently forbidden in canonical sources such as the *Vinaya*. Others argue that meat is necessary as part of tantric Buddhist practice, connected with both antinomian behavior and questions of pure view. Most fundamentally, however, meat is consistently seen as necessary, if ethically problematic. Such a vision, I argue, rests on cultural ideals associating meat with physical strength and other masculine virtues. The interaction of these ideals with the Buddhist ethical discourses discussed in the previous chapter leads to a situation where meat was widely regarded as sinful, but also a necessary part of human life.

## A Permitted Food

In interviews with contemporary Tibetans, the most common reason given for eating meat is its taste. Informants who ate meat routinely said that even though they

recognized the ethical superiority of vegetarianism, they would have a hard time giving up such a delicious part of their diet. For their part, informants who were vegetarian often said that they missed the taste of meat, sometimes so much that they struggled with maintaining their vegetarianism. To provide just one example of many, a Bön lama interviewed in a restaurant in Dartsedo claimed that he missed the taste of meat so much he would probably eat it again after his three-year vegetarian vow expired.

Textual sources also highlight the importance of meat's taste in dampening the growth of vegetarianism. While I have not uncovered any sources that say that eating meat is permissible because it tastes good, anti-meat texts routinely criticize those who twist Buddhist ethical precepts out of "lust for the taste of meat."<sup>273</sup> One early Bön text claims that, if properly considered, meat *should* be nauseating, but the text makes clear that in practice, this is not so.<sup>274</sup> Meat tastes good, and this has made generations of Tibetans reluctant to give it up.

At the same time, however, meat's taste clearly cannot account for the persistence of meat in the Tibetan diet. Tibetan Buddhism, after all, restricts many things widely considered enjoyable. Most obviously, Buddhist monks and nuns take vows of celibacy. This vow is broken in various ways with some frequency,<sup>275</sup> but it remains normative for

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<sup>273</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 323. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 208.  
*sha'i ro la sred pas*

<sup>274</sup> mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Received Vinaya*, 49.

<sup>275</sup> For a prominent example, see: Goldstein, et al. *The Struggle for Modern Tibet*.

monks and nuns to forswear sex. It is clear, therefore, that Buddhist ethical norms can, and do, cause widespread rejection of practices that are widely considered pleasant.

While Buddhist teachings regarding monastic celibacy are clear, however, the prohibition of meat is less so. As mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation, the rules for monks explicitly *permit* meat, as long as it meets the requirement of threefold purity. There is debate about what types of meat fulfill this requirement, as well as whether this rule is superseded by the demands of compassion. Fundamentally, however, these permissions are accepted in one form or another by most Tibetan commentators. There is, therefore, no blanket prohibition of meat as there is for monastic sex.

Basing their conclusions on discussions with Tibetan lamas living in India during the late nineteen seventies, Tsepak Rigzin and Francesca Hampton cite the rule of threefold purity as the “most fundamental” rule governing the consumption of meat.<sup>276</sup> This position is supported by my own interviews with contemporary Tibetan monks, where the rule of threefold purity was frequently held up as proof that meat eating was at least acceptable, if not necessarily virtuous. These interviews also made clear that for many Tibetans, meat purchased from a butcher was understood to fulfill the standards of threefold purity, as it was killed for sale, but not *specifically* for the person who eventually bought it.

Further, as will be discussed in the next chapter, several important pro-vegetarian authors from throughout Tibetan history critique the application of the rule of threefold

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<sup>276</sup> Rigzin & Hampton, “Buddhism and Meat Eating,” 8.

purity in the Tibetan context, indicating that this rule was widely invoked as justification for monks eating meat at during those periods as well. Thus, despite a paucity of sources explicitly endorsing meat eating among monks, it is clear that the idea of threefold purity was one of the main arguments used to support the consumption of meat among monastics, both in the pre-modern and contemporary periods.

The lack of a blanket prohibition of meat has clearly had an impact on the adoption—or lack thereof—of vegetarianism. Holmes Welch recalls speaking with a Chinese monk that had spent thirteen years in Lhasa during the nineteen thirties and forties. This monk had asked his Tibetan counterparts why they were not vegetarian and received the simple answer that vegetarianism was not mandated by the Buddha.<sup>277</sup> Similarly, Dungkar Losang Tīnlé (1927-1997) argues that, “In the Buddha's teachings, it is not that one absolutely has to eat meat or that one definitively must not eat it.”<sup>278</sup> Dungkar Losang Tīnlé is aware that vegetarianism is a controversial topic, but since it is not prohibited, he places it in a category of practices that are ambiguous, neither completely permitted or rejected. It is worth noting that this position does not suggest that vegetarianism is wrong, or even that meat eating is a good practice, saying simply that it is not prohibited.

While meat may not be universally prohibited in Buddhist texts, killing animals is. In order to be allowed, therefore, the act of eating meat must be separated from the

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<sup>277</sup> Welch, *Buddhist Revival in China*, 176-177.

<sup>278</sup> dung dkar blo bzang ‘phrin las, *Dungkar Doxography*, 41.  
*sangs rgyas chos lugs nang la sha nges par za dgos pa zbig min la sha gtan nas za mi chog pa yang min/*

act of killing the animal. Such a separation is, in fact, widely asserted by those defending meat eating. In this logic, it is the butcher who is responsible for the death of the animal. By the time the meat is purchased later, it is already dead, so the purchaser is freed of any direct involvement in the animal's death.

Again, the rule of threefold purity serves as a basis for such arguments. In Buddhist ethical theory, several requirements must be met in order for an action to be considered complete. The person performing the action must understand the situation correctly, and he or she must intend to commit the action.<sup>279</sup> Thus, while intentionally killing an insect is considered sinful, accidentally stepping on one is not. As Chandra Prasad has noted, the rule of threefold purity serves to distance monks from the intentional killing of the animal.<sup>280</sup> Since they do not, in theory, even suspect that the meat was killed for them, they are able to legitimately claim that the animal's death is not due to their own intention. Thus, the individual is not ethically—or karmically—culpable for the death of the animal.

In practice, this means that many Tibetans actively avoid killing, even while happily eating the meat. During the course of eighteen months of fieldwork among nomads living west of Lhasa, Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall have noted that few of the nomads slaughtered their animals themselves, preferring to hire others for this task. In one case, Goldstein and Beall waited for three days for a butcher to arrive and slaughter a sheep they had bought, as its previous owner refused, citing Buddhist ethical

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<sup>279</sup> Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 14-21.

norms, to do it himself.<sup>281</sup> Once the animals was dead, however, the nomads were free to participate in the butchering of the carcass and consumption of the meat without fault.<sup>282</sup> Such observations align closely with my own fieldwork among both nomadic and settled Tibetans in Kham, where many informants insisted that they would never kill an animal and that this stance was not in conflict with their consumption of meat.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a long history of authors who support vegetarianism critiquing this position. As early as the third century, in fact, the authors of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* pointed out that without the demand for meat provided by consumers, butchers would not kill many animals.<sup>283</sup> This point is echoed—often literally, in the form of extended quotations—in the works of almost all Tibetan authors sympathetic to vegetarianism. As these repeated attacks make clear, the perceived separation between eating meat and killing animals has been one of the most important logical moves legitimizing meat eating throughout Tibetan history.

In addition to simply noting these permissions, some Tibetans argued that vegetarianism was excessively austere, violating the Buddha's middle path between sensory indulgence and excessive religious austerities. A canonical source for this idea can be found in *The Foundations of the Vinaya*, where the Buddha's cousin Devadatta seeks to steal away the Buddha's followers by practicing five additional austerities, beyond what

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<sup>280</sup> Prasad, "Meat-Eating and the Rule of Tikoṭiparisuddha," 293.

<sup>281</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 99.

<sup>282</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 99.

<sup>283</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 155b.



the Buddha has already enjoined on his disciples. Vegetarianism was one of these five practices.<sup>284</sup>

This story and the idea that vegetarianism was excessively austere was known to Tibetans interested in defending meat eating among monks. In a passage cited previously, for instance, Sakya Paṇḍita (1180-1251) claims that, “Śrāvakas may eat meat that has threefold purity. To refuse would be the conduct of Devadatta.”<sup>285</sup> Sakya Paṇḍita eventually condemns meat consumption. Nevertheless, the fact that he mention this argument indicates that the idea that vegetarianism was one of Devadatta’s austerities was known during the thirteenth century.

Unlike sex and other pleasant but ethically dubious practices, eating meat was explicitly permitted by the Buddha, at least in certain contexts. These permissions, combined with the sense that the act of eating meat and the act of killing the animal are distinct, have directly contributed to the prevailing opinion that vegetarianism is admirable, but far from necessary.

At the same time, as has been extensively discussed in previous chapters, there has been a consistent discourse critical of meat eating. For many of these critics, the rule of threefold purity is superseded by the call to have compassion for all beings. This argument will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, but for now it is sufficient to recognize that the rule of threefold purity has not been enough to convince all Tibetan

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<sup>284</sup> Shakyamuni, *Foundations of the Vinaya*, vol 4, 289a-289b.

<sup>285</sup> kun dga' rgyal btshan, *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, 34. Sakya Paṇḍita Kūnga Gyaltsen, *A Clear Differentiation*, 66.  
 nyan thos rnam gsum dag pa'i sha/ bza' rung gal te mi za na/ lbas byin gyi ni brtul zbugs 'gyur/

religious leaders that meat is a legitimate food. While the rule of threefold purity has undoubtedly contributed to the general sense that meat is acceptable, in and of itself it cannot account for the persistence of meat in the Tibetan diet.

## **A Tantric Sacrament**

In addition to arguing that meat is permissible, some also contend that eating meat is actually a necessary aspect of Tantric Buddhist practice. As discussed in the previous chapter, Tantric Buddhism idealizes antinomian behavior, including intentionally violating sexual taboos, eating substances generally considered filthy and dressing like a madman. The most flagrant of these violations do not seem to have been actually implemented all that often, however.<sup>286</sup> Instead, these violations of social norms were incorporated into Tibetan ritual life, so that such transgressions, while technically present, were not flagrant. As part of this project, the flesh of humans, cows, dogs, elephants and horses were included among the necessary offering objects in ritual feast offerings. As discussed previously, some individuals have taken the presence of the five meats in the ritual feast to mean that Tantric practice allows, and may even require, the consumption of meat more broadly.

Not surprisingly, while most pro-vegetarian authors accept the presence of the five meats in the ritual feast, few accept the idea that this justifies broader consumption of meat. To repeat Patrül's (1808-1887) criticism presented earlier, "Eating [the five meats]

wantonly in towns, because you are attached to the taste of meat, is the fault known as ‘behaving carelessly with the Tantric vow of consumption’<sup>287</sup> Once again, while I have found little direct literary evidence for this claim, the presence of this critique suggests that some people did, in fact, use the five meats as justification for broader consumption of meat.

In addition to this specific use of meat in ritual feasts, some meat apologists insist that because of tantra’s emphasis on pure perception, tantric practitioners should eat meat freely. In many forms of Tantra, practitioners are called upon to see all phenomena as equally pure, a view sometimes referred to evocatively as *one taste*.<sup>288</sup> Ideally, someone practicing such a view would see any two foodstuffs as fundamentally identical, and would, therefore, not discriminate among them, claiming one to be pure, and another impure. Since a tantric practitioner, according to this argument, is bound to view all phenomena as equally pure, they should not discriminate in what they eat.

Not surprisingly, this position is repeatedly critiqued by authors sympathetic to vegetarianism. A recent example can be found in the writing of the present Dalai Lama, who notes that this position is theoretically true, and may even be practically true for practitioners at the highest level, but that it does not apply to most people:

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<sup>286</sup> This is not always the case, and some Tibetan ‘mad yogis’ would adopt the wild dress and habits encouraged in the Tantras on at least a semi-regular basis. (DiValerio)

<sup>287</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan ‘jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 323. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 208.  
*sha’i ro la sred pas grong yul du bag med du zos na/ dang /blang gi dam tshig bag med du spyad pa zhes bya ste/ de yang ‘gal/*

<sup>288</sup> Tib: *ro gcig*

In Highest Yoga Tantra, however, practitioners are actually advised to rely on the five types of meat and five types of nectar. ... In this regard, someone might try to justify eating meat on the grounds that he or she is a practitioner of Highest Yoga Tantra. But this person must not forget that included in the five nectars and five meats are substances that are normally considered dirty and repulsive.<sup>289</sup> A true practitioner of Highest Yoga Tantra does not discriminate by taking the meat but not the dirty substances, but we cover our noses if such dirty substances are anywhere near us, let alone actually ingesting them.<sup>290</sup>

Similarly, Dilgo Khyentsé (1910-1991), allows that a practitioner of extremely high realization can do anything without incurring a moral fault. “On the other hand” he argues, “if we fail to properly assess our level of realization, thinking that we are highly realized and can do whatever we want, drinking alcohol, indulging in sex and eating lots of meat, we will be going in quite the opposite direction to the Dharma.”<sup>291</sup>

Similar views were expressed during many interviews with contemporary Tibetan lamas. While it is possible, according to tantric theory, to achieve a level of realization that allows one to act without regard to conventional ideas of pure and impure, it is clear that many Tibetan lamas find the implications of this idea uncomfortable. They insist, therefore, that such conduct is only allowed for those of truly high realization and that practitioners must be careful to judge their own realization accurately.

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<sup>289</sup> Among others ingredients, these substances include blood, urine and feces.

<sup>290</sup> Dalai Lama, *World of Tibetan Buddhism*, 112.

<sup>291</sup> Dilgo Khyenste, *Zurchungpa's Testament*, 111.

Though originally taught in Tibetan, it does not appear that a Tibetan version of this text has been published.

In addition to this idea that meat is acceptable because of Tantric Buddhism's emphasis on the single taste of all phenomena, some Tibetans have asserted that, because Tantric practice is so powerful, a tantric practitioner actually benefits the animal she is eating. In this argument, Tantric Buddhism has such powerful liberative potential that it sows the seeds of liberation in any being that comes into contact with it. This includes not only practitioners themselves, but also any being that comes into contact with a practitioner. Because the benefit of such connections outweighs the pain of dying, eating meat actually benefits the animal involved.

As with so much else in this chapter, I have not found any literary sources that actually support such arguments. Several informants, however, articulated this notion, and pro-vegetarianism texts critique it, suggesting again that it was current prior to the modern period. Perhaps the best articulated example comes from the writings of Jigmé Lingpa (1730-1798), who advises his students, "You should think like this, 'In a Tantric context, it's great if someone has given rise to the power of concentration, so that he is not tainted by obscurations and is able to benefit beings through a connection with their meat and blood. But I do not have this confidence.'"<sup>292</sup> As with the above quotes from the Dalai Lama and Dilgo Khyentsé, Jigmé Lingpa holds out the possibility that very advanced practitioners could, in fact, benefit beings by eating them. He cautions his

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<sup>292</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Engaging the Path*, 723. Jigme Lingpa, "Entering the Path of Enlightenment," 133. *rdo rje theg pa'i skabs su'ang ting nge 'dzin gyi nus pa mngon du gyur nas rang la sgrib pas mi gos shing/ sems can de la sha kbrag gi 'brel pas phan thog nus pa yin na dang go bcad/ bdag la de ltar gyi gdeng mi bdug/ ... snyam du bsam mno*

students, however, to reflect honestly on their own abilities and to recognize that they have probably not reached this stage.

As should be clear by now, the idea that Tantric practice permits, and may even require, the broad consumption of meat comes in several flavors. Each version of this argument has been promoted by some and critiqued by others. Speaking broadly, these critiques tend to suggest, sometimes explicitly, but more often implicitly, that those who use tantric practice as a justification for meat eating outside the context of the ritual feast are abusing tantric ideology in support of personal pleasure.

Such a conclusion aligns with the presentation of the five meats found in the last chapter. As elucidated by Christian Wedemeyer, the five meats were important for tantra specifically because of their symbolic value as a violation of cultural norms. They were to be consumed in a ritual context, but not on a broad, daily basis.<sup>293</sup> Further, we have seen many Tibetan commentators agree with this assessment. When this observation is combined with the lack of sources that support the idea that Tantra justified eating meat on a daily basis, we are left with the impression that while this idea certainly existed in Tibet, it may not have been terribly widespread. The fact that some individuals felt that Tantric practice justified eating meat, therefore, still fails to account for the prevalence of meat eating across the Tibetan diet.

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<sup>293</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*.

## No Other Options

In recent decades, as the question of vegetarianism has emerged both in Tibet and among exile Tibetan communities, several lamas have written defenses of meat eating. Among the most common arguments raised in these texts is the idea that Tibet's environment made meat a necessary staple in the Tibetan diet. The present Dalai Lama explains, "In Tibet the difficult geographical conditions - its climate and altitude - were not suitable for growing vegetables and the people have always had to depend on meat and dairy products to survive."<sup>294</sup> As the Dalai Lama suggests, the Tibetan environment made the cultivation of vegetables and fruits difficult, limiting the availability of non-meat foods and significantly impeding the spread of vegetarianism.

Environmental conditions across the Tibetan plateau vary widely, but most areas are located at very high altitudes. The Lhasa valley, for instance, is located thirty-six hundred meters above sea level. Northwest of Lhasa, the Changtang Plateau begins at forty-five hundred meters of elevation. At such extreme elevations, little agriculture is possible, and Tibetans living in the Changtang are almost exclusively nomadic, practicing animal husbandry. Even at lower elevations agriculture is difficult, and Tibetan farmers were quite restricted in their choice of crops. By far the most common crop was barley, though some vegetables, such as radishes and peas, were known.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama, "Non-Vegetarian Food," 57.

<sup>295</sup> Carrasco, *Land and Polity in Tibet*, 5.

As a result, the food options available to Tibetans prior to the last few decades were extremely limited.<sup>296</sup> Barley was roasted and ground into tsampa, providing the most common non-meat food. Dairy was widely available, often in the form of butter, and a variety of other products, such as the troma root, were locally available. In such a context, meat played an important role in most individual's diets.

Nowhere was this more true than among nomadic populations. Nomadic animal husbandry has been practiced in Tibet for millennia.<sup>297</sup> Nomads care for large herds of animals, often sheep or yaks, and follow these herds, usually in a yearly cycle. Thus, a nomad community will often have established summer and winter camps, with traditionally defined grazing land at each site. Given this mobile lifestyle, nomads are unable to grow crops and are dependent on the products of their animals for almost the entirety of their economic production. These products include the wool of both sheep and yaks, dung for fires and the milk, butter, yogurt and cheese that are produced from the milk of female yaks. They also include meat, both for consumption by the nomads themselves and for sale or barter with farmers or other sedentary groups.

Meat is a fundamental aspect of nomadic life. Indeed, even non-meat staples such as tsampa must be acquired through trading meat and other animals products. Between 1986 and 1988, the anthropologists Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall lived among a nomadic community on the high plateau northwest of Lhasa recording, among

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<sup>296</sup> Modern roads and the trucks that drive on them have changed this situation dramatically, and vegetables and fruit can be found in even remote communities.

<sup>297</sup> Citing pollen deposits, one recent study concludes that nomadic pastoralism has been practiced on the Tibetan plateau for 8,800 years. (Foggin et al.)



other facets of life, the nomads' diet. They note that a family of five consumed the meat, on average, of twenty-two yaks and sheep a year, while a wealthy family of five could consume as many as forty-five to fifty animals. These animals were often slaughtered at the beginning of fall, with the meat being dried and then used to sustain a family through the winter and into the summer.<sup>298</sup> During the winter, when meat was most plentiful, it was the primary food for many nomads. As the winter's supply of meat dwindled in late spring and summer, tsampa and dairy products became increasingly important.<sup>299</sup>

Goldstein and Beall's observations are specific to the nomadic community they studied, west of Lhasa, but their observations align closely with my own discussions with nomads in Kham, as well as with reports of nomadic practices in other regions. For nomads everywhere, meat is a fundamental element of the diet, not easily dispensed with.

Given the centrality of animals in nomadic culture, and of meat in nomadic diets, it is not surprising that vegetarianism is widely considered incompatible with nomadism. For many Tibetans, asking nomads to give up meat is akin to asking them to give up their nomadic lifestyle. For this reason, many contemporary lamas who otherwise support vegetarianism seem reluctant to ask nomads to give up meat. Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö (b. circa 1970s), for instance, told me in an interview that given the difficulties of being a vegetarian nomad, it was acceptable for nomads to eat meat, though it would be ideal if they would try to reduce their consumption somewhat. Likewise, Ugyen Trinlé Dorjé (b. 1985), the seventeenth Karmapa, told me that nomads could eat meat, though

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<sup>298</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 99.

he hoped that they would not sell animals to the industrial slaughterhouses that have recently appeared in many regions of Tibet.

Both Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö and the Karmapa have written strong denunciations of meat eating. Further, these works are widely distributed in Tibet and have contributed strongly to the recent spread of vegetarianism, particularly in Kham. During both interviews, these lamas made clear that they felt the nomadic lifestyle was an important aspect of Tibetan culture, worth preserving even if that means slowing the spread of vegetarianism. It is also worth noting that neither Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö or the Karmapa made any claims that nomadic culture was important on religious grounds. That is, nomadic culture is important because of its traditional place in Tibetan society, not because being a nomad is conducive to religious attainment.

This is not to say that nomads are ignorant of the ethical complications surrounding the slaughter of animals for their meat. Goldstein and Beall note that few of the nomads chose to slaughter their animals themselves, preferring to hire others for this task.<sup>300</sup> For these nomads, the sin was entirely in the killing, and the meat could be consumed without fault. As we have seen, many lamas who support vegetarianism are quite explicit in their critique of this argument. Here, however, the important point is to recognize that Buddhist attitudes towards killing animals for meat were well known by the nomadic community, and that they tried to modify their behavior accordingly. Killing animals for meat was, they understood, opposed to Buddhist teachings, but it was

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<sup>299</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 115.

also a necessary part of their life, without which their families might not have survived the winter.

The same environmental conditions that made meat an integral part of nomadic life also impacted settled farmers. Farming families had easier access to tsampa than their nomadic counterparts, but environmental conditions still precluded the cultivation of most green vegetables and all fruits. Vegetables were so rare in some regions that one contemporary Tibetan lama has noted, “[until] about eighteen years ago, most of the people in my village didn’t even know that vegetables could be eaten by humans.”<sup>301</sup> In contrast to the difficulty of acquiring vegetables, meat was widely available to farmers. Some of this meat would come from their own animals, but much of it was acquired through trade with nomads. However it was acquired, given the environmental constraints, it is not surprising that meat was an integral part of farmers’ diets, as well as nomads.

As this discussion indicates, the environment conditions on the Tibetan plateau made vegetarianism difficult. Indeed, contemporary apologists for Tibetan meat eating regularly—and justifiably—cite the Tibetan climate as the most important factor impeding the growth of vegetarianism. There can be little doubt that the difficulty of growing vegetables in Tibet made the adoption of vegetarianism especially difficult in pre-modern Tibet.

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<sup>300</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 99.

<sup>301</sup> Khentrul Rinpoche, *Vegetarianism Free from Extremes*.

## A Necessary Evil

One result of difficult environmental conditions in Tibet has been a consistent discourse that views meat as a necessary component of a healthy human diet. As we saw in the previous chapter, there has been a consistent discourse in Tibet that labelled meat sinful. Not everyone who accepted this discourse, however, became vegetarian. Even Jigmé Lingpa, who wrote extensively on the flaws of eating meat, never claims to have actually become vegetarian. For individuals like this, eating meat was clearly immoral, but, given the limited options available, it was also a necessary part of human life.

This argument hinges on an understanding of meat's role in human health. Interviews with contemporary Tibetans reveal a widespread belief that without meat, an individual's health will decline. This was expressed repeatedly by individuals who did eat meat, as a justification for their diet. One young monk, for instance, claimed to have thought about becoming vegetarian frequently, but was afraid of the diet's impact on his health. Meat, he admitted, was ethically problematic, but without it, he was afraid his health would decline.

Another informant, from the Ngaba region, blamed his father's death on his refusal to eat meat. His father had been a vegetarian for many years and refused to change his diet even after being diagnosed with cancer. As the disease ran its course, a Tibetan doctor advised that eating meat might extend his life, but he refused, despite his family's entreaties. The young man who told me this story did not blame vegetarianism

for causing his father's cancer, but he did believe that eating meat would have allowed his father to live longer.

As this story suggests, the popular notion that meat is important for health is supported by many Tibetan medical doctors. According to Tibetan medical theory, the body contains three humors, phlegm, wind and bile, that all must be in balance for optimal health.<sup>302</sup> An imbalance of these three humors results in disease. To greatly oversimplify, Tibetan medicine is the practice of restoring the balance of these humors when one or another has become excessively dominant. In order to do so, Tibetan doctors can prescribe a range of medicines, as well as suggesting changes in behavior or, importantly for the discussion here, diet.<sup>303</sup>

The role of meat in this system was explained to me during a series of interviews with a prominent Tibetan doctor in Xining. According to this doctor, different meats impact the body in different ways. Goat, for instance, supports the bile humor, but not wind or phlegm, and as a result eating goat meat might be prescribed to treat swelling or dropsy. Yak and mutton, on the other hand, are particularly important for supporting the wind humor. A significant decrease in the amount of yak or mutton eaten, therefore, would lead to an decrease in the strength of the wind humor. This would produce an imbalance in the body's three humors, resulting in an increasing likelihood of illness.

So far, this discussion of the health consequences of vegetarianism has relied entirely on contemporary sources. Textual evidence, however, indicates that similar

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<sup>302</sup> Tib: *bad kan, rlung, mkhris pa*

concerns have been present at many other points in Tibetan history. Sera Khandro (1892-1940), a lifelong vegetarian, recalls falling seriously ill when she was thirty. Her teacher insisted that she eat meat for a month, after which her strength and health recovered enough that she could re-adopt a vegetarian diet.<sup>304</sup> Similarly, Shabkar (1781-1851) allows meat to be eaten for medicinal purposes during illness or old age.<sup>305</sup>

In particular, many Tibetans believe that without meat, one's bodily strength with decline. This association is seen most clearly in interviews with contemporary Tibetans. Many informants acknowledged the ethical superiority of a vegetarian diet, but felt that if they stopped eating meat, their bodily strength would decline. One typical informant, a young man in Dartsedo, claimed that it was bad to adopt vegetarianism, as doing so caused the body to weaken. In order to keep his strength up, he needed to eat generous portions of meat.

This emphasis on strength is also supported by Tibetan medical concepts. As noted above, yak and mutton—the most commonly consumed meats in Tibet—are both associated with supporting the wind humor. The wind humor, in turn, is particularly associated with bodily strength. A reduction in meat eating, therefore, could produce an imbalance associated with a weakened wind humor, manifested as a decrease in bodily strength. Popular conceptions about the role of meat in fostering strength, therefore, align well with Tibetan medical theories.

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<sup>303</sup> Desi Sangyé Gyatso, *Mirror of Beryl*, 17.

<sup>304</sup> se ra mkha' 'dro, *Autobiography*, 356. Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 56.

<sup>305</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 609-610. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 121.

Once again, while this discussion has drawn primarily on contemporary interviews, there is some evidence to suggest that such concerns have a long history in Tibet. Shabkar notes that some people argue that eating meat will maintain monks' strength.<sup>306</sup> Shabkar, as we might guess, has little tolerance for this concern, dismissing it as an excuse proposed by those addicted to the taste of flesh. By discussing it at all, however, he indicates that some people in early nineteenth century Amdo felt that meat was particularly important for bodily strength.

An association between meat and strength is further demonstrated by a pair of stories concerning heroic strongmen. In the first, recently published in a collection of oral histories and coming from the Degé region of Kham, tells of the exploits of Gerab Shepochen (n.d.). Gerab Shepochen was a simple herder who rose to prominence not through mental acumen, but through his extraordinary strength. As proof of this heroic ability, the tale repeatedly describes him as able to eat a leg of yak and two measures of tsampa at every meal.<sup>307</sup> For those who listened to this story, Gerab Shepochen's ability to eat immense quantities of meat and other food was visible proof of his superhuman strength.

Similarly, Jamyang Khyentsé Wangchuk (1524-1568) tells the story of Tashi Sengé (circa 11<sup>th</sup> c.), a famous strongman who becomes a disciple of Drokmi Lotsawa (992-1072). Like Gerab Shepochen, Tashi Sengé is renowned for his strength, a fact which is demonstrated through his ability to eat vast quantities of food, notably including

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<sup>306</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 585. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 103.

up to half a yak, in a single sitting.<sup>308</sup> In both of these stories, the heroes consume vast quantities of tsampa and beer as well as meat, making clear that their strength is not derived solely from the meat they eat. At the same time, however, the prominence given to meat in their diets aligns with the relationship between meat and strength seen elsewhere. Meat, these stories suggest, is part of a broader vision of heroic strength.

In many ways, this relationship between meat and ideals of strength is similar to the ideas that allow Chinese martial monks to eat meat, despite the fact that vegetarianism is otherwise normative for monks in China. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Meir Shahar has recently published a study of the martial monks of Shaolin monastery, highlighting, among other points, the fact that many of these monks eat meat. In Shahar's analysis, this is tolerated, both by the monastic authorities and the surrounding population, because of a belief that the monks' physical exercises require meat. Without it, they would not have the strength to pursue their lifestyle.<sup>309</sup>

In support of this, Shahar tells a story drawn from an eighth century anthology. In this tale, a novice monk named Chou is repeatedly abused by his peers, lacking the strength to defend himself. In order to develop strength, he locks himself in a temple dedicated to Vajrapāṇi, and vows to cling to the statue's feet for a week. On the sixth day, Vajrapāṇi appears and the following dialogue ensues:

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<sup>307</sup> zla ba sgrol ma, *Silence in the Valley of Songs*, 37-38.

<sup>308</sup> 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang 'phyugs, *Expansion of the Great Secret Doctrine*, 93-96. Stearns, *Taking the Path as the Result*, 199-202.



“Boy, do you want strength?” [Vajrapāṇi] asked Chou.

“Yes.”

“Are you determined?”

“Yes.”

“Can you eat flesh?”

“I cannot.”

“Why?” inquired the deity.

“Because monks must abandon meat.” Chou replied. Because of this, the god lifted his alms-bowl and fed him flesh with a knife. ... When he finished eating, the god said, “Now, you are already very strong.”<sup>310</sup>

By the end of this account, the young monk is so physically impressive that, “Those who had previously belittled him now fell prostrate, sweating.”<sup>311</sup>

The association between meat eating and physical prowess in this story is clear. As a vegetarian, the young monk Chou is unable to stand up for himself. Once he eats meat—divine meat, admittedly—he becomes so strong that his former tormenters cower in fear. This story is drawn from the Chinese Buddhist tradition rather than the Tibetan. Nevertheless, it aligns closely with the evidence we have seen regarding the Tibetan tradition. Meat, in both contexts, is directly connected to the development of physical strength.

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<sup>309</sup> Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 43.

<sup>310</sup> Zhang Zhuo, *Records of the Court and People*, 2.21. Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 36. 謂稠曰。小子欲力乎。曰欲。念至乎。曰至。能食筋乎。曰不能。神曰。何故。稠曰出家人斷肉。故神因操鉢舉匕以筋食 ... 食畢。神曰汝已多力。

<sup>311</sup> Zhang Zhuo, *Records of the Court and People*, 2.22. Shahar, *Shaolin Monastery*, 37. 先輕侮者俯伏流汗。

For many religiously inclined Tibetans, personal strength—and health more generally—is important not only because it allows one to defeat one’s tormentors, or because it makes life more enjoyable, but also because a human life is uniquely suited to the practice of religion. In line with many other forms of Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhists generally assert that an individual can be born as a god, a demi-god, a human, an animal, a hungry ghost or a hell-being. Being born in hell, as a hungry ghost or an animal all entail great suffering, to the point that religious practice is next to impossible. Being born as a god or demi-god, on the other hand, is said to be so pleasant that there is no motivation for pursuing religious practice and the promise of ultimate release such practice holds out. Only birth as a human being contains the necessary mixture of suffering and happiness that will allow an individual to pursue religious liberation. For this reason, a human life, said to be difficult to obtain, is often referred to as a ‘precious human life.’<sup>312</sup>

Further, Tibetan religious practice is driven—ideally—by compassion for the suffering all beings experience. Those who achieve a precious human life have a rare opportunity to not only pursue their own liberation from suffering, but to benefit other beings in a way that will bring them to liberation as well. In such a context, preserving an individual’s health becomes a concern not only for the individual in question, but also for all of the other beings potentially benefitted by that individual’s religious practice. Given

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<sup>312</sup> Tib: *mi lus rin chen*

klong chen ye shes rdo rje, *Quintessence*, 15–21. Jigmé Lingpa & Longchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche, *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, 117–122.

the assumption that it is necessary for human health, meat can be seen as a way to actually benefit other beings.

Numerous contemporary informants cited this argument in support of their own consumption of meat. This was particularly true of monks and nuns, who tended to emphasize the need for meat in order to practice religion, while laity highlighted the importance of meat for their health. One khenpo at Shechen Monastery, for instance, emphasized that without eating meat, one would become weak and consequently be unable to practice religion, repeating this assertion several times over the course of an extended interview. Another monastic informant took this idea so far as to actively critique vegetarianism, saying that since meat was necessary for human health, and health necessary for religious practice, then those lamas who promoted vegetarianism were actually harming animals rather than helping them.

Textual evidence also makes clear that this argument was invoked to support meat eating at other points in Tibetan history as well. Again, I have not uncovered any sources that advocate such a position, but it is repeatedly critiqued by authors advocating vegetarianism, indicating that it was current at those times. Again, Shabkar provides a good example, “By eating meat, monks maintain their strength and practice religion. Therefore, [vegetarianism] has no benefit.”<sup>313</sup> Not surprisingly, Shabkar rejects this argument, reflecting that, “their food is no different from a demons’.”<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 585. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 103. *sha zos nas dge 'dun pa'i lus zungs gsos/ chos byas na des ma phan*

<sup>314</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 586. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 104. *kha za 'dres kbrid pa dang khyad par med de/*

Perhaps the most extended reflection on this idea, however, comes from Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1935). As we have seen, Shardza's *Shortcomings of Eating Meat* contains a strong critique of meat eating. The rhetoric Shardza employs in this text is unsparing: meat is nauseating and meat-eaters are labelled hypocrites for their willingness to inflict suffering on others without being willing to accept it themselves.<sup>315</sup> Following five pages of such critique, however, Shardza declares:

At the same time, however, the Buddha is the extraordinary support for practice, and this free and favored human life [when his teachings can be practiced] is difficult to obtain. Eating meat supports long life, and, therefore, is a necessary basis for obtaining the supreme objective. If you do not eat this, your bodily strength will be feeble, you will not be able to perform virtue, and your life-force will be weak, as if you had a wind disorder. Not relying on a skillful method like [meat] would be to throw away your body. It is said to be a fault similar to tearing down the four supporting pillars in a temple. For the sake of practicing virtue, it is important to nourish your body with foods such as suitable meat.<sup>316</sup>

Despite his earlier critiques, in the end Shardza not only allows, but actually mandates the consumption of meat. This leaves readers in a quandary: how should they reconcile the various ethical problems that Shardza highlights with the imperative to

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<sup>315</sup> shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, *Shortcomings*, 331-332.

<sup>316</sup> shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, *Shortcomings*, 333.

'on kyang dal 'byor mi lus 'di ni rnyed dka' zhing sangs rgyas sgrub pa'i rten khyad par can yin pas na/ 'di yun ring 'tsho ba'i ched du sha la sogs pa'i zas kyis gso nas 'di'i steng du gtan gyi 'dun ma len dgos phyir/ 'di mi gso bar lus kyi stobs zhan nas dge ba sgrub mi nus pa dang rlung nad lta bus srog la nyan bzhin du/ de la phan pa'i thabs mi bsten

support the precious human body through meat eating. For Shardza, the answer is to eat ‘suitable meat.’

If you ask what meat is suitable, when you buy it it must be free of having been seen, heard and suspected. This also applies to meat purchased for you by others. For example, meat from animals that have died naturally is suitable. The *Vinaya* says, ‘Meat that has died naturally at the end of its time, as well as second-hand meat should be eaten without desire, for the sake of nourishing the body.’<sup>317</sup>

By mandating meat that has not been seen, heard or suspected, Shardza invokes the rule of threefold purity, which allows monks to eat meat that they have not seen, heard, or suspected to have been killed specifically for them. Shardza, however, deftly re-imagines this rule, including meat that was purchased by others under its proscription. By doing so, he effectively rules out any slaughtered meat, including meat purchased from a butcher, which most other interpretations of the rule of threefold purity allow. As a result, only two types of meat are acceptable: meat that comes from animals that have died naturally and second-hand meat that was purchased by someone else for their own consumption, then discarded as waste. Shardza’s *Biography* indicates that he himself followed such rules from the moment he took ordination as a monk, seemingly blending

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*pa lus bor ba byed pa ni/ lha khang ka ba bzhi bshig pa dang nyes pa mtshungs pa gsungs pas na dge sbyor bas bza’ rung gi sha la sogs pas lus gso ba gal che/*

<sup>317</sup> shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, *Shortcomings*, 333–334.

*de la bza’ rung gi sha gang yin zhe na/ mthong thos dgos [334] gsum gyis dben pa’i tshong dus khar ‘khor gyi nyos sha’am/ dus zad pa’i shi sha sogs bza’ rung gi sha yin pas/ de dag la chags sems spang nas srog phyir bza’ ba gnang ste/ ‘dul ba las/ dus zas pa yi shi sha dang/tshang du kha ‘khor nyos sha ni/chags sems spong ste srog phyir bza’/ zhes gsungs/*

his concern for the suffering caused by eating meat with a felt need to eat meat in order to support his religious practices and thereby benefit others.<sup>318</sup>

For Shardza, meat was a necessary evil, and similar sentiments are also expressed by other Tibetan authors. Among the most eloquent is the nun Orgyen Chökyi (1675-1729), who reflects, “When I put goat’s meat in my mouth, my mind is sad. Set in this human life, I need food.”<sup>319</sup> Meat is a necessary part of being human and she makes no attempt to give it up, even though it makes her sad.

At the same time, however, Tibet’s difficult environmental conditions and the resultant notion that meat was necessary for human health cannot, in and of themselves, account for the persistent presence of meat in the Tibetan diet. For one thing, Tibetans did not generally consume all of the potential sources of meat available to them. Goldstein and Beall have noted, for instance, that the nomadic community they studied did not eat either fish or waterfowl, both of which were plentiful.<sup>320</sup> Similarly, Samten Karmay notes deep cultural bias among some Tibetans against eating horse meat, also easily available to nomadic herders.<sup>321</sup> If meat was consumed only because nothing else was available, we might expect to find these readily available meats in wide use as well. Instead, cultural norms led Tibetans to reject these animals as sources of food, indicating that more than environmentally dictated needs are at play in this context.

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<sup>318</sup> dbra ston skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Biography of Shardza*, 123.

<sup>319</sup> o rgyan chos skyid. *Autobiography*, 9. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 138.  
*ra sha kha ru 'jug dus sems nyid skyo/ mi yi lugs la rten nas zas dgos byung/*

<sup>320</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 114.

<sup>321</sup> Samten Karmay, “A General Introduction,” 145-146.

More importantly, as we saw in the opening chapter of this dissertation, many Tibetans did, in fact, adopt vegetarianism. Further, many vegetarians lived long and full lives, garnering many disciples and otherwise propagating the Buddhist teachings quite effectively. Dolpopa (1292-1361) even became famous for his great weight, and is often depicted in artistic renderings as quite obese. Dolpopa's alleged girth may not reflect contemporary western conceptions of health, but for many Tibetans I interviewed, being fat was considered a sign of good health. Along with other Tibetan vegetarians, therefore, Dolpopa's example offered a powerful argument against the idea that meat was necessary for human health.

Before moving on, it is also worth pointing once again to the impact recent development in Tibet has had on this debate. Extensive road-building projects have connected vast areas of the Tibetan plateau. Trips that would have taken months can now be completed in days. Those roads are regularly travelled by trucks, bringing vegetables and fruit to even remote areas. Spinach, oranges and other foods are now widely available. Further, the influx of Chinese-style restaurants across much of the Tibetan plateau has helped make these exotic foods a normal part of the modern Tibetan diet. In addition to fruits and vegetables, processed foods are now available across the Tibetan plateau. This has had many unfortunate results, and the landscape is now littered with drink bottles and snack wrappers. Some processed foods, however, are specifically produced for and marketed to vegetarians, sometimes even imitating the taste



Fig. 4: Advertisement for snacks made of imitation meat. Importantly, the advertisement is in both Chinese and Tibetan, indicating that the products are being marketed to Tibetans. Jyekundo, summer 2012.

and texture of meat, allowing even more diversity in the foods available to vegetarians.

(Fig. 4)

In discussions with contemporary Tibetan vegetarians, these newly available foods are routinely cited as the most important reason vegetarianism is spreading so rapidly now. Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö told me that in the past, fruits and vegetables were unavailable in Tibet, so lamas had to eat meat. Nowadays, he argues, that is no longer the case and Tibetans should adopt vegetarianism. Many other proponents of vegetarianism, including such prominent figures as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa, but also including many ordinary Tibetans, have made similar arguments. While many contemporary vegetarians argue that meat is no longer necessary for health, however, that



idea has not yet permeated Tibetan culture, and most of the meat eating Tibetans I interviewed insisted that meat was necessary for human health.<sup>322</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to evaluate, from a medical perspective, the health impact of vegetarianism, in the light of the other dietary options available to Tibetans of various times and places. Given the limited other options, however, it seems reasonable to assume that abandoning meat—at least prior to recent decades—would impact an individual's health, potentially to a noticeable degree. Whatever the scientific facts of the matter, there has long been a near consensus among Tibetans that meat is necessary for one's health, to the extent that even some proponents of vegetarianism admit that theirs is, from a strictly medical perspective, an unhealthy diet. For many Tibetans, therefore, meat seems to have been understood as something of a necessary evil.

Perhaps even more than meat's pleasant taste, permitted status and role in tantric ritual, Tibet's environmental conditions and the resultant belief that meat was medically necessary formed a significant impediment to the spread of vegetarianism. At the same time, however, there are enough examples of vegetarians who lived long and healthy lives to demonstrate that meat was not an environmentally dictated necessity. Like these other factors, the difficulties posed by the Tibetan environment can and were overcome on a regular basis, suggesting that the prevalence of meat in the Tibetan diet is not based solely on environmental factors, but also reflects cultural ideals and norms. In the rest of this chapter, I will analyze the place of meat in Tibetan culture more broadly, arguing

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<sup>322</sup> Over the course of more than one hundred interviews, only two meat-eating Tibetans admitted that meat was unnecessary for human health, admitting that they ate it only because it tasted good.

that, despite Buddhism's ethical critique, other aspects of Tibetan culture actually celebrated the consumption of meat.

## Strength & Masculinity

As we have just seen, both Tibetan popular opinion and medical theory link the consumption of meat with the development of strength. For some Tibetans, especially those who are particularly devout, physical strength is necessary primarily because of its importance for Buddhist practice. For others, however, physical strength had other connotations. Of primary importance among these are its connections with notions of ideal masculinity.

For many Tibetans, the image of an ideal man includes strength and the ability to dominate and control others. The consumption of meat, in turn, is seen as a necessary support for the development of physical strength. Within this context, therefore, meat is seen as more than just a necessary evil. Instead, it is actually celebrated as an important part of idealized masculinity. This positive evaluation of meat has been a significant check on the spread of vegetarianism, working alongside Tibet's difficult environmental conditions to restrict the impact of the Buddhist-inspired critique of meat.

One way to approach the relationship between strength and masculinity is through a discussion of Tibetan attitudes towards hunting and otherwise dominating dangerous animals. Hunting has a long history in Tibet, with archeological evidence demonstrating hunting to be a culturally significant practice long before the historical

period.<sup>323</sup> The importance of hunting in generating a vision of masculine strength, however, becomes clearer once the archeological evidence is complemented by historical records.

Brandon Dotson has recently analyzed some of the earliest of these records, arguing that during the Tibetan Imperial Period, emperors engaged in large-scale royal hunts as a calculated way to demonstrate their power and authority.<sup>324</sup> That is, these large scale hunts were not simply about acquiring food. Instead, they provided a venue in which rulers could perform, demonstrating their strength and ability to rule. As an example, Dotson points to the *Old Tibetan Chronicle's* eulogy to king Tri Düsöng (670-704), "From the time when Emperor [Tri Düsöng] was small, although he was young, he slaughtered wild boar, fettered wild yaks, seized tigers by the tail, and so forth."<sup>325</sup> Tri Düsöng's conquests over dangerous animals proved his strength and manhood. By extension, such exploits also established both his right and ability to rule.

Dotson focusses his analysis on the Imperial Period, but hunting has remained an important part of Tibetan culture down to the present day. Often, contemporary Tibetan hunting practices are directed at producing meat, either for personal consumption or sale.<sup>326</sup> At the same time, however, hunting has never completely shed its ability to

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<sup>323</sup> Bellezza, "Gods, Hunting and Society."

<sup>324</sup> Dotson, "Princess and the Yak."

<sup>325</sup> Dotson, "Princess and the Yak," 78.

This is Dotson's translation.

*bstan po khri 'dus srong/ /sku chung nas gzhon gyis kyang/ /phag rgod la bshan gyIs mdzad/ /g.yag rgod sg[r]og du bcug/ /stagI rna ba la bzung ba la stsogs pa'*

<sup>326</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 124-133. Huber, "Antelope Hunting."

express an individual's strength and masculinity through the domination of dangerous. As Toni Huber remarks, "The massive wild yak bull is legendary for its immense power, and the human ability to capture or kill one has always been the measure of a hero."<sup>327</sup> The ability to dominate animals displayed by successful hunting thus reflects an archetype of heroic masculinity, both a test and a proof of an individual's strength.

Nor is the connection between dominating animals and masculinity limited to hunting, and similar theme can be found in the *Autobiography* of Do Khyentsé (1800–1859). Do Khyentsé was an incarnation of Jigmé Lingpa, but also has a reputation as something of a wild figure, and many stories are told about his bizarre and sometimes violent actions.<sup>328</sup> Before discussing his own life, his *Autobiography* presents the mythological origins of his clan. In this account, the tribe's progenitor, Longchen Tar (n.d.), is approached by a local god for help. The god, in the form of a yak bull, fights daily with a demon, also in the form of a great yak bull. Longchen Tar is a noted archer, and at the god's behest he shoots the demonic yak, ending the struggle. The god is pleased, and promises to fulfill Longchen Tar's every wish. The next day, he is told, a frightening animal will come to him: all he has to do is stand his ground and touch it. When a divine white yak appears, however, he is so terrified that he does not dare approach. The next day, the god rebukes him, saying, "You didn't act like a man!"<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Huber, "Chase and the Dharma," 36.

<sup>328</sup> Tülku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 179–197. Surya Das, *Snow Lion's Turquoise Mane*, 20, 136.

<sup>329</sup> mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje, *Autobiography*, 6. Kornman, "A Tribal History," 85. *khyod kyis pho ma byas song*

A similar pattern repeats the next day: when a terrible tigress appears, Longchen Tar does nothing and the god chides him for his fear, “If tomorrow you cannot bring up your courage, there is nothing I can do for you.”<sup>330</sup> On the third day, a crocodile appears, but this time the man is able to throw a handful of sand at it. The animals are the god’s divine daughters, and if Longchen Tar had been able to touch them, he and his descendants would have been rich and powerful, ruling over India and Tibet. As it is, by throwing the sand at the third daughter, he is able to acquire only cattle, a tent and land.<sup>331</sup>

This is not a story about hunting, per se, nor about meat eating. What it does demonstrate quite well, however, is the relationship between dominating animals—particularly dangerous animals—and ideals of masculinity. Longchen Tar’s initial ascent to fame is through his ability to kill a yak bull, an act which brings great reward. His strength and bravery in this instance demonstrate his right to wealth and political power. His subsequent cowardice and inability to dominate the fearful creatures that follow, however, call this into question, and almost make him lose his reward. Where his initial ability to dominate an animal brought him the potential for great reward, Longchen Tar’s later inability to do so brings loss and a need to settle for a simple herder’s tent. Dominance over animals is a proof of strength explicitly linked to Longchen Tar’s

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<sup>330</sup> mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje, *Autobiography*, 7. Kornman, “A Tribal History,” 86.  
 ‘on kyang sang nang par snying stobs bskyed ma nus na/ nged kyi bya thabs bral ba

<sup>331</sup> mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje, *Autobiography*, 3-7. Kornman, “A Tribal History,” 84-86.

masculinity—or lack thereof—and aligned with the right to wealth, beautiful women and political power.

The relationship between strength and masculinity I have observed here also aligns with recent research by Charlene Makley. In *The Violence of Liberation*, Makley examines the role of gender in the revival of Buddhism in Amdo over the last three decades.<sup>332</sup> Among her many salient observations, she highlights the importance of strength to Tibetan visions of masculinity. She argues that those qualities associated with the figure of the hero, including physical and mental strength and the ability to conquer one's enemies, are believed to inhere in the male body, and are absent from the female body.<sup>333</sup> Once again, strength and the capacity for heroic action is one of the key traits that characterize Tibetan visions of masculinity.

Admittedly, eating meat is distinct from hunting or otherwise combatting animals. One can, after all, eat meat without dominating anything. At the same time, however, these concerns are not entirely unrelated, either. The key factor in this discussion of masculinity is strength: it is the display of a significant level of physical strength that allows hunting or battling dangerous animals to demonstrate an individual's masculinity. And as we have seen, eating meat is widely considered necessary to the development of physical strength. In this context, while eating meat is not, in and of

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<sup>332</sup> Amdo is located in the northeast of the Tibetan cultural area, primarily in the contemporary Chinese province of Qinghai, but also including parts of Gansu and northern Sichuan.

<sup>333</sup> Makley, *Violence of Liberation*, 241.

itself, a display of masculine strength, it does become part of a larger vision of what it means to be a certain type of man in Tibet.

This alignment between meat, strength and masculinity is also supported by interview data with contemporary Tibetans. Above, I have noted that many Tibetans were concerned with the potential impact of vegetarianism on their health. Such responses, however, were strongly gendered. Men I interviewed were likely to frame their concerns in terms of strength. For them, vegetarianism held out the promise of reduced physical strength. Women, on the other hand, tended to frame their concerns as a broader question of health, including concerns with disease and general well-being, but without the emphasis on physical strength.<sup>334</sup> For male informants, meat was part of a broader vision of those aspects of masculinity that invoke ideals of physical strength.

As important as strength is to Tibetan ideals of masculinity, however, it is not the only characteristic that defines a male. On the contrary, masculine ideals in Tibet incorporate a wide variety of ideals, and these ideals have also varied significantly in different historical contexts. I have already mentioned Makley's emphasis on heroic masculinity, but she also notes other male-gendered traits.<sup>335</sup> Some of these, such as the importance of begetting progeny and belief that men have more mental strength and

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<sup>334</sup> Contemporary interview data suggests that for some women, meat may be linked to such feminine concerns as successful pregnancy and breastfeeding. Unfortunately, I do not have enough data at present to directly address the place of meat in Tibetan visions of femininity. As new sources come to light, I hope to address this question more fully.

<sup>335</sup> Makley, "The Body of a Nun."

fortitude than women, are relevant to discussions of meat in Tibetan monasticism, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

For the time being, however, it is sufficient to note that this discussion of the relationship between meat, strength and masculine ideals highlights only one aspect of male identity in Tibet. That said, physical strength has been, and remains, an important aspect of male Tibetan identity. In such a context, and given meat's strong associations with physical strength, it is not surprising that some Tibetan men actually celebrate meat eating, despite the consistent Buddhist critique of it as unethical. For those Tibetan men who aspired to fulfill a vision of a strong, masculine hero, meat carried positive connotations, and vegetarianism was viewed with deep suspicion.

## **Taming the Food of Demons**

As this discussion makes clear, Tibetan cultural and ethical norms are multifaceted. There is, as discussed extensively in the previous chapter, an ethical model that draws on classical Buddhist ethics and which condemns the killing of animals in no uncertain terms. At the same time, however, other cultural ideals have remained powerful in Tibet, and some of these, far from idealizing vegetarianism, actually celebrated meat consumption. Rather than a single coherent system, Tibetan attitudes towards the slaughter of animals and the consumption of their meat consist of multiple cultural ideals, often in tension.



For the purposes of this dissertation, the most useful model for making sense of the interactions between these disparate ideals involves the rhetoric of ‘taming.’<sup>336</sup> Taming involves the replacement of thoughts or practices that are opposed to Buddhist ideals with their religiously sanctioned counterparts. Thus, an individual might tame their anger through the application of Buddhist techniques. Similarly, someone who reflects on Buddhist ethical norms and thereby gives up negative conduct can be said to have been tamed. As a concept, the idea of taming negative thoughts or actions is widespread in Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetan term for taming, *dulwa*, in fact, is the same word used to translate the Sanskrit word *Vinaya*, the collection of formal rules for monks. By sanctioning certain rules of conduct, the *Vinaya* tames non-virtuous practices and brings them in line with Buddhist norms. As this suggests, the idea of taming is intricately connected with Tibetan conceptions of the purpose of religion.

Examples of the successful taming of non-virtuous practice are widespread. Goldstein and Beall report that when they returned to their field site after a year away, one young man, previously a well known hunter, announced that he had given up the practice because he had decided it was sinful.<sup>337</sup> Similarly, a well known story about the famed saint Milarepa (1052-1135) recalls how he sang a song to a hunter, taming the latter’s ferocious anger and turning him into a model Buddhist.<sup>338</sup> Both of these hunters were tamed by Buddhist ethical claims.

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<sup>336</sup> Tib: *dul ba*

<sup>337</sup> Goldstein & Beall, *Nomads of Western Tibet*, 127.

<sup>338</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 74-75.

In addition to personal changes such as these, however, the rhetoric of taming can also be applied to communities and communal practices. The most important instances of this involve the repudiation and reform of animal sacrifice. In *Himalayan Dialogue*, Stan Royal Mumford provides a detailed account of debates surrounding animal sacrifice in an ethnically Tibetan community living in the Nepal Himalayas. For generations, these Tibetans had sacrificed animals to local divinities, receiving the deity's protection in return. In the nineteen sixties, however, this situation was complicated by the arrival of a senior Tibetan lama who asserted that such sacrifices were opposed to Buddhist ethical norms and demanded that they be abandoned. As part of this transformation, he performed rituals to tame the deities, bringing them in line with Buddhist norms and assuring they would continue to assist the populace, even without meat offerings.<sup>339</sup>

As Mumford notes, the taming of animal sacrifice by a senior religious figure is a pattern that recurs throughout Tibetan history.<sup>340</sup> In many ways, this shift from red to white offerings marks the shift from a non-Buddhist, or quasi-Buddhist status to a fully Buddhist community. The region Mumford discusses had local lamas in each village, built Buddhist temples and performed Buddhist rituals, but in the senior lama's eyes, all this was in vain if animal sacrifice continued.<sup>341</sup> Coming to similar conclusions, the anthropologist Geoffrey Samuel argues, "The Tibetan emphasis on [white offerings] is not only, or even primarily, because of the Buddhist prohibitions on taking life. The

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<sup>339</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 63-92.

<sup>340</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 7.

<sup>341</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 80.

banning of animals sacrifices was historically in Tibet the sign of Tibetan Buddhist dominance over local pre-Buddhist deity cults.”<sup>342</sup> For Mumford and Samuel, Buddhist ethical ideals are in competition with another set of ideals that prioritizes strength and control over ethical conduct. By abandoning animal sacrifice, the region displays that it has repudiated the latter and adopted the former: the villages have been tamed.

As we might expect, in actual practice, the conversion from untamed to tamed is not as straightforward as this presentation may make it sound. The competing ideals of strength and ethical conduct continue to influence and inform each other. Mumford highlights this point by concluding, “The later interpretations do not replace the earlier ones, but rather develop a sequence of layered meanings.”<sup>343</sup> In the case of one local religious leader, this interplay resulted in a reduction in the number of animals sacrificed, but not the total elimination of all sacrifices, indicating an acceptance of the lamas’ ethical arguments, but also an unwillingness to completely abandon the concerns for control that motivate red offerings.<sup>344</sup> In other cases, villagers refused to abandon the sacrifices, suggesting that in their eyes the power of the sacrifice outweighed the sin it entailed.<sup>345</sup> In the region he studied, the debate over animal sacrifice was resolved not by complete dominance of one side over the other, but by a blending of both perspectives, with all

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<sup>342</sup> Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 704–705.

<sup>343</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 92.

<sup>344</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 77.

<sup>345</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 82.

participants being impacted by the debate, whatever their final position on animal sacrifice turned out to be.

Another, particularly striking example of the conflict between tamed and untamed visions of religious practice can be found in the *Autobiography* of Dūdjom Lingpa (1835-1904). Dūdjom Lingpa was a non-celibate lama from Kham, well known for his ability to control spirits and other divinities. During a dream in 1888, one of Dūdjom Lingpa's favorite deities appeared and, among other comments, criticized Dūdjom for not making meat offerings:

[The deity] said, "My meat storehouse is empty, come look!" I saw a room empty save for a single limb of meat, rotten and withered. "What is needed?" I asked. "This is because you did not give me meat!" He replied. "Well," I replied, "scholars say it is inappropriate to offer meat and blood. What of that?" "Ha ha!" He replied. "From [the great god] Gönpö Lekden down to goblins, there is no one who doesn't like meat!" ... "We like everything that is suitable for you as food or drink!"<sup>346</sup>

This passage is notable first because Dūdjom Lingpa was not writing from the borderlands. He was a powerful figure closely related to the broad religious revival that occurred in nineteenth century Kham. Further, vegetarianism flourished during this time, and many figures, notably Dūdjom Lingpa's teacher Patrül Rinpoché, explicitly

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<sup>346</sup> bdud 'joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 228-229. Dūdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 169-170.  
 nga'i sha mdzod stong pa 'di kar ltos dang zer nas khang pa stong pa zbig gi nang na sha lag pa skam la rul pa zbig  
 las med par mthong/ 'di la ji dgos dris pas/ khyod kyis nga la sha ma ster bas lan pa yin zer/ de la mkhas pa rnams  
 kyis sha khrag mchod rdzas la bsham mi rung zer bas de ci yin dris pas/ ha ha/ mgon po legs ldan man chad nas

critiqued the use of meat in offerings. Dūdjom's concerns, therefore, reflect the fact that the debate over meat offerings was not limited to a question of taming borderland populations, but was an active point of contention in areas central to Tibetan religious culture.

Further, Dūdjom Lingpa's work clearly reflects the fact that this was a debate. He notes that some 'learned people' say that meat should not be used in offerings (it is hard not to think this remark may be aimed at his teacher Patrül, well known for his opposition to meat offerings). These reservations, however, conflict with the needs of the gods, as understood by Dūdjom Lingpa and, presumably, many others.

If, as Mumford and Samuel suggest, the shift from red to white offerings marks the dominance of Buddhism over local cults, what we see here is the incomplete nature of that dominance. Buddhism may claim to define Tibetan culture, but as the persistent nature of the debate between tamed—vegetarian—and untamed—meat—offerings demonstrates, other aspects of Tibetan culture persist. This is true not only of the southern border region Mumford studied, but also nineteenth century Kham, often praised as a golden age of Tibetan Buddhist culture.

Debates over vegetarianism map onto this discussion in a number of ways. At the outset, it is clear that the role meat plays in the animal sacrifice itself aligns with what we have already seen of the role of meat in Tibetan culture. Untamed gods are powerful, martial, and capricious. They have power over local populations and in many ways

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*the'u rang thal skya yan chad sha la mi dgyes pa ni med/ ... /nged cag kyang khyed kyi bza' btung du 'os pa thams cad la dga' ste rung zhes*

embody an ideal that draws on images of the warrior-king. And they need meat. Without it, they will withdraw their protection of the region, resulting, it is understood, in sick livestock, landslides and other natural calamities.<sup>347</sup> Similarly, Dūdjom Lingpa's visionary encounter suggests that a lack of meat actively angers protector deities.<sup>348</sup> It is no accident that the deities in question are powerful, militaristic deities. Meat, as we have seen, is intimately connected with notions of strength and power, and these deities' desire and capacity for meat offerings is similarly connected to their martial personas.

Further, the Buddhist critique of meat eating discussed in the previous chapter bears a striking resemblance to the critique of animal sacrifice discussed by Mumford. Both cases feature cultural practices involving the death of animals and are strongly connected to notions of strength and masculinity. These practices are then critiqued on Buddhist ethical grounds. In each case that critique rests on an assertion that whatever power is derived from the practice—influence over the gods or an individual's physical strength—do not justify the harm inflicted on animals. In fact, the lama discussed by Mumford explicitly claims that the rituals he offers as a replacement for the animal sacrifice are actually more powerful than the sacrifice itself. Likewise, lamas who support vegetarianism regularly assert that such a diet is superior to a meat-based diet, bringing benefit both in the present life and the next.

The Tibetan terms themselves also suggest the kinship between the debates over animal sacrifice and over meat eating. The most common term used to describe animal

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<sup>347</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 69.

sacrifice is *marchö*, or ‘red offering.’<sup>349</sup> This is contrasted with *karchö*, or ‘white offering.’<sup>350</sup> As discussed in the opening of the previous chapter, the Tibetan terms most commonly used to refer to meat-based food and vegetarian food are *marsé* and *karsé*, ‘red food’ and ‘white food,’ respectively. On the one hand, we have animal blood, on the other the clean slate of ethical conduct.

Finally, in both cases the individuals listening to the Buddhist ethical critique are often uncomfortable with the discussion, fearing a loss of power. Mumford notes that many villagers feared that without performing the appropriate animal sacrifice they would lose the support of the local gods. They were willing to adopt the lama’s new ritual protocol only on the assurance that it would be just as effective in currying the deity’s favor as the previous sacrifices had been.<sup>351</sup> Likewise, many of my own Tibetan informants expressed a reluctance to adopt vegetarianism out of a fear that they would lose power and strength. For many, it was only after seeing the example of others practicing vegetarianism that they decided such a diet was feasible.

Just as the conflict between red and white offerings is, in many ways, a conflict between competing visions of Tibetan religiosity, the conflict between meat eating and vegetarianism is also a conflict between competing ideals. On the one hand, red offerings and meat eating celebrate a vision where strength and dominance over animals is a virtue,

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<sup>348</sup> bdud ‘joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 228-229. Düdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 169-170.

<sup>349</sup> Tib: *dmar mchod*

<sup>350</sup> Tib: *dkar mchod*

<sup>351</sup> Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 82.

while white offerings and vegetarianism celebrate Buddhist ethics as the highest ideal. Given these parallels, it is not hard to see support for vegetarianism as another instance of Buddhist religious leaders attempting to tame cultural models and ideals that conflict with Buddhist ethical norms. Thus, while Buddhist ethical discourses frequently opposed meat eating, other models within Tibetan culture supported and encouraged it. Meat eating was not a neutral practice easily overcome by ethical arguments. Instead, it carried with it strong connections with ideals of strength and masculinity, and, in its role in red sacrifices, provided communities with time tested crisis management practices, making individuals and communities reluctant to abandon the practice.

Further, just as the villagers Mumford studied tried to reconcile Buddhist ethical demands and their concern for properly placating the local deities, Tibetans concerned about the implications of meat eating had to reconcile the diet with their knowledge of Buddhist ethics. For many, this meant integrating these two systems, sometimes uneasily. Thus, while most Tibetans continued to see meat as necessary for strength and other aspects of human health, many also came to regard it as at least ethically problematic. The idea that meat is a necessary evil, discussed above, can be seen as an integration of Buddhist ethical critiques into cultural models celebrating meat as necessary for strength and health. Similarly, many individuals who supported vegetarianism also allowed for its use in times of illness, just as communities who had largely abandoned red offerings might relapse in times of crisis, feeling that extra power might be necessary. Even Shabkar, whom we have seen described as Tibet's most ardent



vegetarian, allows meat to be eaten to support bodily strength during times of illness, tacitly accepting the connection of meat with bodily strength.<sup>352</sup>

Taking an alternate approach to reconciling these competing ideals, Jigmé Lingpa asserts that different groups have different responsibilities towards meat. After watching villagers kill animals in order to offer their meat to an assembly of lamas, he reflects, “They are worldly people, so they do not recognize that all beings were their mothers and are able to kill them. But how are we dharma practitioners able to eat it without fault?”<sup>353</sup> Villagers are on the periphery of Buddhism’s influence; they have not been tamed through knowledge of Buddhist ethical norms and so are able to kill. Those aligned with religion, on the other hand, are expected to be tamed, so cannot consume meat without fault. For Jigmé Lingpa, the degree to which an individual was expected to adopt vegetarianism was determined by the degree to which they were affiliated with religious, rather than secular, ideals.

As the first chapter of this dissertation makes clear, vegetarianism has varied in popularity across Tibetan history. This itself is a reflection of the fact that Tibet harbored competing cultural ideals with regards to the consumption of meat. At some times and places, such as Central Tibet from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, or Kham from the nineteenth century onward, vegetarianism has flourished, seemingly reflecting an increased importance of Buddhist ethical critiques. At other times,

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<sup>352</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 609–610. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 121.

<sup>353</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 125.

*sems can thams cad kyi rang gi ma byas/ kkhong ‘jig rten pas de ltar ma rig ste gsod nus kyang/ rang re chos pa tshos bza’ nus pa’i kha na mi ‘dug/*

however, vegetarians are hard to find, suggesting that such ideals may have waned in relative importance.

## Conclusion

This chapter opened by asking why meat eating has remained so ingrained in Tibetan society, despite the numerous arguments against it. There is general agreement that meat tastes good, but this in itself is insufficient to explain its continued popularity. Sex is also pleasant, after all, and yet monks are widely expected to give it up. This is an imperfect analogy, of course, as sex is explicitly forbidden by the *Vinaya*, while criticism of meat in canonical texts is less consistent. Still, given Tibetan Buddhism's ability to induce individuals to give up pleasant practices, attachment to meat's taste remains an insufficient explanation for its persistence.

More importantly, the difficulty of growing vegetables and fruit in the high-altitude environment of the Tibetan plateau made abandoning meat difficult. These, environmental difficulties, combined with cultural norms that associated meat with physical strength led to a situation where meat was seen as a necessary evil; an idea seen repeatedly in both ethnographic and textual discussions of vegetarianism. It is in this interplay between Buddhist ethical ideals and Tibetan ideals of masculinity and strength that we can begin to understand why meat eating remains ingrained in the Tibetan diet, despite the sustained and consistent criticism it has faced from many Buddhist leaders.

## Chapter 4

# Vegetarianism and Monasticism

For centuries, vegetarianism in Tibet was practiced primarily by monks. Those individuals who chose to adopt vegetarianism often did so at the same time that they took monastic ordination, and texts advocating vegetarianism often did so as part of a broader discussion of the monastic rules. Some sources even go so far as to explicitly assert that while monks should be vegetarian, non-monastic Buddhists could eat meat freely. This persistent relationship is surprising, as the rules governing monastic conduct explicitly *allow* monks to eat meat. As we saw in the first chapter of this book, these rules, known as the *Vinaya*, allow monks to eat meat as long as they were not personally involved in the death of the animal.<sup>354</sup>

Given these explicit permissions, why did vegetarianism in Tibet develop such strong and persistent connections with monasticism? In this chapter, I will address this question, noting first the history of the association between vegetarianism and monasticism in Tibet. I will then examine the view of meat according to each of the three sets of vows that monks take, including the *Vinaya*, but also the Bodhisattva vow

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<sup>354</sup> Shakyamuni, *Foundations of the Vinaya*, vol 3, 25a-25b.

and tantric vows, each of which view meat from a very different perspective. It is in the hierarchical relationship between these vows, I argue, that we can locate the reason the *Vinaya*'s permissions did not restrict the rise of vegetarianism among monastics. Finally, I return to the theme of 'taming' discussed in the previous chapter, noting that monks embody the rejection of those aspects of masculinity that prioritize physical strength in a way that other religious professionals, free of monastic commitments, do not. The rejection of meat, therefore, aligned well with a broader understanding of what it meant to be a monastic. Thus, the association between vegetarianism and monasticism is revealed not simply as a question of vows, but as a reflection of cultural ideals invested in the figure of the monk.

## Vegetarianism in the Monastery

The association of vegetarianism with monastic life dates at least to the eleventh century and the first known instances of vegetarianism in Tibet. In a series of dialogues with his Tibetan disciple Dromtön (1004-1064), the Indian master Atiśa (980-1054) suggests that people should examine the *Vinaya* to see if meat is permitted, with the clear implication that it is not.<sup>355</sup> This is only a passing remark, and Atiśa's other critiques do not specify a monastic audience. Still, whether or not Atiśa and Dromtön thought vegetarianism was only for monks, it is clear that they thought the *Vinaya* forbade meat.

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<sup>355</sup> Anonymous, *Book of Kadam*, 96. Jinpa, *Book of Kadam*, 174.

A century later, the vegetarianism of both Taklung Tangpa (1142-1209) and Jikten Sumgön (1143-1217) was also closely connected to their monastic vocation. In the fifteenth century *Blue Annals*, Gö Lotsawa (1392-1481) describes Jikten Sumgön as, “not transgressing even the most minute vows. He never knew even the smell of meat or alcohol.”<sup>356</sup> For Taklung Tangpa, Gö Lotsawa makes the connection even more explicit, “In general, after he became a monk, he never consumed meat or alcohol.”<sup>357</sup> By adopting vegetarianism at the time he took his vows, Taklung Tangpa (at least in Gö Lotsawa’s telling) seems to have felt that the practice was required after, but not necessarily before, ordination.

Similarly, the fourth Karmapa hierarch, Rolpé Dorjé (1340-1383), also abandoned meat and alcohol in connection with his monastic ordination. *The Blue Annals* notes, “He guarded his monastic commitments with great subtlety, not allowing even a hair’s breadth of meat or wine into his presence.”<sup>358</sup> In a pattern that would be repeated frequently in the coming centuries, Taklung Tangpa, Jikten Sumgön and the fourth Karmapa all practiced vegetarianism in close relationship with their ordination.

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As discussed in chapter one, the precise dating of this text is unclear. Thubten Jinpa suggests that while the composition as known today was not finalized until 1302, it is based around an ‘archaic version’ containing genuine dialogues between Atiśa and Dromtön. (Thubten Jinpa. *Book of Kadam*, 28)

<sup>356</sup> ‘gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 705. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 599.

*de yang tshul khrim rin po che la rag las par gzigs nas rang nyid ‘dul ba’i bcas pa phra mo las mi ‘gal/ dmar dang chang gi dri tsam yam mi snom/*

<sup>357</sup> ‘gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 727. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 619.

*spyir rab byung nas sha chang zhal du ‘khyer ma myong/*

<sup>358</sup> ‘gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 592. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 499.

*‘dul ba’i bcas pa phra mo rnams kyang bsrung zHING/ sha dang chang spu rtse tsam yang spyen lam du mi ‘grim/*

In Kham, the seventeenth century Nyingma lamas Künzang Sherab (1636-1698) and Padma Lhündrub Gyatso (1659-1727), the first and second abbots of Pelyül Monastery, both adopted vegetarianism, a practice that their biographer, Tsering Lama Jampel Zangpo (b. 1900), associated with their strict adherence to monastic regulations.<sup>359</sup> Further, this same source claims that Padma Lhündrub Gyatso induced *thousands* of his disciples to abandon meat as part of a strict monastic regimen.<sup>360</sup> Once again, vegetarianism was intimately associated with strict adherence to monk's vows.

In addition to such biographical references, many of the critiques of meat eating mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation come from texts commenting on the rules for monks. One of the earliest such references comes from *The Vinaya Compendium*, a commentary on the *Vinaya* by the eleventh century Bön lama Metön Sherab Özer (1058-1132). While there is nothing in Metön Sherab Özer's critique that explicitly claims vegetarianism is only for monks, as a *Vinaya* commentary, the nature of the text itself suggests that he is specifically referring to a monastic audience.<sup>361</sup> Metön Sherab Özer was a foundational figure for the Bön monastic tradition, and his ideas about the inappropriateness of meat for monks were picked up and promoted by several later

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<sup>359</sup> tshe ring bla ma 'jam dpal bzang po, *Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 45, 67. Tsering Lama Jampal Zangpo, *Garland of Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 63, 76.

<sup>360</sup> tshe ring bla ma 'jam dpal bzang po, *Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 67. Tsering Lama Jampal Zangpo, *Garland of Immortal Wish-Fulfilling Trees*, 76.

As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, while there is some question as to the reliability of this source, it does seem likely that a vegetarian culture existed at seventeenth century Pelyül Monastery and that it centered on a strict adherence to monastic discipline.

<sup>361</sup> mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Received Vinaya*, 48-50.

commentators, including Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen (1356-1415) and Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1935).<sup>362</sup>

Similar passages can be found in Buddhist works as well. Khedrup Jé Gelek Pelzang (1385-1438), one of the closest disciples of Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), founder of the Geluk school, writes in his *Outline of the Three Vows*, “Some say, ‘The *Vinaya* says it is suitable to eat meat out of a desire for the taste.’ We would never say this. Even in a dream, I would never say this is not a fault.”<sup>363</sup> Khedrup thus claims, in explicit contrast to unnamed others, that eating meat out of desire—as in most normal circumstances—is forbidden to monks.

*Vinaya* commentaries such as these are meant to apply to all monks, regardless of what monastery they happen to live in. Another type of text, monastic customaries, contains rules intended to govern monks’ conduct at specific monasteries. Such texts often delve into the details of monastic life, including such issues as seating order, appropriate dress and the ritual calendar. Some also discuss meat. Jigmé Yeshé Drakpa’s (1696-1750) *A Customary for Pel-Narthang, Reting and Gönlung Monasteries*, for instance, asserts that, “During the summer session, those who have won titles, examinees, and

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I have not yet located a full copy of this text, but it is quoted extensively by both Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen and Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen. For this dissertation, therefore, I am relying on the quotations preserved in their work.

<sup>362</sup> mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Received Vinaya*, 48-50. shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, 261.

<sup>363</sup> thub bstan bsod pa, *Examining the Regulations*, 11.

I have not yet found this passage in Khedrup’s original text. This passage is taken from a citation in a text by Geshe Thubten Soepa.

sha yi ro la chags pa’i dbang gis sha za rung bar ’dul ba las gnang ngo zhes kho bo cag ni rnam pa thams cad du mi smra’o/\_de lta bu la skyon med ces kho bo ni rmi lam du yang mi smra’o//

patrons must never hold a meat festival.”<sup>364</sup> While this text does not mandate full vegetarianism among the monks of these monasteries, it does claim that meat feasts are inappropriate during times of celebration, making clear that meat is at least somewhat problematic for monks.

Less than a century later, Kudün Sönam Lodrö’s *Menri Customary* of 1810 provided rules for the monks of Menri, the central monastery of the Bön tradition. In this work, Kudün Sönam Lodrö clearly states, in pointed contrast to Jigmé Yeshé Drakpa’s work, that monks of Menri Monastery, “may not eat meat, alcohol, garlic or onions.”<sup>365</sup> This text is still in use at today’s Menri Monastery in India, where meat is rarely eaten openly inside monastery precincts, but is regularly consumed outside the monastery by Menri’s monks.<sup>366</sup> Thus, we cannot assume that because Menri’s rules forbade meat, the monks themselves were fully vegetarian. Still, this text clearly propagates an ideal in which monks do not eat meat. Further, given Menri’s central importance to Bön monastic tradition, it is likely that Menri’s prohibition of meat strongly influenced later Bön vegetarianism.

Like Jikten Sumgön, Taklung Tangpa and Karmapa Rolpé Dorjé, Dolpopa (1292-1361), founder of the Jonang lineage, abandoned meat at the same time he took

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<sup>364</sup> ’jigs med ye shes grags pa, *Customary*, 31b.

*dbyar chos skabs su ming btags pa dang tshogs langs pa rnams/ chos thog so so’i sbyin bdag bcas pas sha’i dga’ ston gtan nas mi mdzad cig/*

<sup>365</sup> Cech, “A Bönpo Bca’ Yig,” 74, 80.

*kha zas sde la mang thun sha dang yu ti chang/ sgog gcong rigs/ phyi dro’i kha zas*

<sup>366</sup> Personal communication from Jed Verity, August 2012.



full monastic ordination in 1324.<sup>367</sup> Unlike these figures, however, Dolpopa put his sentiments about meat into writing. Dolpopa's text, *The Prohibition of Meat and Alcohol*, is the earliest example of an entire text specifically focused on meat that I am aware of. Importantly, Dolpopa structures his work around the role of meat in the three sets of vows most Tibetan monks take: the vows of a Śrāvaka, Bodhisattva, and Tantric practitioner.<sup>368</sup> He includes other arguments—notably, the incompatibility of meat and compassion—but, the structure of the text makes clear that he is speaking to an audience of monks, concerned with how to properly maintain their vows.

Writing less than a century later, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, founder of the Ngor lineage of the Sakya school, also penned a work specifically outlining the faults of eating meat, *A Letter to Benefit Students*. Like Dolpopa, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (1382-1444) structures his work as a reflection on the three vows, with one section dedicated to each level of vow.<sup>369</sup> Within that structure he includes a variety of the arguments discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, but, once again, the structure of the text makes clear that for Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo, vegetarianism was a question to be addressed in a monastic context.

At roughly the same time that Karmapa Rolpé Dorjé, Dolpopa and Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo were active, the Nyingma lama Orgyen Lingpa (1323- ?) revealed the *Chronicle of Padma*, a biography of Padmasambhava notable here for containing an edict

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<sup>367</sup> Stearns, *Buddha from Dolpo*, 14.

<sup>368</sup> dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan, *Prohibition*. Mochizuki, “Scriptures.”

<sup>369</sup> kun dga' bzang po, *Letter to Benefit Students*.

purportedly containing rules which the eighth century Emperor Tri Songdetsen (742-796) had promulgated for the monastic community. This text is a *terma*,<sup>370</sup> said to have been composed during the Imperial Period by Tri Songdetsen but then intentionally hidden, only to be revealed centuries later by a pre-destined *tertön*,<sup>371</sup> in this case Orgyen Lingpa.<sup>372</sup> As such, *The Chronicle of Padma* cannot be used as reliable evidence for vegetarianism during the Tibetan Imperial Period. It can, however, be used to illuminate attitudes current in the fourteenth century, when it was revealed. In the edict, we find instructions for monks, including rules concerning diet, “For thirst, monks should only drink milk and tea. For food, they may eat grain, molasses, honey and cheese. ... They may not consume black, polluted foods like beer and meat.”<sup>373</sup>

More interesting for this investigation into the connections between meat and monasticism, however, is the passage immediately following this one. The author, again writing in Tri Songdetsen’s voice, gives advice to ‘mantrins,’ so called because of their reliance on *mantras* and other elements of tantric practice.<sup>374</sup> Like monks, mantrins are religious professionals, engaging in study, practice and ritual on a full-time basis. Unlike

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<sup>370</sup> Tib: *gter ma*

<sup>371</sup> Tib: *gter ston*

<sup>372</sup> There has been significant discussion of *terma* in modern scholarship. For a traditional understanding of the varieties of *terma* and their revelation, see: Thondup, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*.

For some of the debates that have surrounded the use of *terma* as historical sources, see: Aris, *Hidden Treasures*. Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*. Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*. Terrone, *Householders and Monks*.

<sup>373</sup> o rgyan gling pa, *Chronicle of Padma*, 302. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 144.

*dge 'dun skom du dkar dang ja gsol cig/ zas su bru dang bur sgrang mar thud gsol/ ... chang nag sha dang lhad zas ma sten cig/*

<sup>374</sup> Tib: *sngags pa*

monks, however, mantrins do not take monastic vows and can marry and have children.<sup>375</sup>

As with his advice to monks, the author of the *Chronicle of Padma* comments on dietary matters for mantrins, declaring, “Mantrins ... can eat whatever they enjoy, as long as it is not poison.”<sup>376</sup> While monks are explicitly told to abandon meat, mantrins are allowed to eat whatever they want. For Orgyen Lingpa, it seems, vegetarianism was something required of monastics, but not of other types of religious practitioners.

It is important to acknowledge that vegetarianism was not exclusively associated with monasticism during this time. *The Blue Annals*, for instance, recounts two individuals, Jamyang Gönpö (1208- ?) and Orgyenpa Rinchen Pal (1229-1309), who maintained a vegetarian diet during extended periods of retreat.<sup>377</sup> For these individuals, and presumably others, vegetarianism was a practice associated with periods of intensive religious practice, rather than one associated with monastic vows. Further, Namka Gyeltsen’s (1370-1433) biographical prefix to *Machik’s Complete Explanation*, claims that the non-celibate female practitioner Machik Labdrön (1055-1149) was vegetarian.<sup>378</sup> Assuming this is true, it provides evidence that vegetarianism was at least occasionally practiced among those who were not ordained.

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<sup>375</sup> For more about the distinction between monks and mantrins, see: Terrone, *Householders and Monks*, and Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*.

<sup>376</sup> o rgyan gling pa, *Chronicle of Padma*, 302. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, 144.  
zas su ci dgar longs spyod dug ma za/

<sup>377</sup> ‘gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 794, 818. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 677, 699.

<sup>378</sup> ma gcig lab sgron, *Explaining the Meaning of Chö*, 34. Machik Labdron, *Machik’s Complete Explanation*, 68.

So far, this chapter has been considering, almost exclusively, texts composed prior to the eighteenth century. And despite these few examples to the contrary, almost all references to vegetarianism from this time are connected, to one degree or another, with the practice of monasticism. This begins to change, however, in the mid-eighteenth century. While the connection between vegetarianism and monasticism never fully goes away, we do start to see individuals from that time adopting and arguing for vegetarianism outside of a monastic context.

Perhaps the most important instigator of this shift was Jigmé Lingpa. While Jigmé Lingpa (1730-1798) took monk's vows early in his life, he quickly abandoned them and adopted the mantrin lifestyle typical of tertöns such as himself.<sup>379</sup> As discussed earlier, Jigmé Lingpa wrote several texts extolling vegetarianism. In these works, Jigmé Lingpa critiques meat from a variety of perspectives, including assertions that meat is incompatible with monasticism.<sup>380</sup> More commonly, however, Jigmé Lingpa critiques meat-based on its incompatibility with the principle of compassion, often invoking emotional scenes of animal suffering.<sup>381</sup> By focusing on the incompatibility of meat with the idea of compassion rather than on monastic rules, Jigmé Lingpa extends the range of potential vegetarians to include mantrins such as himself.

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<sup>379</sup> For more information on the connections between non-celibate Tantric practice and terma revelation, see:

Jacoby, *To Be or Not to Be Celibate*

Terrone, *Householders and Monks*

Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations, etc.*

<sup>380</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 111. 'jigs med gling pa, *Chariot of the Two Truths*, vol 1, 348.

<sup>381</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Chariot of the Two Truths*, vol 1, 348-349.

Jigmé Lingpa's disciple Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu (1765-1842) also provides a key insight into the shift away from the association of vegetarianism exclusively with monasticism. Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu was a monk, but his conversion to vegetarianism did not occur when he took ordination but came after watching a nomadic couple slaughter a sheep for him.<sup>382</sup> For Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu, vegetarianism was a response to an emotionally powerful act of violence towards an animal, rather than a consideration of the conduct appropriate for a monk.

Similarly, Shabkar (1781-1851) does not adopt vegetarianism at the time of his ordination. Instead, his conversion is also prompted by the sight of sheep lined up for slaughter in Lhasa.<sup>383</sup> Shabkar was a monk, though he also wore the long hair typical of a mantrin and recalls teasing people who were uncertain of his status.<sup>384</sup> Like Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu, Shabkar's vegetarianism, however, was a separate consideration from his ordination.

At the same time, however, it is worth noting that Shabkar never completely drops the connection between vegetarianism and monasticism. Towards the end of his *Autobiography*, for instance, he sums up his own adherence to the rules for monks by noting his abstention from meat, garlic, onions and alcohol.<sup>385</sup> Thus, while Shabkar's primary argument against meat lies in what he perceives to be a contradiction between

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<sup>382</sup> Anonymous, *Biography of Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu*, 69-70.

<sup>383</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 201a-201b. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 232.

<sup>384</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 311b-312a. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 359.

<sup>385</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 480b. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 541.

the compassion that is required of all Buddhists—regardless of ordination status—and a meat-based diet, he retains a sense that being vegetarian is part of being a good monk.

Texts from nineteenth and twentieth century Kham further confirm the emergence of vegetarianism outside of the monastic context. Nyakla Pema Dūdül (1816–1873), for instance, was a mantrin, rather than an ordained monk, and adopted vegetarianism following a visionary encounter in which the deity Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, berated him for eating meat. In his text recounting this encounter, *Advice for Abandoning Meat*, Avalokiteśvara’s arguments against meat are based squarely on the principle of compassion with no mention of monastic vows.<sup>386</sup>

A half century later, we find another non-monastic vegetarian in the figure of the female tertön and non-celibate practitioner Sera Khandro (1892–1940). While the sources concerning Sera Khandro’s vegetarianism provide few details, we know from her *Autobiography* that she was a vegetarian for most of her adult life.<sup>387</sup> Thus, while she never explains the reasons and circumstances surrounding her vegetarianism, her non-celibate status makes clear that the diet is unrelated to monastic vows.

The presence of such non-monastic vegetarians, however, does not mean that the old association between vegetarianism and monasticism disappears during this period. Rigzin Garwang’s (1858–1930) *The Faults of Eating Meat*, for instance, structures its discussion of meat around the three vows.<sup>388</sup> That is, like Dolpopa and Ngorchen Kunga

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<sup>386</sup> nyag bla padma bdud ‘dul, *Advice*. Nyala Pema Duddul, “Song of Advice.”

<sup>387</sup> se ra mkha’ ‘dro, *Autobiography*, 130–131, 356. Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 56, 295.

<sup>388</sup> rig ‘dzin gar dbang, *Faults of Eating Meat*.

Zangpo, Rigzin Garwang's text systematically explores the faults of meat according to each of the three systems of vows monks take, suggesting that for him, vegetarianism was a question of adherence to vows.

Several vegetarian lamas from this period also repeated the old pattern of adopting vegetarianism at the time of monastic ordination. Ngawang Lekpa's (1864-1941) *Biography*, for instance, recalls that while he was inspired to give up meat by the sight of sheep being slaughtered, his actual adoption of vegetarianism coincided with his ordination.<sup>389</sup> Ngawang Lekpa's story thus blends both the emotional response to animal suffering seen in the biographies of Jigmé Lingpa, Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu and Shabkar with the association between vegetarianism and monastic vows seen in the biographies of earlier figures.

Similarly, at the time of his ordination as a monk, the Bön lama Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen also renounced eating any meat that had not died naturally, as well as wearing clothes made of hide and even riding horses.<sup>390</sup> Shardza's *Vinaya* commentary also argues meat is inappropriate for monks, concluding, "Monks must abandon meat, that food for demons."<sup>391</sup> Nor was Shardza the only Bön monk to adopt vegetarianism in conjunction with his monastic vows. When Kechok Rangdröl Rangrik (1904-1996) took ordination at the age of thirty-three, he abandoned meat, alcohol, and even tea.<sup>392</sup> Other vegetarians

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<sup>389</sup> kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Life of Ngawang Lekpa*, 9.

<sup>390</sup> dbra ston skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Biography of Shardza*, 122-123.

<sup>391</sup> shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, 261.  
rab tu byung bas sdig can bdud kyi kha zas sha ni mi bza' ba spang dgos pa

<sup>392</sup> 'jam dpal dpa' bo rdo rje rtsal, *History of Makser Bön Lineage*, 126.

from this lineage were not monks, however, making it is clear that vegetarianism was not purely a monastic phenomena. Still, the fact that Kechok Rangdröl Rangrik adopted vegetarianism at the time he took his vows indicates that for Bön lamas of his lineage, some connection between vegetarianism and monasticism remained.

Finally, one of the clearest indications of the continued importance of this association comes from the memoirs of Tülku Urgyen Rinpoché (1920-1996). Tülku Urgyen recalls three vegetarians among his teachers. All three, Karmé Khenpo (1835-19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), Samten Gyatso (1881-1945) and Sangngak Rinpoché (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> C) were also fully ordained monks. Tülku Urgyen himself, however, was neither a monk nor a vegetarian. In explaining his decision not to ordain, he connects these two:

The reason I didn't take ordination at that time or any time after was simply that I didn't trust that I could keep the vows. Not only did Samten Gyatso never touch women, he never even touched meat or liquor. Uncle Sangngak was not different. If you take monk's vows, you should keep them pure, like my uncles or like Karmé Khenpo. I have great respect for anyone who does so, but not for the half-hearted renunciate so common nowadays.<sup>393</sup>

For Tülku Urgyen, being vegetarian was part of being a pure monk, as opposed to a 'half-hearted renunciate.' As a non-celibate mantrin, however, Tülku Urgyen clearly felt that he was in a different category, and that vegetarianism was not compulsory,

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This is the only instance I have come across where tea is abandoned alongside meat and alcohol.

<sup>393</sup> Tülku Urgyen, *Blazing Splendor*, 198.



echoing the position seen in earlier texts such as the *Chronicle of Padma*, where vegetarianism was prescribed for monks but not for mantrins.

Thus, despite the emergence of this practice among non-monastic practitioners over the last two and a half centuries, the connections between vegetarianism and monasticism remain strong during this period: several figures adopt vegetarianism at the same time as they take ordination, works such as Shardza's *Distinguishing the Three Vows* clearly claim that meat is forbidden for monks, and Tülku Urgyen's memoirs suggest that he, at least, felt that vegetarianism was a practice for monks but not for mantrins.

That said, the preceding account should not give the impression that all, or even most, monks were vegetarian during this time. As discussed in chapter one, most of the available sources that mention vegetarianism only refer to the practice as adopted by elite practitioners and offer few insights into the dietary practices of rank and file monks. Even the *Vinaya* commentaries and customaries that ostensibly govern monastic conduct do not allow us to reach firm conclusions about the number of monks who practiced vegetarianism. Given the available evidence, it seems unlikely that rates of vegetarianism among monks would have ever been high. More likely, the practice remained an ideal that was widely admired but only actually practiced by a minority of individuals.

It is also worth noting that there is no record of nuns who adopted vegetarianism. This may be due to the paucity of biographies and other sources written by female monastics, or it may reflect a broader conception that advanced religious practices belonged to the sphere of male monasticism but not to female. Sara Jacoby has

highlighted the secondary status female monastics held in Tibetan culture, pointing out that while women could achieve high status in religious circles, such achievements were relatively rare and often involved non-celibate practice.<sup>394</sup> Indeed, the only two female vegetarians I am aware of prior to the late twentieth century, Machik Labdrön and Sera Khandro (1892-1940), were both non-celibate practitioners.<sup>395</sup> With that said, many nuns in contemporary Kham have adopted vegetarianism. Thus, without more biographies of female monastics from earlier eras, it remains impossible to decide whether the apparent lack of female monastic vegetarianism prior to the present generation represents an actual lacunae in the practice of vegetarianism or simply a lack of evidence.

## Meat & Vows

These longstanding connections between monasticism and vegetarianism are striking because the *Vinaya* rules followed by Tibetan monks explicitly *allow* monks to eat meat if certain conditions are met. That is, those monks mentioned above, and presumably many others whose vegetarianism has gone unrecorded, adopted the practice despite, rather than because of, the basic rules for monks. Instead, I will show that vegetarian monks are drawing on concepts more properly associated with the Bodhisattva vow—a call to compassion for all beings that supersedes the *Vinaya* rules—to justify their

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<sup>394</sup> Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*.

<sup>395</sup> ma gcig lab sgron, *Explaining the Meaning of Chö*, 34. Machik Labdron, *Machik's Complete Explanation*, 68. se ra mkha' 'dro, *Autobiography*, 130-131, 356. Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 56, 295.

diet. Vegetarianism thus became a way for monks to practice compassion in a way that exceeded the minimal requirements of monasticism, effectively positioning themselves as a kind of monk-par-excellence, even more committed to the renunciatory life than necessary.

In order to understand this process, it is necessary to examine the types of vows adopted by Tibetan monks and the place of meat in each. Speaking broadly, most Tibetan monks adopt three sets of vows, those of Śrāvakas, Bodhisattvas and Tantric practitioners, each of which corresponds to a specific type of Buddhist practice in Tibetan doxographical schemes.

The vows associated with the vehicle of the Śrāvakas are focused primarily on the *Vinaya*, the official rules for monks and nuns.<sup>396</sup> These vows are generally undertaken in two stages, first as a novice, and then as a fully ordained monk.<sup>397</sup> At the novice level, ten vows are included, including the vow of celibacy and vows not to kill, steal, lie or consume intoxicants. When a monk becomes fully ordained, the number of vows increases dramatically, to two-hundred and fifty-three.<sup>398</sup> Many of these vows, however, such as the vow not to touch money, seem to have been considered relatively minor and

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<sup>396</sup> The Sanskrit term Śrāvakas literally means listener, referring to those who listened to the Buddha's teachings. In Tibetan doxographies, Śrāvakas are generally mapped onto the Hīnayāna, or lesser vehicle, but one should be careful in interpreting these doxographical schemas as if they refer to contemporary non-Mahāyāna Buddhists, such as the Theravāda of Southeast Asia.

<sup>397</sup> The full ordination lineage for nuns died out in Tibet many centuries ago. Since then, there have been no fully ordained nuns, only novices.

<sup>398</sup> All lineages of Tibetan Buddhism that I am aware of follow the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. For more information on the history of the transmission of this lineage to Tibet, see Berzin, "History of Mulasarvastivada Ordination Lineages in Tibet."

were routinely ignored by almost all Tibetan monks.<sup>399</sup> In Tibetan doxographies, Śrāvakas are said to practice Buddhism for their own benefit, to remove their own suffering. This self-interested motivation also extends to the vows undertaken at this level, so that Śrāvakas who undertake monastic vows do so in order to free themselves of suffering.

According to the vows of a Śrāvaka, as contained in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* followed by Tibetan monks, monks are allowed to eat meat, but only if it meets the requirements of threefold purity. As detailed in the first chapter of this dissertation, this rule was originally promulgated by the Buddha, in response to criticism by a group of non-Buddhist ascetics. As recounted in full previously, the Buddha and his monks were invited to a meal by Sengé, an army general. In preparation for the meal, but without the Buddha's knowledge, Sengé slaughters a large animal. Some non-Buddhist ascetics in the area spread the rumor that the Buddha has knowingly eaten meat killed specifically for him. In response, the Buddha formulates the rule of threefold purity, according to which a monk may eat meat as long as they have not seen, heard, or suspected that it has been killed specifically for them.<sup>400</sup>

In a Tibetan context, the standard interpretation of the rule of threefold purity is nicely summarized by Khenpo Shenga (1871-1927), "Meat is not allowed if one has seen,

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<sup>399</sup> I have never read about or personally met a Tibetan monk who refused to touch money, as would be required by a strict interpretation of the *Vinaya*. On the contrary, most monks I have interacted with felt completely comfortable handling money and making purchases with it.

<sup>400</sup> Shakyamuni, *Foundations of the Vinaya*, vol 3, 25a-25b.

heard, or suspected that the meat was prepared by the donor specifically for the eater.”<sup>401</sup>

For most Tibetans this means that meat purchased in a butcher shop, where the butcher has killed the animal for sale, but not *specifically* for the monk, is acceptable, but ordering meat from a butcher is not. Importantly, a monk who begs for food at a house without alerting the owner in advance has a reasonable expectation that any meat put in his bowl was not killed specifically for him and meets the standards of threefold purity.<sup>402</sup>

Such an interpretation of threefold purity, however, has not gone unchallenged by Tibetan authors sympathetic to vegetarianism. As Buddhists, these authors were generally unwilling to say that this rule, understood to be taught by the Buddha himself, is wrong. Instead, they argue that it simply does not apply to monks living in Tibet. This argument generally takes two forms. In the first, the rule of threefold purity is critiqued, not because the rule itself is wrong but because it does not apply to the monastic lifestyle as lived in Tibet. Secondly, some authors claim that while the rule of threefold purity is legitimate for those who follow the Śrāvaka system, it is superseded by the call to compassion found in Mahāyāna scriptures.

A good example of the first position can be found in the *Chariot of the Two Truths*, written by Jigmé Lingpa in 1780.<sup>403</sup> In this work, Jigmé Lingpa provides

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<sup>401</sup> gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba, *Tree of White Lotuses*, 583.

za ba po'i phyir sbyin bdag gis sha bsngos par mthong ba dang thos pa dang dogs pa'i sgo nas shes na bza' bar mi bya'o/

<sup>402</sup> According to *Vinaya* regulations, monks are supposed to beg for their food from house to house on a daily basis, saving nothing for the next day. In Tibet, this was only rarely practiced, and most monks sought after reliable sources of food.

<sup>403</sup> The colophon to this text does not mention a date, but Jigmé Lingpa's *Autobiography* says it was written in 1780. ('jigs med gling pa, *rang rnam* 306)

extensive quotations from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* arguing against meat, including one that claims, “As for meat with threefold purity, there is absolutely none that is unexamined, unrequested and unincited. Therefore, don’t eat meat.”<sup>404</sup> Thus, without saying that the rule itself is mistaken, Jigmé Lingpa nevertheless claims that in real-world situations, it simply doesn’t apply.

This argument is taken further by Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol in his *Nectar of Immortality*, composed during the 1840s. In an extended passage from this text, Shabkar bluntly critiques the doctrine of threefold purity by name, providing one of the longest and most interesting critiques of the applicability of the rule of threefold purity of which I am aware:

In the past, the Buddha and his retinue depended on alms for their food and lived in the forest without a settled abode. They did not hoard food or money and did not engage in commerce. Needless to say, they did not participate in the meat trade. Behaving like this, they were not involved in any wrong livelihood and any [meat] had threefold purity.

Nowadays, monasteries are built in towns, and become even richer than the laypeople! Because of this, butchers come to live nearby, killing because they are certain the monks will buy the meat. And the monks buy as much meat as can be slaughtered. The killers and buyers, working in dependence on each other, directly kill thousands of goats, sheep and other beings.

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<sup>404</sup> jigs med gling pa, *Chariot of the Two Truths*, vol 1, 349.

*rnam gsum dag pa'i sha rnams ni/ ma brtags pa dang ma bslangs dang/ ma bskul ba yang yongs med pas/ de bas sha ni mi bza' o/ zhes gsungs so/*

If this is [meat] with threefold purity and does not involve a fault, then these people must all have gone where everything is all-encompassing purity!<sup>405</sup>

Shabkar invokes the difference between the lifestyle of the Buddha and that seen in Tibetan monasteries to argue that while threefold purity may have applied in its original setting, that is no longer the case in Tibet. In Tibet, where monks do not beg for their daily meal, the rule of threefold purity is simply not relevant, and monks should not eat meat.

Despite such critiques, however, most discussions of *Vinaya* regulations—at least most of those that mention meat at all—continue to maintain that meat is acceptable fare according to the rules of the *Vinaya*, at least under certain circumstances. Even Jigmé Lingpa and Shabkar do not actually say that the rule of threefold purity is wrong, simply that it doesn't apply in a Tibetan context. Thus, even these strident proponents of vegetarianism admit that there are some circumstances when a monk holding Śrāvaka vows is allowed to eat meat. In order to advance their case further, these and other authors argue that while the rule of threefold purity is valid in the context of the vehicle of the Śrāvakas, it is superseded by the Bodhisattva vow, which requires monks to abstain from meat.

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<sup>405</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Nectar of Immortality*, 601. Shabkar, *Food of Bodhisattvas*, 115.  
 sngon sangs rgyas 'khor bcas kyi zas bsod snyoms gnas shing drung ba yin pa'i gnas nges med/ zas nor gyi gsog 'jog  
 dang nyo tshong mi byed pas sha yi nyo tshong mi byed pa smos ci dgos/ de ltar mdzad pa la rnam gsum dag pa zbig  
 ma gtogs log 'tsho 'ong thabs med la/ deng sang grong dgon pa btab/ khyim pa las lhag gi gsog 'jog rgya chen po byas/  
 de'i thag nyer shan pa bsam bzhin sdod du bcug/ shan pas kyang dge 'dun pas sha nyo yong shag byas bsad/ dge 'dun  
 pas kyang bsad nas sha mang po yod shag byas nyos/ gsod mkhan nyo mkhan gnyis ka'i rgyu rkyen la brten nas sems

In addition to their monastic vows, all Tibetan monks take the Bodhisattva vow, signifying entrance to the Mahāyāna vehicle. Someone who takes this vow commits to placing the needs of others before their own and to postponing their own liberation from suffering until all other beings have been freed. As such, according to standard Tibetan interpretations, there is a fundamental difference in motivation between the Śrāvaka vows and that of the Bodhisattva vow. This difference in motivation is so strong that some Tibetan theorists, such as the Sakya master Gorampa (1429-1489), have argued that when someone who holds monastic vows according to the Śrāvaka system then takes the Bodhisattva vow, their vows are actually transformed, becoming Mahāyāna vows.<sup>406</sup> Even in such situations, however, the actual rules and requirements governing conduct remain the same. Thus a monk who takes Bodhisattva vows retains his monastic ordination, and should continue to abide by either the ten or two-hundred-fifty-three vows that come with it, depending on the individual's ordination level.

The Bodhisattva vow requires individuals to subordinate their own interests to those of other beings. Killing out of self interest, such as out of desire for meat, is a clear violation of this principle, and all Tibetan theorists agree that such acts contradict the Bodhisattva vow. As discussed in chapter two of this work, however, there is debate about whether or not purchasing meat in the market is the equivalent of killing the

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*can ra lug brgya stong mang po'i srog mngon sum gcod pa 'di la nyes pa gang yang med/ rnam gsum dag pa yin na thams cad dag pa rab 'byams 'ba' zhig tu song 'dug pas/*

<sup>406</sup> Sobisch, *Three Vow Theories*, 89-91.



animal oneself. Many pro-vegetarian authors echo Jigmé Lingpa when he asserts, “It is laughable to claim there is a difference between the sin of killing and the sin of eating.”<sup>407</sup>

If one accepts the equivalency of killing and eating meat, then it is clear that eating meat is incompatible with the Bodhisattva vow, and several Tibetan authors have arrived at precisely this position. To provide just one example of many, Ngawang Tenzin Norbu (1867-1940) writes, in the context of an extended critique of meat eating, “Specifically, on the path of the Bodhisattvas, one must be the refuge and protector to all beings. We say we will protect these unfortunate beings, but instead of sheltering them, we kill them without mercy.”<sup>408</sup>

Deciding that meat is forbidden, or at least considered sinful, according to the ideal of the Bodhisattva vow, however, directly conflicts with the permissions granted in the Śrāvaka *Vinaya*. Nor is meat the only area where the Bodhisattva vow may conflict with *Vinaya* requirements. The Bodhisattva vow is based on an intention—to benefit others—and it is not hard to see areas where fulfilling that intention might contradict the strict requirements of the *Vinaya*. Extreme examples include the need to kill someone before they can kill others, but there are many similar situations that occur more frequently, such as the need to handle money in order to give it to a beggar. In order to

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<sup>407</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Tale of the Deer*, 759. Jigme Lingpa, *Story of the Hunted Deer*, 7.  
za dang gsod pa’i sdig pa la/ khyad par yod na gad mo bro/

<sup>408</sup> ngag dbang bstan ‘dzin nor bu, *Vase of Amritua*, 100.  
khyad par theg chen byang chub sems pa’i lugs la mtha’ yas pa’i sems can thams cad skyabs dang skyob pa byed dgos  
rgyu la/ bskyab bya’i sems can las ngan can de la snying rje med par bsad nas/ skyob byed du khas blangs pa

deal with such contradictions between the vows, Tibetan authors developed theories delineating the relationships between the various vows.

The literature associated with these theories, known as *three-vow* theory, addresses several questions about the nature of the three vows.<sup>409</sup> We have already seen several works with the words ‘three vows’ in their title, since such texts often provide commentary on the rules of each individual vow. Several passages cited above that deal with the question of threefold purity, for example, come from texts included in the three-vow genre. In addition to providing these details about the individual vows, however, many such works discuss three-vow theory more broadly, exploring and explaining the relationships between each set of vows, as well as how individual people should relate to the vows as a complete set of three. Among the various debates contained in such works, we can find diverse opinions on such scholastic questions such as whether the three vows coexist or not, as well as whether they share the same nature, or are fundamentally different.<sup>410</sup>

While Tibetan theorists disagree on the precise nature of the relationship between the various vows, there is general agreement that the vows are hierarchical. That is, because of its superior intention, the Bodhisattva vow supersedes the *Vinaya* in importance, and because of their superior view, the tantric samayas supersede the Bodhisattva vow. Thus, in cases where strict adherence to the *Vinaya* rules would entail

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<sup>409</sup> Tib: *sdom gsum*

<sup>410</sup> These debates are somewhat outside the scope of this present work. For a full discussion of these topics according to various three vow theories from different periods in Tibetan history, see Sobisch, *Three Vow Theories in Tibetan Buddhism* (Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2002).

an individual breaking his Bodhisattva vows, the individual is expected to follow the Bodhisattva vow. In his *Clearly Distinguishing the Three Vows*, Sakya Paṇḍita (1180-1251) used meat eating as an example illustrating this principle, “Śrāvakas may eat meat that has threefold purity. To refuse would be the conduct of Devadatta. In the Mahāyāna, meat is repudiated. Eating it is said to be the cause of birth in the lower realms.”<sup>411</sup> As the Bodhisattva vow is superior to the Śrāvaka vows, those who have taken it are not allowed to eat meat, even though such a diet is appropriate for Śrāvaka monks.

Such a view is given canonical grounding in a passage from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, where meat is proscribed for Mahāyāna practitioners, in explicit contrast to the Śrāvakas, whose consumption of meat is allowed, if only grudgingly:

O Mahamati, you may believe that I have permitted [eating meat], or that I have permitted it for those Śrāvakas who are near to me. But, I have condemned the eating of meat for those who live in charnel grounds and who perform the yoga of dwelling in love, those sons and daughters of my lineage who have correctly entered the Mahāyāna and who consider all beings to be their only child.<sup>412</sup>

This passage has been cited repeatedly by pro-vegetarian authors, including Dolpopa, Jigmé Lingpa and Shabkar. These authors argue, based on both three-vow

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<sup>411</sup> kun dga' rgyal btshan, *Distinguishing the Three Vows*, 34. Sakya Paṇḍita Kūnga Gyaltsen, *A Clear Differentiation*, 66.

*nyan thos rnam gsum dag pa'i sha/ bza' rung gal te mi za na/ lbas byin gyi ni brtul zbugs 'gyur/ theg pa che las sha rnam bkaḡ/ zos na ngan 'gro'i rgyu ru gsungs/*

<sup>412</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 156a-156b.

*blo gros chen po gal te ngas gnang bar bya bar 'dod dam/ nga'i nyan thos rnam kyis bsnyen par rung ba zhig yin na ni/ byams pas gnas pa'i rnal 'byor can dur khrod pa rnam dang/ theg pa chen po la yang dag par zhugs pa'i rigs kyi bu dang/ rigs kyi bu mo rnam la sems can thams cad bu gcig bzhi du 'du shes bsgom pa'i phyir sha thams cad za ba gcod par yang byas so/*

theory and scriptural authority, that because meat is forbidden in the Mahāyāna, the permissions granted by the *Vinaya* are effectively irrelevant, as they are superseded by the Bodhisattva vow.

Finally, all—or almost all—Tibetan monks receive ritual initiations into one or more tantric practice lineages.<sup>413</sup> With these initiations they undertake tantric vows, or *samayas*.<sup>414</sup> Among most enumerations of samaya vows is a requirement that vow-holders ritually consume meat—as well as other impure substances such as feces, semen and blood—in the context of a ritual food offering to the tantric deities. At least in certain ritual contexts, therefore, tantric vows actually require the consumption of meat. Most commonly, this occurs during collective food offering rituals, where participants gather and ceremonially offer food to the tantric deities, including the five meats. These five meats—human, cow, dog, elephant and horse—were all considered unclean and not suitable for consumption in India, where the tantric feast ritual originates.<sup>415</sup> Eating these unclean meats, therefore, was a particularly powerful way of violating social taboos and demonstrating the primordial purity of the substances themselves.<sup>416</sup>

Above, we saw how Tibetan three-vow theories indicate that the Bodhisattva vows supersede *Vinaya* requirements. The same principle also holds that the samayas supersede the Bodhisattva vow and is invoked in order to explain why meat is acceptable

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<sup>413</sup> For a good introduction to tantric principles in general, see David Gordon White's introduction to *Tantra in Practice* (3–36).

<sup>414</sup> Tib: *dam tshig*

<sup>415</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 322. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 207.

in this context. Thus, lamas who are otherwise staunch vegetarians are willing to consume meat in the context of the feast offering ritual. Even Shabkar, who regularly critiques meat in the strongest terms, was willing to eat meat in the context of the feast offering.<sup>417</sup>

At the same time, however, the superior status of tantric samayas does not fully release individual practitioners from the strictures of the lower vows. Just as Tibetan theorists are united in their opinion that higher vows supersede lower vows, they also agree that when the vows are not in contradiction the lower vows remain in effect. Sobisch notes that Ācārya Marpo (circa 11<sup>th</sup> century), one early theorist who did assert that adherence to tantric vows removed any requirement to act in accordance with the *Vinaya*, was roundly criticized by later theorists.<sup>418</sup>

Thus, while higher vows supersede lower vows in cases of conflict, the lower vows remain in effect when there is no conflict. Outside of specifically tantric situations (such as the feast offering), therefore, pro-vegetarian authors assert that meat eating should be governed by the Bodhisattva vow, in line with standard versions of three-vow theory. Thus, as we have seen previously, Patrül Rinpoché (1808-1887) is able to claim that instead of being a Tantric requirement, eating meat under normal circumstances actually violates Tantric vows, “Eating [the five meats] wantonly in towns, because you are attached to the taste of meat, is the fault known as, ‘behaving carelessly with the samaya

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<sup>416</sup> Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 122.

<sup>417</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 389a. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 449.

<sup>418</sup> Sobisch, *Three Vow Theories*, 13-14.

of consumption”<sup>419</sup> Thus, for Patrül and other lamas sympathetic to vegetarianism, it is clear that while the tantric samayas do require the consumption of meat, this does not give tantric practitioners license to eat meat however they please. Indeed, both Patrül and Shabkar routinely mock those lamas they see as abusing their tantric samayas by claiming to be eating meat as a tantric rite, while actually being motivated only by desire.

As should be clear at this point, the consumption of meat is involved in a complicated web of vows and obligations taken by monks. In order to resolve this apparent conflict between the various vows, many pro-vegetarian Tibetan authors invoke the doctrine that higher vows supersede lower. All sources agree that the *Vinaya* does allow monks to eat meat that passes the test of threefold purity (this remains true even though some, such as Shabkar and Jigmé Lingpa, doubt that any meat available in Tibet does pass this test). At the same time the compassion required by the Bodhisattva vow supersedes the *Vinaya*'s permissions.<sup>420</sup> Thus, according to these authors, Tibetan monks should never eat meat, as the Bodhisattva vow supersedes the *Vinaya*. The specific requirements of tantric samayas supersede the Bodhisattva vow, however, so that in specific ritual contexts, meat is not only permissible, but required. Outside of these specific contexts, however, the samayas do not require meat consumption, and the Bodhisattva vow remains in effect. Thus, through invoking the hierarchical nature of the

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<sup>419</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 323. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 208.  
*sha'i ro la sred pas grong yul du bag med du zos na/ dang /blang gi dam tshig bag med du spyad pa zhes bya ste/ de yang 'gal/*

<sup>420</sup> Figures explicitly making this argument include Sakya Pandita, Dolpopa, Ngorchon Künga Zangpo, Jigmé Lingpa, and Shabkar.

three vows, these pro-vegetarian authors arrive at a position where vegetarianism should be the norm for monks, while meat is permitted in the specific context of the ritual feast.

## A Good Monk

We should now have the tools to begin to address the question at the heart of this chapter: why is the connection between monasticism and vegetarianism so strong when the *Vinaya*, the monastic code, specifically allows meat to be consumed as long as it meets the test of threefold purity? As we have seen, there is no blanket proscription of meat in the *Vinaya*. Instead, it is specifically allowed, as long as the monk in question has not been personally involved in the death of the animal. And yet, numerous figures throughout Tibetan history have argued that monks should not eat meat, while others have exemplified this connection by abandoning meat at the same time as they took monastic vows.

In making these arguments, however, these authors are not drawing on the *Vinaya*, but rather on concepts associated with the Bodhisattva vow. That is, monks should avoid meat not because it is forbidden by the monastic code, but because it conflicts with the ideals of the Bodhisattva vow, which supersedes that code in importance. As we have seen, several authors made this explicit, admitting that Śrāvakas—those monks without Bodhisattva vows—are permitted to eat meat, but that anyone who has taken the Bodhisattva vow may not. The association between monasticism and vegetarianism, therefore, was not about the formal monastic regulations

but rather was derived from the fact that all Tibetan monks have also taken the Bodhisattva vow, which supersedes their monastic vows in cases of conflict between the two. In a very real sense, then, those monks who adopted vegetarianism at the time of their ordination and those who argued that monks should not eat meat were responding to a higher calling than the *Vinaya* code.

It is worth remembering here that vegetarians were a small minority of Tibet's monastic population. The vast majority of monks ate meat whenever it was available, presumably with little or no consideration of its moral or ethical implications. Adopting vegetarianism, therefore, was a way for monks to distinguish themselves from the majority of their peers. Moreover, it was a way to distinguish themselves that had obvious connections with the ideals of the Bodhisattva vow. A monk who adopted vegetarianism was not simply abiding by the baseline rules of the *Vinaya*, the basic code all monks are expected to adhere to, but was motivated by the Bodhisattva vow. This would not only set them apart from their peers, but also set them above their peers, at least implicitly.

There is also ample evidence that monks who adopted vegetarianism were considered different and superior to their peers in practice, as well as in theory. In this context, it is worth repeating Tülku Urgyen's explanation for why he never took monastic vows himself:

The reason I didn't take ordination at that time or any time after was simply that I didn't trust that I could keep the vows. Not only did Samten Gyatso never touch women, he never even touched meat or



liquor. Uncle Sangngak was not different. If you take monk's vows, you should keep them pure, like my uncles or like Karmé Khenpo. I have great respect for anyone who does so, but not for the half-hearted renunciate so common nowadays. Maybe it was my lack of pure perception, but I didn't see that many pure monks even then.<sup>421</sup>

For Tülku Urgyen, the vegetarianism, teetotaling, and strict celibacy of these three figures clearly separated them from the general monastic population, establishing them as exemplars of proper monastic conduct. If he was not going to be able to live up to this standard, he felt, it was better not to become a monk at all.

A similar sentiment can be seen in the oral histories surrounding some lesser known lamas from recent generations in Kham. During the summer of 2010, I was repeatedly told about a monk named Lagen Kama (? -1959 or 1960) who used to live in the vicinity of Palpung Monastery, near Degé. Among other qualities, Lagen Kama was a vegetarian. Lagen Kama did not leave a written biography, but his story was well known to the monks of Palpung Monastery fifty years after his death. Further, his vegetarianism was significant enough to be included in the oral tradition stories that were told about him, indicating both that vegetarianism was not terribly widespread during his time and that others were impressed by Lagen Kama's adoption of the practice. As with Tülku Urgyen's attitude towards his uncles, it is clear that Lagen Kama's peers respected and admired his practice of vegetarianism.

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<sup>421</sup> Tülku Urgyen, *Blazing Splendor*, 198.

For monks, vegetarianism was less about strict adherence to the monastic code than about adherence to the Bodhisattva ideal. By adopting vegetarianism, a monk could assert—and publicly display—their adherence to the higher ideals of the Bodhisattva vow. This would, in effect, separate them from the more conventional diets and lifestyles of the majority of their peers. If monks, broadly defined, are those who adhere to the *Vinaya* regulations, then vegetarianism was one means for an individual to distinguish himself from the broader community of monks and to define himself as a Bodhisattva.

## Monasticism and Masculinity

The superiority of the Bodhisattva vow over the *Vinaya* helps explain the role of vegetarianism within a monastic context, but it does not explain why vegetarianism was so often associated with monks, but not other religious professionals. Mantrins, for instance, also take the Bodhisattva vow. And yet we have seen the fourteenth century *Chronicle of Padma* forbid meat to monks, while allowing it for mantrins. In the twentieth century, Tülku Urgyen linked his decision to not become a monk with his inability to give up meat, suggesting that while monks should be vegetarian, mantrins such as himself had no such requirement.

In order to account for this division, it is helpful to return to the discussion of taming begun in the previous chapter of this dissertation. There, we saw that meat eating carried strong associations with physical strength, and was thereby implicated in a vision of masculinity that celebrated physical, even heroic, strength and the ability to dominate

others. Buddhism, in turn, functioned to tame such ideals, shifting individuals' and communities' relationships with animals towards the compassionate ideal espoused by Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics.

In many ways, monks are the embodiment of this process, at least ideally.<sup>422</sup> This is suggested by the terms themselves: as noted previously, the Tibetan term for taming, *dulwa*, is also used to translate the Sanskrit term *Vinaya*, the term for the monastic code. In "The Body of a Nun," Charlene Makley has noted that monks are often defined by their rejection of traits paradigmatic of masculinity, most prominently marriage and the begetting of progeny. For the Tibetans she studied, producing a family is the quintessential act of a lay Tibetan man. By renouncing heterosexual sex, monks separate themselves from traditional understandings of masculine identity. It was this act of separation that defined an individual as a monastic, rather than a lay person.<sup>423</sup>

This does not mean that becoming a monk is emasculating. Makley identifies other male-gendered traits, such as wisdom and mental fortitude, that are enhanced by their association with monasticism.<sup>424</sup> As Makley explains, "monkhood was not fundamentally a repudiation of masculinity, but the renunciation of those aspects of lay manhood that were most seen to hinder progress on the path, i.e. heterosexuality and

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<sup>422</sup> It is important to recognize that not all Tibetan monks adhere to the renunciant ideal to the same degree. As Makley notes, Tibetan monasticism, particularly in large monasteries, was designed to allow those who chose to fully refine their masculine tendencies, while offering supporting roles to those not so inclined. (Violence of Liberation, 246)

<sup>423</sup> Makley, "The Body of a Nun," 271-272.

<sup>424</sup> Makley, "The Body of a Nun," 270.

responsibilities for the household.”<sup>425</sup> By ordaining, therefore, monks could promote or enhance some aspects of their masculine identity, at the same time as downplaying others.

Not only are monks characterized by their rejection of heterosexual sex and family life, this act of renunciation is also a key source of their ritual power and authority. As Makley observes in *The Violence of Liberation*, monks derive, “great ritual and moral power” from the act of taming their sexual urges.<sup>426</sup> Monastic ordination, therefore, rather than being a rejection of masculine identity, in fact serves to refocus and channel an individual’s masculinity. Makley makes this point nicely, noting a “widespread assumption that the passage to monkhood was an essential means by which the explosive potential of heroic masculinity could be channelled and refined.”<sup>427</sup>

If we return to the language of taming, we can say that monks are those who have tamed their masculinity, bringing its power—or at least potential power—to the service of religious ends. In effect, by taking ordination, monks turn the sexual and violent impulses that characterize lay masculine identity into the mental strength and power understood to characterize monastic masculinity. Monks, in effect, represent the idealized form of tamed Buddhism: powerful, but with that power directed towards religious ends.

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<sup>425</sup> Makley, “The Body of a Nun,” 275.

<sup>426</sup> Makley, *Violence of Liberation*, 193.

<sup>427</sup> Makley, *Violence of Liberation*, 243.

Vegetarianism aligns well with this vision. As we saw in the previous chapter, meat is associated with physical strength, and through that association is involved in those visions of masculinity that celebrate such strength. Vegetarianism, on the other hand, is associated with tamed forms of Buddhism that prioritize mental strength. As such, it fits well with the vision of monasticism presented here, where the masculine potential for physical power is tamed and directed towards mental strength. Vegetarianism is clearly not a necessary component of the monastic lifestyle, as most monks continued to eat meat after their ordination. The ideals encapsulated by vegetarianism, however, fit well with the ideals and social role of monastics.

If monks derive their power from the renunciation of sex and the taming of their masculinity, the same is not necessarily true of mantrins. Most obviously, mantrins are not celibate; they are able to marry and have families. As we saw above, celibacy is the single key factor distinguishing monks and laymen. With no pretense towards celibacy, mantrins are in a fundamentally different category.

Further, just as monks derive authority and ritual power from their celibacy, mantrins derive power from their sexual activity. Such sexual activity is said to fulfill a variety of religious goals, but these all hinge on sex's ability to release energy blocks in the subtle body.<sup>428</sup> According to tantric models of the body, it is pervaded by a series of energy channels. Through the proper performance of sexual practices, blocks in these

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<sup>428</sup> Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 222.

channels can be released and their latent power harnessed.<sup>429</sup> In this way, mantrins derive a portion of their perceived ritual power from the very thing that monks renounce.

Mantrins are also distinguished from monks through the avenues through which they exercise this ritual power, with mantrins being frequently associated with the performance of violent, exorcistic rituals. Admittedly, this distinction is less clear than the question of celibacy, as monks also frequently perform wrathful, violent rituals and mantrins frequently engage in peaceful rituals. Nevertheless, Nicolas Sihlé has noted that in popular conception mantrins tend to be associated with violent, wrathful rituals more than monks.<sup>430</sup> This observation aligns with my own field experience, where informants tended to associate mantrins with the violent exercise of ritual power and monks with study and other non-violent forms of ritual and mental power. There is significant overlap between these two spheres, but on a general level, this distinction persists.

Above, I have argued that vegetarianism maps closely onto the model of celibate monasticism. Vegetarianism is quintessentially a tamed practice, and monks embody tamed Buddhism. Mantrins, on the other hand, occupy a more ambiguous position with respect to tamed Buddhist ideals. They are Buddhist practitioners, but their celebration of the power that comes with sexuality and their emphasis on wrathful ritual also draws on themes more closely associated with Tibet's untamed religious spheres. As such, vegetarianism does not map as well onto mantrins as it does onto monks.

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<sup>429</sup> Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 222.

<sup>430</sup> Sihlé, "The Ala and Ngakpa Priestly Traditions," 157-158.

In practice, of course, things are not as neat as this model would suggest. As I noted previously, there have been several mantrins closely associated with vegetarianism, especially after the eighteenth century. Jigmé Lingpa, in particular, played a pivotal role in the later spread of vegetarianism, helping to turn it from a practice restricted to monks to a practice available to all. Still, despite such important outliers, we have seen a broad pattern emerge in which monks are associated with tamed masculinity while mantrins are not, or at least are less so. In such a model, vegetarianism aligns much more closely with monasticism, helping to explain the persistent association of vegetarianism with monks, rather than mantrins.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen a persistent connection between vegetarianism and the practice of monasticism in Tibet, despite the fact that the *Vinaya*, the rules for monks, allows monks to eat meat so long as they are not personally responsible for the death of the animal. This relationship was seen in the biographies of monks who adopted vegetarianism at the time of their ordination, as well in texts that explicitly claim that monks should not eat meat. Further, this relationship persisted throughout the history of vegetarianism in Tibet, from its first appearances in the eleventh century through the present. For long periods, in fact, vegetarianism in Tibet seems to have been an almost exclusively monastic phenomenon.

And yet there is no denying that the rules for monks explicitly allow the consumption of meat. Instead of finding the root of the connection between vegetarianism and monasticism in the *Vinaya*, therefore, we must look to the ideals of compassion incorporated into the Bodhisattva vow. It was on the basis of that vow—adopted by all Tibetan monks alongside the *Vinaya*—that most pro-vegetarian authors based their claim that monks should avoid meat. Drawing on this discourse, a minority of monks adopted the practice of vegetarianism, despite the personal hardships it entailed, and thereby distinguished themselves from the larger body of monks. Thus, vegetarianism became one marker of an individual's exemplary conduct, effectively marking them as a superior form of monastic.

Further, monasticism involved the taming of those aspects of masculinity opposed to religious ideals. Primarily, this consists of the renunciation of marriage and family life. Meat eating, however, as a masculine practice opposed to religious ideals, also fits this pattern of taming and renunciation, aligning vegetarianism with broader conceptions of what it meant to be a monk. In contrast, vegetarianism did not fit as well for lay practitioners such as mantrins, who were not expected to renounce family life or other aspects of masculine identity. Vegetarianism, therefore, was frequently connected to monasticism, but not to those without ordination, even if they were religious professionals expected to adhere to the Bodhisattva vow.



## Chapter 5

### The Search for Legitimacy

The previous three chapters have highlighted vegetarianism's association with idealized forms of religious practice, particularly monasticism. Such a diet demonstrated an individual's adherence to the Bodhisattva ideal and tamed, monastic religiosity. As this suggests, vegetarianism was a powerful way for individuals to display and cultivate religious legitimacy. Such legitimacy—a popular perception that the individual was motivated by religious goals, rather than economic gain, political power or other worldly aims—was crucial in the cultivation of disciples and patrons, making vegetarianism a practice capable of impacting the development of a religious leader's success in propagating their lineage.

In this, the final chapter of this dissertation, I will address the role of vegetarianism in developing religious legitimacy. In order to do this, I will specifically focus on vegetarianism in nineteenth and early twentieth century Kham. As noted in the first chapter, vegetarianism flourished during this time, achieving a level of popularity that seems to have been greater than at any time prior to the present. I will argue that three points are key to this popularity: the turbulent political and religious environment

in Kham at this time, the increasing importance given to monastic practice, and the early example set by some of the most important religious figures of the time. The unstable political and religious environment meant that individual lamas had to struggle to establish their legitimacy. Thanks to the importance of monasticism and the example set by key figures, vegetarianism proved to be an important means to do so.

## Political and Religious Instability

Nineteenth and early twentieth century Kham is perhaps most famous for hosting the *rimé*, or ‘non-sectarian,’ movement. This movement, as it is understood by many today, celebrated all Buddhist schools as valid religious paths. While those aligned with this movement encouraged practitioners to follow their own lineages, they also encouraged respect across religious divides and frequently received and gave teachings from other lineages.<sup>431</sup> This emphasis on the *rimé* movement, however, obscures the fact that during this time period, Kham experienced high levels of both political and religious instability. This included repeated, violent conflict between rival polities within Kham, as well as invasion and occupation by forces from both Lhasa and Beijing. This political instability was often mirrored in religious instability as well, with frequent—and sometimes violent—sectarian attacks.

Prior to the nineteenth century, Kham was not a unified region, but rather a collection of independent or semi-independent kingdoms. These kingdoms frequently

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<sup>431</sup> Ringu Tulku, *The Rimé Philosophy of Jamgon Kongtrul*, 2.

fought with each other, annexing land and the people who lived and worked on that land. By the mid-seventeenth century, a series of skillful military maneuvers and alliances brought the kingdom of Degé to the fore, a position which it consolidated over the next century and a half.<sup>432</sup> The ascendancy of Degé, however, did not mean that other kingdoms in Kham accepted its authority, merely that Degé managed to establish itself as a political and cultural power in the region, a fact reflected in its centrality to the story told here.

In 1798, Degé experienced a coup, with the ruling queen being forced into exile by a collection of ministers and important lamas. As justification for this, the coup's instigators cited Queen Tsewang Lhamo's (? -1812) affinity for the Nyingma teachings of Jigmé Lingpa, rather than the Sakya school traditionally favored by the rulers of Degé.<sup>433</sup> This coup, therefore, highlights the sectarian tensions that existed between previously dominant schools, such as the Sakya in Degé, and others that were ascendant in the region, such as the Nyingma. This event also provided inspiration for Tsewang Dorjé Rigzin's (1786-1847) *History of the Kings of Degé*, a text that E. Gene Smith has termed "the first document of the nonsectarian movement."<sup>434</sup> Tsewang Dorjé Rigzin, the heir to the Degé throne, was twelve at the time of the coup, and it seems likely that his exposure to sectarian struggle at that time—including the exile of his mother the queen—influenced his later writings in support of nonsectarianism.

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<sup>432</sup> Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations and Reincarnated Lamas*, 42.

<sup>433</sup> Hartley, *A Socio-Political History of the Kingdom of Sde-dge*, 40.

<sup>434</sup> Smith, "The Autobiography of the Rnying ma pa Visionary Mkhan po Ngag dbang dpal bzang," 25.

Sixty years later, a much wider swath of Kham was engulfed by the warlord Gönpo Namgyel (1799-1865). Originally from Nyakrong, south of Degé, Gönpo Namgyel began a military expansion of his territory in the early 1860s, conquering Degé in 1862.<sup>435</sup> Gönpo Namgyel took the king and queen of Degé hostage, as well as many other important political and religious figures, in an attempt to prevent a general insurrection. In addition to such kidnappings, Gönpo Namgyel's rule was noted for its violence and the use of fear and intimidation as weapons. As Tashi Tsering notes, "Throughout his campaign, his motto was: 'Kill everybody in sight, so that all that have ears hear of it,' thereby creating an image of might and terror."<sup>436</sup>

In order to win back their territory from Gönpo Namgyel, the rulers of Degé requested military assistance from both Lhasa and Beijing. Beijing demurred, but Lhasa sent a large army under the leadership of Phulungwa (n.d.) that first occupied Degé, and then, in 1865, defeated Gönpo Namgyel, burning him inside his Nyakrong fortress.<sup>437</sup> Following this success, however, the army did not return to Lhasa. Instead, they remained in Kham, forming an army of occupation, with a governor appointed by the Lhasa administration.<sup>438</sup> In addition to their direct political oversight of much of Kham,

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<sup>435</sup> Tashi Tsering, "Nag-ron mGon-po rNam-rgyal," 198.

<sup>436</sup> Tashi Tsering, "Nag-ron mGon-po rNam-rgyal," 204-205.

<sup>437</sup> Coleman, "The Uprising at Batang," 38. Tashi Tsering, "Nag-ron mGon-po rNam-rgyal," 211.

<sup>438</sup> Hartley, *A Socio-Political History of the Kingdom of Sde-dge*, 16.

the occupation is also said to have featured extensive looting, as well as the imposition of direct taxation for the first time.<sup>439</sup>

In 1889, building on the broad resentment of Lhasa's rule, the Nyakrong region rebelled against the governor.<sup>440</sup> The revolt was unsuccessful, but a few years later the commissioner was recalled to Lhasa under Chinese military pressure.<sup>441</sup> Dislike of Lhasa rule had provided an opportunity for the Qing dynasty to assert control over Kham.<sup>442</sup> Following the British invasion of Central Tibet in 1903, however, the Qing decided to consolidate their defenses by asserting direct control over Kham.<sup>443</sup> This led, in 1907, to a military mission to Degé, under the leadership of Zhao Erfeng.<sup>444</sup> Zhao, aided by a succession struggle in Degé, quickly placed the region under his authority, and exercised supreme authority until he was recalled in 1911, following the end of the Qing Dynasty.<sup>445</sup>

Following the end of the Qing, most of Zhao Erfeng's reforms disintegrated, and the region reverted to local rule.<sup>446</sup> Conflict continued, however, with frequent skirmishes between local rulers, Chinese armies, Muslim warlords from the north and

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<sup>439</sup> Tashi Tsering, "Nag-ron mGon-po rNam-rgyal," 210. Xiuyu Wang, "Lu Chuanlin's 'Great Game' in Nyarong," 481.

<sup>440</sup> Xiuyu Wang, "Lu Chuanlin's 'Great Game' in Nyarong," 482.

<sup>441</sup> Xiuyu Wang, "Lu Chuanlin's 'Great Game' in Nyarong," 484.

<sup>442</sup> Xiuyu Wang, "Lu Chuanlin's 'Great Game' in Nyarong," 485.

<sup>443</sup> Sperling, "The Chinese Venture in K'am," 13-14.

<sup>444</sup> Ch: 趙爾豐

<sup>445</sup> Sperling, "The Chinese Venture in K'am," 25-30.

<sup>446</sup> Sperling, "The Chinese Venture in K'am," 30.

troops from Lhasa engaging in repeated skirmishes until the region was finally brought under Communist Chinese authority in 1949.<sup>447</sup>

The political and military maneuverings of this time were complex, with a variety of interests at play. Each of these interests saw Kham's place differently, a point Xiuyu Wang has articulated nicely, "The potential for conflict arose from conflicting perceptions: for the Qing, the chieftains functioned as a substratum below the imperial bureaucracy; in their own eyes, they were autonomous kingdoms; for central Tibet, they were the Dalai Lama's subjects."<sup>448</sup> Given the divergence of these visions, perhaps we should not be surprised at the complexity of the political and military situation during this period. Indeed, it is worth emphasizing at this point that the preceding account is no more than a sketch: many important individuals and events have been omitted for the sake of brevity.

Further, this turbulence was not limited to the political realm, and conflict was rife among religious institutions as well. We have already seen one early instance of this in the 1798 coup in Degé. Degé had been a stronghold of the Sakya school, and this coup has traditionally been attributed to the aversion powerful members of this school felt towards Queen Tsewang Lhamo's association with Jigmé Lingpa (1730-1798) and his disciple Dodrupchen Jigmé Trinlé Özer (1745-1821). While Alex Gardner has recently cast doubt on this theory, suggesting that this sectarian story was a cover for more

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<sup>447</sup> Meinert, "Gangkar Rinpoché Between Tibet and China," 219-220. Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhism in the Making of Modern China*, 172. Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*, 68.

<sup>448</sup> Xiuyu Wang, "Lu Chuanlin's 'Great Game' in Nyarong," 481.

prosaically political motives, sectarianism remains a viable excuse.<sup>449</sup> As Gardner points out, “The episode of sectarian clash in [Degé] during the reign of [Tsewang Lhamo] reveals the delicacy with which the numerous religious institutions coexisted in [Degé], and the readiness with which their distinctiveness could be turned into political weapons.”<sup>450</sup>

Evidence of the continued presence of sectarian conflict during this period can also be found in Jamgön Kongtrül’s (1813-1899) *Autobiography*. Kongtrül took his monastic vows at the age of nineteen, as a Nyingma monk of Shechen Monastery. Less than a year later, however, a powerful Kagyü lama at Palpung Monastery insisted that Kongtrül serve as his secretary. Despite protesting that he had already received full monastic ordination, Kongtrül was instructed to take his monastic vows again, this time in the Kagyü tradition.<sup>451</sup> This episode demonstrates that among the religious elite, there was considerable sectarian disdain during the eighteen-thirties, to the extent that the chief lamas of Palpung did not even consider Kongtrül’s Nyingma ordination valid. Further, the very fact that Palpung was able to induce Kongtrül to come, against his wishes, indicates the degree to which Nyingma monasteries such as Shechen operated in the shadow of more powerful institutions.<sup>452</sup> Kongtrül went on to be one of the most important advocates of rimé philosophy, and, as Gene Smith notes, “This small

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<sup>449</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 129-131.

<sup>450</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 131.

<sup>451</sup> ‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, *Autobiography*, 18b-19a. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 22-23.

<sup>452</sup> Smith, “‘jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement,” 247.

experience of intolerance seems to have been significant in channeling [Kongtrül's] interests toward a nonsectarian approach to Buddhist practice and scholarship."<sup>453</sup>

Kongtrül's *Autobiography* also mentions another, more violent incident of sectarian tension from this period. He recalls that in 1848, Ba Chödé Monastery, a Gelukpa institution located near Batang in Kham, attacked the Nyingma affiliated Pungri Monastery. As part of the attack, the head incarnate abbot of Pungri, Chagdö Tülku (n.d.), was killed.<sup>454</sup> Sectarian tensions, Kongtrül makes clear, were not limited to intellectual disdain, but could also become violent.

These sectarian tensions would be further exacerbated by the rise of Gönpö Namgyel in the early eighteen sixties. As mentioned above, Gönpö Namgyel routinely took leading religious leaders hostage in order to prevent popular uprisings. These hostages included representatives of all major schools, though Tashi Tsering has suggested that two of his favorite lamas were Nyakla Pema Dödül (1816-1873) and the fourth Dzogchen Tülku, Migyur Namké Dorjé (1793-1870), both Nyingma figures.<sup>455</sup>

The Lhasa based armies that defeated Gönpö Namgyel, on the other hand, strongly favored the Geluk school. This led to what Luciano Petech has described as a "widespread purge of [Nyingma] elements, suspected of collusion with [Gönpö Namgyel]."<sup>456</sup> Kidnapped or not, Nyingma figures' association with Gönpö Namgyel

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<sup>453</sup> Smith, "Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement," 248.

<sup>454</sup> 'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, *Autobiography*, 60a. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 67.

<sup>455</sup> Tashi Tsering, "Nag-ron mGon-po rNam-rgyal," 207.

<sup>456</sup> Petech, *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet*, 121.



provided the victorious Lhasa army an opportunity to assert the supremacy of the Gelukpa school over the other schools that had long dominated in Kham. Gene Smith suggests that there was an element of opportunism in this, “The [Geluk] factions availed themselves of the presence of the victorious Lhasa army under [Phulungwa] to settle old scores with the other sects and extract the maximum advantage from their new position of strength.”<sup>457</sup> If Smith’s assertion is true, it suggests that purges of Nyingma elements was not simply punishment of a defeated military enemy, but a calculated bid to increase the power of the Geluk at the expense of the Nyingma and other schools.

Nor were the Geluk purges limited to the Nyingma school. Kongtrül recalls that Palpung Monastery—a Kagyü affiliate—was also threatened by the advancing Lhasa armies. Fortunately, the commander of one of the Lhasa-affiliated battalions became ill and summoned Kongtrül, who was reputed to be the best physician in the region. The commander recovered and Palpung was spared.<sup>458</sup> After the abbot of Palpung was freed from Gönpö Namgyel’s captivity, he thanked Kongtrül for his intervention, declaring, “It is thanks to your kindness that Palpung and the surrounding countryside were spared.”<sup>459</sup> Again, the arrival of Lhasa’s armies spelled trouble not only for Gönpö Namgyel and local political institutions, but also for non-Geluk monastic institutions.

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<sup>457</sup> Smith, “Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement,” 249.

<sup>458</sup> ‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, *Autobiography*, 106a. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 138-139.

<sup>459</sup> ‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, *Autobiography*, 109a. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 142.

Such violent sectarian clashes also continued well past Gönpö Namgyel's era. In his *Biography of Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen*, Dratön Kelzang Tenpé Gyeltsen (1897-1959) recalls a 1902 event in which Buddhist monks burned the Bön affiliated Tengchen Monastery to the ground.<sup>460</sup> Tenpé Gyeltsen's work does not specify the sectarian affiliation of the Buddhist monks, but both Tsering Thar, citing a local history, and William Gorvine, citing oral history, claim that the monks were from a local Gelukpa monastery.<sup>461</sup> Gorvine's informants specified that the Gelukpa monastery in question, located downhill from Tengchen, felt affronted when Bön monks would throw ritual cakes in their direction.<sup>462</sup>

A final, colorful example of the potential for sectarian strife during this time can be found in *Land of the Lamas*, a travelogue by the American diplomat and explorer William Rockhill. Writing about a journey conducted in 1889, Rockhill writes that violence was frequent between monasteries in the Degé region. Noting that monastic robes are ill-suited to riding horses for days on end, Rockhill claims that a necessary precondition for warfare was for the monks to have their shawls converted to trousers. He asserts that simply hearing that their opponent had taken this step, thereby announcing their intention to fight, was enough to induce the weaker party to surrender.<sup>463</sup> Whatever the truth of such sartorial claims, we have seen enough examples at this point to conclude

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<sup>460</sup> dbra ston skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Biography of Shardza*, 233-237.

<sup>461</sup> Tsering Thar, "Shar rdza Hermitage," 157. Gorvine. *The Life of a Bönpo Luminary*, 175.

<sup>462</sup> Gorvine. *The Life of a Bönpo Luminary*, 175.

<sup>463</sup> Rockhill, *Land of the Lamas*, 216-217.

that Rockhill's fundamental assertion, that warfare between monasteries was a frequent occurrence, was sound.

Sectarian strife, however, did not always involve violence; conflict over questions of doctrine and practice was also frequent. Among the most prominent examples of this is the sustained criticism of *terma* revelation by some Geluk scholars. As discussed previously, *terma* are texts believed to have been composed during Tibet's Imperial Period—roughly the seventh through ninth centuries—and then concealed. These texts are then revealed, much later, by pre-destined individuals, known as *tertöns*. Such individuals are generally understood to be the incarnation of Imperial Period practitioners, with strong karmic connections to the *terma* text dating to that period. Terma revelation was particularly important for practitioners of the Nyingma school, for whom it provided a connection with authoritarian figures of the Imperial Period and allowed the incorporation of new ideas while maintaining a claim that the texts derived from Indian sources.<sup>464</sup>

For other schools, however, the practice of *terma* revelation offered an opportunity for critique. In his insightful analysis of one such debate, Mathew Kapstein notes that for opponents, particularly those aligned with the Geluk school, *terma* texts were simply false, made up. Rather than being authentic texts dating to the Imperial Period, *terma* were seen as the creations of the *tertöns* themselves, who then attributed

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<sup>464</sup> Germano, "Re-membering," 75.

them to earlier figures in a calculated attempt to deceive others.<sup>465</sup> Given the importance of tertöns and terma revelation for the Nyingma school, the falsity of terma and tertöns was, for some critics, an indictment of the entire school.

Kapstein bases his analysis on a pair of texts, a critique of terma composed in Central Tibet in the eighteenth century, and a defense composed in Amdo at the turn of the nineteenth century. While Kapstein is not, therefore, specifically addressing Kham during the period in question here, his analysis applies broadly to this period as well. I am not aware of texts specifically critical of terma from this period, but there are multiple works that actively defend the practice. Mipam Jamyang Namgyel Gyatso (1846-1912), for instance, one of the greatest Nyingma scholars of all time, composed a strong, nuanced defense of terma revelation.<sup>466</sup> Similarly, the fifteenth Karmapa, Kakyab Dorjé (1870-1922), while officially associated with the Kagyü school, also composed a defense of terma revelation.<sup>467</sup> Such defenses indicate that terma revelation was a contested practice, and, given the Geluk school's longstanding opposition to the practice, a significant site of sectarian controversy.

Such was the environment that the rimé movement emerged out of. As noted previously, this movement may have had its origins in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>468</sup> It emerged most famously, however, in the later half of that century,

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<sup>465</sup> Kapstein, "Purificatory Gem."

<sup>466</sup> Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 52-71.

<sup>467</sup> Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 46.

<sup>468</sup> Smith, "The Autobiography of the Rnying ma pa Visionary Mkhan po Ngag dbang dpal bzang," 25.

particularly in the writings of Jamgön Kongtrül, Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820-1892) and the tertön Chokgyur Lingpa (1829-1870). These figures consistently advocated adherence to the practices and theories of one's own tradition coupled with respect for other lineages and schools.<sup>469</sup> It is worth noting that all of these figures had experienced the downsides of sectarian rivalry, a fact which surely influenced their later adoption of the ideology of non-sectarianism. Writing decades later about his forcible conversion from the Nyingma Shechen Monastery to the Kagyü affiliated Palpung Monastery, Jamgön Kongtrül recalls his teacher at Shechen Monastery giving him a particular piece of advice, "don't be sectarian."<sup>470</sup> As Smith has suggested, this experience seems to have been formative for Kongtrül, particularly inspiring his later advocacy of a rimé perspective.

Nor was the rimé movement limited to Kongtrül, Khyentsé, Chokgyur Lingpa and their circles. Patrül Rinpoché's (1808-1887) *Biography*, for instance, recalls that he received numerous teachings from Gelukpa lamas, as well as those of his own Nyingma school.<sup>471</sup> Similarly, Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen (1859-1935) had numerous collegial relationships with Buddhist figures of this time, frequently giving Bön teachings to these figures and receiving Buddhist ones in turn.<sup>472</sup> Despite the earlier destruction of Tengchen monastery at the hands of Gelukpa monks, Shardza's admirers include at least

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<sup>469</sup> Ringu Tulku, *The Rimé Philosophy of Jamgon Kongtrul*, 2.

<sup>470</sup> 'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, *Autobiography*, 17a. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 21.  
*phyogs ris ma byed*

<sup>471</sup> 'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, *Biography of Patrül*, 455, 458.

one Geluk scholar, whose letters of praise are preserved in Shardza's *Biography*.<sup>473</sup> The authors of these biographies explicitly praise Patrül and Shardza for their rimé perspective, suggesting the importance such ideals carried for their contemporaries.

At the same time, however, it is worth noting that even core figures of the rimé movement were not necessarily above sectarian tendencies. In an illuminating dissertation, Alex Gardner has argued that current understandings of the rimé movement overstate its importance. Gardner focuses his analysis on a text jointly produced by Chokgyur Lingpa and Jamgön Kongtrül, *The Twenty Five Great Sites of Kham*. This text, which Gardner describes as a “narrative map,” is a descriptive list of pilgrimage sites across Kham.<sup>474</sup> The list includes locations sacred to many different schools and lineages, but pointedly does not include any Geluk sites.<sup>475</sup> As we have seen, after the war against Gönpö Namgyel, Geluk affiliated monasteries and officials in Kham were actively seeking to bolster their own school at the expense of other traditions. In Gardner's analysis, therefore, *The Twenty Five Great Sites* is an attempt by representatives of the non-Geluk schools to band together against a common enemy.<sup>476</sup> For Gardner, this casts doubt on the existence of the rimé movement as a discernible movement.<sup>477</sup> I do not want to follow Gardner that far, but his work does serve as a reminder that even figures

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<sup>472</sup> Gorvine. *The Life of a Bönpo Luminary*, 187–200.

<sup>473</sup> dbra ston skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, *Biography of Shardza*, 465–466. Gorvine. *The Life of a Bönpo Luminary*, 190.

<sup>474</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 48.

<sup>475</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 111.

<sup>476</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 111.

such as Kongtrül and Chokgyur Lingpa had not entirely divorced themselves from sectarianism.

At this point, it should be clear that while many people in nineteenth and early twentieth century Kham celebrated a rimé ideal, the period also featured consistent sectarian conflict. In many ways, in fact, the repeated celebration of such an ideal itself points to the presence of sectarianism. If sectarianism had not been a problem, non-sectarianism would not have been praised. When such religious sectarian rivalry is combined with the turbulent political environment of the period, it becomes clear that Kham during this period was a highly unsettled environment. Indeed, for the purposes of this present dissertation, this is the key insight provided by the preceding discussion: Kham was a turbulent place, with many different players all vying, sometimes violently, for power, respect and economic gain.

## Questions of Legitimacy

One of the repercussions of this unstable political and religious landscape was a level of fluidity among the religious hierarchy. Individuals could improve their status, gaining followers, patrons, and ecclesiastical rank, or their status could decline. In many ways, an individual's status depended on their reputation for sanctity, what I refer to as their religious legitimacy. On the other hand, legitimate religious leaders were contrasted with charlatans. Düdjom Lingpa (1835-1904) describes such individuals succinctly, "Out

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<sup>477</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 111.

of a desire for women, they write down whatever appears in their mind and call themselves tertöns. Some are lowly and wish to be grand, so they do the same. Others, depressed and annoyed by being poor, do likewise.”<sup>478</sup>

As Düdjom’s complaint indicates, while some individuals pursued religious careers out of a desire to benefit others through Buddhism, others pursued the same career out of a desire for women, political power, and money. In order to be successful, a prospective lama had to convince those around him that he was a legitimate practitioner rather than a charlatan. The sense of legitimacy that separated these groups was governed by a wide variety of factors, and there were many strategies that individuals pursued in an attempt to influence their legitimacy. Among these was vegetarianism.

Perhaps the clearest window into the strategies governing legitimacy can be found in the debates over tertöns and terma revelation, both collectively and as individuals. As noted above, the critique and defense of terma revelation was an important aspect of sectarian debate in nineteenth and early twentieth century Kham. At the same time, however, it is important to note that even within the Nyingma school, where terma revelation was widely accepted as possible, there was active debate over the legitimacy of individual tertöns. Simply claiming to have revealed a terma was not sufficient to guarantee the text’s acceptance as authentic.

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<sup>478</sup> bdud ‘joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 186. Düdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 138.  
*bud med la chags nas gter ston yin skad de sems la gang dran yi ger bri ‘dug gi /la las ni kho dman pa mtho la  
 brkam nas de ltar byed ‘dug gi /la las ni dbul phongs la bred cing sun nas de ltar byed ‘dug gi*



Düdjom Lingpa notes that fear of fraudulent tertöns was widespread, and the fear of such charlatans caused people to be deeply suspicious of anyone who claimed to be a tertön, even, he claims, legitimate tertön such as himself.<sup>479</sup> At the same time, Düdjom's account also demonstrates that such concerns could be overcome through the implementation of strategies devised to demonstrate the legitimacy of a terma, and by extension, a tertön. For prospective tertöns, the stakes were high: acclaim as a tertön could bring a significant boost to one's status, power and financial resources. For students, however, the stakes were also high, for while legitimate termas carried the promise of religious attainment, fraudulent ones did not.<sup>480</sup>

In looking at this process of legitimation, it is useful to begin with *The Gem that Clears the Waters*, Mipam's short defense of terma revelation, recently analyzed by Andreas Doctor. Along with its defense of the terma process in general, this work highlights the problem of fraudulent terma revelation. Mipam describes a society deeply and justifiably skeptical of terma revelation, suggesting that fraudulent terma revelation must have been a common problem in late nineteenth century Kham.<sup>481</sup> In Mipam's view, such charlatans caused problems not only for their immediate followers, but also for the entire Nyingma school by providing ammunition to critics of the terma system in its entirety.

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<sup>479</sup> bdud 'joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 108-110, 187-189. Düdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 83-84, 139-140.

<sup>480</sup> Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 52-71.

<sup>481</sup> Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 52-55.

Following this critique of fraudulent tertöns, Mipam turns his attention to the process of distinguishing such individuals from legitimate tertöns. He highlights strategies used by frauds, such as including the names of wealthy individuals in lists of ‘pre-destined’ patrons, claiming that beautiful women are destined consorts and vehemently denouncing others as frauds.<sup>482</sup> Mipam’s list seems to suggest that the presence of such strategies can suggest the individual in question is a charlatan. That said, Mipam is aware that some legitimate tertöns have behaved bizarrely, demonstrating that such behavior is insufficient to guarantee that someone is a fraud. Ultimately, Mipam claims, the only way to be certain about a tertön’s legitimacy is to ask someone with high levels of spiritual realization.<sup>483</sup> In the ultimate analysis, therefore, while a prospective tertön’s behavior is important, they can only be fully legitimated by another senior lama, whose spiritual realization gives them insight into the individual’s mental state.

In a recent analysis of the early career of Chokgyur Lingpa, Alex Gardner has called attention to the key role that such authentication can play in enhancing a potential tertön’s legitimacy. Chokgyur Lingpa went on to become one of the most important tertöns of nineteenth century Kham, but his initial terms were greeted with skepticism. In a move that Gardner argues was a conscious attempt to acquire legitimacy, he travelled to the Degé region seeking recognition from established figures.<sup>484</sup> He was eventually

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<sup>482</sup> Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 66-67.

<sup>483</sup> Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 70-71.

<sup>484</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 23.

successful in this effort, earning the praise and cooperation of Jamgön Kongtrül and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo, two of the most important figures of this period. With the imprimatur of these figures, Chokgyur Lingpa was able to return to his native region with a significantly enhanced aura of legitimacy.

Düdjom Lingpa's autobiography recalls a similar reliance on the patronage of established religious leaders. In one telling passage, he recalls a patron commenting, "There are many people these days who claim to be tertöns or accomplished practitioners, so I don't have faith and trust in everyone. But Jawa Alak said that you, [Düdjom Lingpa] are an accomplished practitioner. Further, he said, 'If he's not an emanation of Padmasambhava, then I've lied to you!' Once he said that, I invited you."<sup>485</sup> For this individual, and we may assume many others, the approval of other leaders was an important means of separating legitimate tertöns from charlatans.

As both Gardner and Doctor make clear, however, prospective tertöns needed more than just the support of other lamas to achieve legitimacy.<sup>486</sup> Ultimately, they conclude, legitimacy rests with popular perception and acclaim. The intervention and support of lamas already known for their realization is an important strategy for forming this public opinion, but is not, in and of itself necessarily decisive. Thus, in Gardner's analysis, Chokgyur Lingpa could not rest with obtaining Jamgön Kongtrül and Khyentsé

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<sup>485</sup> bdud 'joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 109. Düdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 83.  
*dus phyis gter ston dang grub thob yin par skad pa shin tu mang bas su la'ang yid ches blo thub med kyang 'ja' ba a*  
*lags nas khyod kyis rgis li'i gter ston de la sgrub pa zbig 'don du chug dang de o rgyan padma'i sprul pa zbig min*  
*tshe ngas khyod bslus pa yin gsungs pas de la nyan nas ng rang khyod 'bod du 'ong ba yin zer ba byung bas/*

<sup>486</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*, 48. Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 49.

Wangpo's approval. Instead, he revealed a series of *termas* that described the sacred nature of geographical features across Kham. By providing these sacralizing narratives, Chokgyur Lingpa was able to bind his own status to the newly sacralized landscape.<sup>487</sup> As pilgrims began to visit, the fame of these sites spread, and Chokgyur Lingpa became increasingly well established.

Düdjom Lingpa's *Autobiography* reveals another strategy for generating legitimacy: the effective performance of miracles and other superhuman religious feats. Throughout this work, Düdjom recalls using magic to effectively sideline opponents. This can be applied to personal enemies or detractors, but he also performs magic on behalf of patrons.<sup>488</sup> In at least one instance, Düdjom specifically links his successful performance of magical rites with his legitimacy, "There was a female minister in Golok who had opposed me. She went blind, her commands became powerless and then she died. Thus, my *terma* guardian deities were [shown to be] without rival."<sup>489</sup> In this instance, at least, the legitimacy of Düdjom's *termas* was explicitly linked to his ability to effectively perform magical rites.

The strategies outlined here—all connected to the debates over *terma* revelations—are not the only avenues available for demonstrating the legitimacy of an individual's claim to high religious status. Other strategies were available to a wider

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<sup>487</sup> Gardner, *Twenty-Five Great Sites*.

<sup>488</sup> bdud 'joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 111-112, 190. Düdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 85, 141-142.

<sup>489</sup> bdud 'joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 190. Düdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 142.  
*bdag gi 'gal zla mgo log phyogs kyi dpon mo drag shos zhig yod pa'ang mig long zhig khas zhan du song nas shi/ de ltar nga'i gter byung gi srung ma rnams ni gzhan gis 'gran zla dang bral ba yin/*

audience, including those who made no claim to reveal *termas*. Among the most important of these was scholarship, the practice of studying and commenting on Buddhist philosophical texts.

Scholarship has long been an important aspect of Tibetan religious practice, and many scholastic texts and commentaries have been composed in Tibetan. Large monastic institutions often specialized in such studies and awarded degrees, such as the *geshé* or *khenpo* degrees, to those who successfully completed many years of study.<sup>490</sup> The receipt of such a degree was a clear acknowledgement of scholarly skill and conferred a significant amount of legitimacy on the bearer. Skill and perseverance in scholarship, therefore, often made it possible for an ordinary monk to rise rapidly through ecclesiastical ranks.

While scholarship has a long history in Tibetan Buddhist practice, its relative importance in specific regions has waxed and waned. As Jann Ronis has noted, scholarship was relatively unimportant in Kham prior to the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>491</sup> This began to change, however, under the leadership of figures such as Situ Panchen (1700-1774) in the mid-eighteenth century and Getsé Mahapaṇḍita (1761-1829) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Tib: *dge shes*; *mkhan po*

For a study of this process, based on first-person experience in a contemporary Tibetan monastery in India, see: Dreyfus, *Two Hands Clapping*.

<sup>491</sup> Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations and Reincarnated Lamas*, 55.

<sup>492</sup> Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations and Reincarnated Lamas*, 146-186.

The Tibetan term *panchen* and Sanskrit term *mahapaṇḍita* both mean 'great scholar.' The presence of these titles in these figures' popular names suggests the importance they placed on scholarship.

A good example of this way in which scholarship could result in ecclesiastical advancement can be seen in the experiences of Jamgön Kongtrül, who first rose to prominence for his academic skills. As noted above, his scholastic skills were good enough that Palpung Monastery requisitioned his services from Shechen Monastery. He was recognized as the incarnation of a previous master, granting him significant legitimacy. This recognition, however, took place after he had already become known for his scholarly abilities, so was not a factor in his initial rise.<sup>493</sup>

Scholarship could also be a means of combating sectarianism. Gene Smith has noted, for instance, that Mipam, the most famous Nyingma scholar of the nineteenth and twentieth century, carried on correspondence with several scholars from the rival Geluk sect.<sup>494</sup> These individuals did not always agree, but many—though not all—respected Mipam for his scholarship, suggesting ways in which philosophical scholarship could cut across the sectarian tensions of this time.<sup>495</sup>

Along with the rise of scholasticism, the importance of monastic ordination and celibacy also rose during this period. Ronis notes that prior to the eighteenth century, many of the most important religious leaders of the Nyingma school was focused on *terma* revelation and the non-celibate lifestyles typical of tertöns.<sup>496</sup> Celibate monasticism existed during this period, but elite practitioners were frequently non-celibate mantrins.

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<sup>493</sup> 'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, *Autobiography*, 19a-19b. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, *Autobiography*, 23.

<sup>494</sup> Smith, "Mi pham," 231-233.

<sup>495</sup> Smith, "Mi pham," 233.

<sup>496</sup> Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations and Reincarnated Lamas*, 55.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, this situation was changing. Celibate monasticism was emerging as a popular option for elite religious leaders. Ronis locates the impetus for this shift in the efforts of Situ Panchen. Situ actively promoted monasticism, personally ordaining more than a thousand monks, and writing customaries that mandated celibacy among the monastic population.<sup>497</sup> While personally associated with the Kagyü school, Situ Panchen's efforts profoundly impacted Nyingma monasteries as well.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the shift towards monasticism was complemented by the spread of the Geluk into Kham. As we saw, Geluk missionary activity increased dramatically following the conclusion of the war against Gönpö Namgyel. This missionary activity included critiquing other schools—particularly the Nyingma—for their lax attention to monastic rules. It seems likely that such criticisms would have supported and accelerated the shift towards monasticism initially begun by Situ Panchen.

One interesting way to approach this shift and its role in developing individuals' legitimacy, is through a comparison of autobiographical recollections of childhood. Many Tibetan autobiographies contain recollections of precocious, religiously inclined childhoods. The *Autobiography* of the tertön Chokgyur Lingpa, for instance, recalls several instances where he had visions of Padmasambhava and other divine figures.<sup>498</sup>

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For more on the association between terma revelation and non-celibate status, see: Jacoby, *Consorts and Revelations*.

<sup>497</sup> Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations and Reincarnated Lamas*, 146-162.

<sup>498</sup> mchog gyur gling pa, *Autobiography*, 181.

This is a common motif in the autobiographies of tertöns, and serves to legitimate their identity as tertöns.

In contrast, Getsé Mahapaṇḍita's *Autobiography* spends several lines recalling a childhood dominated by ethical conduct and a desire to dress up like a monk.<sup>499</sup> Getsé's motivation here is similar to Chokgyur Lingpa's: he is calling attention to his innately religious nature. The difference is that Getsé invokes an inclination to monasticism, rather than visions of Padmasambhava, as proof of his legitimacy. Thus, by the early nineteenth century, upholding a celibate, monastic lifestyle had become an effective strategy for demonstrating the sincerity and legitimacy of one's religious vocation. This is not to say that non-celibate practice disappeared. We have already encountered several individuals from the late nineteenth century, such as Chokgyur Lingpa, who maintained the non-celibate lifestyle of a mantrin. Celibate monasticism, however, had become an important alternative, capable of conferring legitimacy.

Finally, and aligning well with the increasing importance of monasticism, a demonstrated commitment to moral conduct could provide individuals with significant levels of legitimacy. As we have just seen, monasticism was becoming increasingly important during this time, and moral standards generally aligned with this shift. Thus, there was a sense that it was appropriate for those who claimed to be religious figures to abide by conventional norms of Buddhist morality. By doing so, they displayed their

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<sup>499</sup> dge rtse 'gyur med tshe dbang mchog grub, *Autobiography*, 166. Ronis, *Celibacy, Revelations and Reincarnated Lamas*, 169.



concern for proper conduct and their commitment to a Buddhist lifestyle. This, in turn, was a powerful argument for their religious legitimacy.

Evidence for the importance of moral conduct in establishing an individual's legitimacy can be found in popular texts such as *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. We have already examined this text's anti-meat stance in some detail, but here it is worth noting the way in which Patrül repeatedly critiques lamas who fail to abide by norms of moral conduct. As we have seen, he critiques those who eat meat, proclaiming that they are all bound for hell.<sup>500</sup> Beyond this, he also denigrates monks who engage in business, in contravention of their vows, "These days, lamas and monks don't see anything wrong with doing business. They wrap their lives around it, and are proud of their skill. But nothing wastes a monk's mind more than business."<sup>501</sup> In Patrül's eyes, anyone who engages in such conduct is only pretending to be a monk. If such negative conduct is proof of charlatanism, then the inverse should be true as well, and the adherence to moral standards should be understood as a sign of religious legitimacy.

Nor is such sentiment limited to Patrül. As we have discussed previously, Tülku Urgyen Rinpoché's (1920-1996) high opinion of Karmé Khenpo (1835-19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), Samten Gyatso (1881-1945) and Sangngak Rinpoché (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> C) was largely due to their strict monastic conduct, which he compares favorably to the "half-hearted

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<sup>500</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 103. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 70.

<sup>501</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 161. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 105.

renunciants” he felt were common.<sup>502</sup> For Tülku Urgyen, moral conduct was a sign of these figures’ authenticity as religious leaders, while the poor conduct of others was a sign of their lack of religious discipline.

Similarly, Dilgo Khyentsé (1910–1991) often remarks on the moral conduct of his teachers. In a representative example, he describes one of his early teachers:

Khenpo Tubten’s physical, verbal, and mental conduct was entirely according to Dharma. His discipline was extremely precise; during meals he didn’t speak, while chanting he remained silent, and when he was free, he never wasted a moment—he did nothing but read, write, teach or study the Dharma. He didn’t hoard anything at all and just kept the bare necessities for clothes and provisions, using everything else for making offerings and benefiting whomever he encountered.<sup>503</sup>

Once again, moral conduct—in line with monastic norms—is held up as proof that an individual’s religious activities are genuine.

There is also evidence that lamas of this time were aware of the powerful effect ethical conduct had on the opinions of others. Jigmé Lingpa, for instance, ask his disciples to, “Stay humble. Be harmonious with all. Wear tattered clothes. ... By appearing in this way, tamed more fully than Yülkor Sung, the king of swans, others will

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*khyad par deng sang gi skabs su bla ma dang ser mo ba rnam nas kyang tshong byed pa la nyes pa'am skyon du mi lta zhing sku tshe de la bsgril nas pho rgod por rlom par 'dug kyang/ bla ma ser mo ba zbig gi rgyud chud zos byed pa la tshong las thu ba gang yang med de/*

<sup>502</sup> Tülku Urgyen, *Blazing Splendor*, 198.

<sup>503</sup> Dilgo Khyentse, *Brilliant Moon*, 62.

perceive you as virtuous.”<sup>504</sup> For Jigmé Lingpa, appearing humble and kind were important, at least in part, because they could convince others that you were a virtuous lama.

Shabkar (1781-1851) recalls a time when several Geluk scholars were discussing why he was able to draw such large crowds to his teachings. One suggested that he must be performing rituals to gather students, but another counters that such rituals could not account for the sheer number of Shabkar’s students. Finally, a third lama concludes, “However one looks, there is nothing wrong with his conduct, so whatever [the reason for his success], don’t criticize him.”<sup>505</sup> In Shabkar’s understanding, his moral conduct insulated him from criticism and contributed to his reputation for legitimacy, which, in turn, drew large crowds to his teachings.

As we have noted, neither Jigmé Lingpa nor Shabkar lived in Kham. Their sentiments, however, are echoed in works more directly connected to that region. Khenpo Künpel, for instance, notes that, “If Bodhisattvas do not guard against [doing things that give rise to] a lack of faith in others, they will be the cause of others’ non-virtue.”<sup>506</sup> Khenpo Künpel follows this statement with a list of uncouth activities to be avoided, such as spitting on the temple floor. Finally, he concludes, “In summary, actions

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<sup>504</sup> ‘jigs med gling pa, *Ocean of Wondrous Advice*, 707. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa, *Wondrous Ocean of Advice*, 6. *dma’ mo’i sa bzung/ kun dang mthun par bya/ hrul po’i gos gyon/ ... ltar snang ngang pa’i rgyal po yul’ khor srung las kyang dul bas gzhan snang dge la’ gyur nus pa zbig dgos/*

<sup>505</sup> zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, *Autobiography*, 410b. Shabkar, *Life of Shabkar*, 468. *khong gi mdzad pa gang la bltas kyang skyon’ o dgas zbig mi gda’/ gang ltar na’ang khas gtong rgyu zbig ma red zer skad/*

<sup>506</sup> kun bzang dpal ldan, *Words of my Gentle Lama*, 335. Kunzang Pelden, *Nectar of Manjushri’s Speech*, 192. *byang chub sems dpa’ gzhan gyis ma dad pa ma bsrung na gzhan gyi sdig rkyen chen por’ gyur ba*

that are derided by other, worldly people and that provoke a loss of faith should all be abandoned. This applies if you have seen and known of the activity yourself, or if you did not know yourself, but have been told by knowledgeable people.”<sup>507</sup> For Khenpo Künpel, one’s actions can powerfully influence the perception of others, and locally appropriate conduct must be maintained, lest it provoke a loss of faith in others.

In contrast to this emphasis on conventional moral conduct, there is relatively little emphasis during this period on ‘wild’ or ‘crazy’ behavior. Such conduct, based on a literal reading of some tantric texts, can include such transgressive acts as eating feces, insulting religious leaders and uninhibited sexuality. Recently, David DiValerio has demonstrated that such conduct, because of its perceived connections with Indian tantric models, serve as a sign of legitimacy. That is, by acting crazy, some individuals were able to align themselves with models of tantric transgression, successfully legitimating their status as religious leaders.<sup>508</sup>

While this may be true in sixteenth century Central Tibet—the time and place that DiValerio focuses on—there is less evidence that such a strategy worked in Kham during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There were individual religious leaders who adopted a crazy lifestyle, with Do Khyentsé (1800-1859) being perhaps the most famous example. While many stories are told celebrating Do Khyentsé’s antinomian

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<sup>507</sup> kun bzang dpal ldan, *Words of my Gentle Lama*, 336. Kunzang Pelden, *Nectar of Manjushri’s Speech*, 192. *mdor na ’jig rten sems can gzhan rnams kyis ’phya zhing ma dad par gyur pa’i spyod pa kun rang gi mthong zhing shes pa rnams dang rang gi ma mthong zhing mi shes pa rnams kyang gang zag gzhan mkhas pa dang rgyus yod rnams la dris te spang bar ’u dgos so/*

<sup>508</sup> DiValerio, *Subversive Sainthood*.

behavior, they is usually an apology, explaining why this behavior is acceptable.<sup>509</sup> Rather than being a sign of legitimacy, behavior such as this needs to be explained away.

A similar concern for establishing the moral bona fides of the mantrin lifestyle is also reflected in a short polemical work written by Do Khyentsé, *Babble of a Foolish Man*.<sup>510</sup> This text is structured as a dialogue between a monk and an old mantrin, and opens with the monk challenging the validity of the mantrins teachings. Not surprising, given that it was written by Do Khyentsé, the monk is impressed by the mantrin's answers, and quickly develops faith.<sup>511</sup> Ultimately, Do Khyentsé argues, the mantrin's superior meditative practice win over the monk's dry scholasticism. The superiority of these practices, however, is not enough to justify the lifestyle of a mantrin: Do Khyentsé also takes the time to defend the moral conduct of mantrins, arguing that they adhere to the rule of "authentic lay practitioners."<sup>512</sup> These rules were laid out by the Buddha, and are meant to govern the conduct of all Buddhists, both lay and monastic. Do Khyentsé, it seems, is aware of popular concern over the conduct of mantrins, and seeks to allay these concerns by associating mantrins with an easily recognizable, Buddhistic moral code.

That said, Do Khyentsé himself remains well known for his sometimes bizarre behavior, proving that individuals could achieve renown without prioritizing ethical,

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<sup>509</sup> Tülku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, 179-197. Surya Das, *Snow Lion's Turquoise Mane*, 20, 136.

<sup>510</sup> gzhon nu ye shes rdo rje, *Babble*. Gayley, "Yogic Trimphalism."

<sup>511</sup> gzhon nu ye shes rdo rje, *Babble*, 71.

<sup>512</sup> gzhon nu ye shes rdo rje, *Babble*, 71.

monastic-style conduct. As Doctor notes, Tibetan lamas sometimes behave in antinomian ways, but are still considered legitimate.<sup>513</sup> As part of a broader collection of strategies, however, including the authorization of high lamas, scholarship, and the ability to perform miracles, moral conduct was one way that potential patrons could evaluate the legitimacy of a lama's claim to religious authority.

## Vegetarianism & Legitimacy

Within this context, vegetarianism was a powerful argument for legitimacy. Monasticism was becoming increasingly important, and, as we saw in the last chapter, vegetarianism was strongly connected to the practice of celibate monasticism. Further, several of the most important religious leaders of this period adopted vegetarianism, giving the practice a level of prominence and authority. Adopting vegetarianism, therefore, was a way for individuals to demonstrate, in a public way, the sincerity of their religious practice.

We have just discussed, perhaps excessively, the increasing importance of monasticism in Kham from the eighteenth century on. For our purposes, this is important because it points to the increasing importance of those aspects of Buddhist practice that are associated with monasticism. Practices such as celibacy, scholarship and the observance of conventional moral conduct had become standard aspects of religious

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*yang dag dge bsnyen*

<sup>513</sup> Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature*, 48.

practice. Vegetarianism was another such practice, strongly connected to monasticism and capable of demonstrating the legitimacy of an individual's religious practice.

The connections between vegetarianism and monasticism have been discussed at length in the previous chapter of this dissertation, so I will limit myself to a brief summary here. Monasticism, at least in large part, was centered on the rejection of those aspects of conventional life understood to be opposed to religious attainment. Many of these aspects, meanwhile, were connected to worldly aspects of ideal masculinity, such as the fathering of progeny and the dominance over animals inherent in hunting. Vegetarianism, as a rejection of such masculine ideals as strength and domination, aligned well with broader conceptions of monastic ideals. And yet vegetarianism is not mandated by the Vinaya, as celibacy is, being instead more properly associated with the Bodhisattva vow.

In many ways, therefore, vegetarianism became a practice of monasticism in its idealized form, where adherence to the higher ideals of the Bodhisattva vow trumped the legalities of the Vinaya. It is worth remembering that vegetarianism was assumed to have negative health consequences, and that it was never expected of religious leaders. Adopting vegetarianism, therefore, meant going above and beyond the expected monastic norms and putting one's health at risk, all in the pursuit of a compassionate ideal. Thus, adopting vegetarianism displayed a strong argument for the legitimacy of an individual's religious vocation. This was particularly true in the competitive religious landscape of nineteenth and twentieth century Kham, where monasticism was idealized.

Vegetarianism, strongly connected to the monastic ideals so important during this time, was a powerful strategy for doing so.

One question this leaves us with, however, is the place of those non-celibate mantrins who adopted vegetarianism. Nineteenth and twentieth century Kham, after all, is perhaps the only time in Tibetan history when vegetarianism was widely adopted by mantrins as well as monks. Non-celibate figures such as Nyakla Pema Dūdül and Sera Khandro (1892-1940) adopted vegetarianism, and Nyakla Pema Dūdül composed a text encouraging it among his students as well.

Not surprisingly, this text makes no mention of monastic vows, or monasticism at all. The text is presented as a dialogue with Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, and Nyakla Pema Dūdül centers his arguments squarely on the ideal of compassion.<sup>514</sup> In the previous chapter, we looked at some of the reasons why vegetarianism was so persistently associated with monasticism, noting monasticism's general association with the ethical discourse typical of tamed religion, and in contrast to the power-based discourses typical of untamed religion. Mantrins, as we saw, occupied something of an ambiguous position in this equation, adhering to normative Buddhist ideals, but also somewhat separated from those ideals by their non-celibate status. What we see in Nyakla Pema Dūdül's work on vegetarianism is a decided appeal to the tamed side of this debate. Thus, even though Nyakla Pema Dūdül was not a monk, the ideals he appeals to are those most closely associated with monasticism. For Nyakla Pema

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<sup>514</sup> nyag bla padma bdud 'dul, *Advice*. Nyala Pema Duddul, "Song of Advice."



Düdül and, presumably, other mantrins like him, such monastic-affiliated ideals had become an important aspect of religious practice, fostering the rise of vegetarianism in this community not previously disposed to the practice.

Vegetarianism was further supported through its association with some of the most important lamas of this period. Foremost among these was Jigmé Lingpa. As discussed previously, it is unclear if Jigmé Lingpa was himself a vegetarian. Whatever the particulars of his own diet, Jigmé Lingpa argued strongly and repeatedly against the consumption of meat. Further, as Khenpo Ngakchung's (1879-1941) *Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher* demonstrates, there is evidence that Jigmé Lingpa was particularly known for his attitude towards animals.<sup>515</sup>

Further, even though Jigmé Lingpa himself never visited the region, his terma revelation known as *The Heart-Essence of the Great Expanse* became one of the most important practice lineages in Kham, thanks to the efforts of his disciples Dodrupchen Jigmé Trinlé Özer and Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu (1765-1842). Nyoshül Khenpo's recent history of Jigmé Lingpa's lineage, in fact, notes no less than one hundred and thirty lamas who actively propagated *The Heart-Essence of the Great Expanse*, most of whom were active in Kham at some point during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>516</sup> While Jigmé Lingpa belonged to the Nyingma school, and his direct impact was largely limited to that community, his

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<sup>515</sup> ngag dbang dpal bzang, *Notes on The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 214. Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang, *Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 148.

<sup>516</sup> smyo shil mkhan po, *Garland of Rare Gems*. Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé, *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*.

*Autobiography* also records several positive interactions with leaders of other sects, suggesting that his work was known and respected beyond the confines of his own school.<sup>517</sup>

Jigmé Lingpa's disciple Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu also provided an important example in support of vegetarianism during this period. Unlike Jigmé Lingpa, Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu's personal vegetarianism is well attested, in both his own *Biography* and Khenpo Ngakchung's later recollections.<sup>518</sup> Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu's opposition to meat was also recorded in Patrül's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, making certain that his stance on vegetarianism was well known.

Between these individuals and later figures, there were plenty of examples of vegetarianism among the highest echelons of religious practice in Kham. The presence of such exemplars could not fail to have given the diet a significant boost. It is particularly notable that Jigmé Lingpa was a mantrin, providing further impetus for the adoption of vegetarianism among this community.

Such examples are particularly powerful in the Tibetan context because of Tibetan Buddhism's strong emphasis on devotion towards the lama. According to Jamgön Kongtrül's encyclopedic *Treasury of Knowledge*, once a particular lama has been accepted as your teacher, he should be regarded as equivalent to the Buddha himself.<sup>519</sup> For someone with this type of devotion, everything the lama does and says models the Buddhist path. By following a teacher in this way, Kongtrül claims, "Our qualities

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<sup>517</sup> 'jigs med gling pa, *Autobiography*, 391, 445.

<sup>518</sup> Anonymous, *Biography of Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu*, 69-70. ngag dbang dpal bzang, *Autobiography*, 79-80.

become higher and higher and we accomplish all temporary and ultimate objectives.”<sup>520</sup>

Similarly, and in an indication that such ideas are widespread across the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) claims that, “the root of the supreme and common accomplishments is found in properly serving a spiritual master.”<sup>521</sup>

Thus, lamas were not simply looked to for explanations of Buddhist thought, they were models of the path, and great importance was placed on disciples’ correct interpretation of their conduct, though this does not mean that disciples felt they should emulate every aspect of their teachers’ conduct. Disciples of tertöns, for instance, would not necessarily have felt that they needed to reveal termas as well. For more prosaic issues of conduct and practice, however, lamas were powerful exemplars of proper conduct for their students. Further, this attitude is not limited to one’s immediate teacher, but is extended towards the entire lineage. Thus, a student in Jigmé Lingpa’s lineage might look back to him as a model, even though he had died a century earlier. Vegetarianism was not only a way to adhere to ideal conduct, it also provided a way to follow in the conduct of some of the most esteemed religious leaders of this period.

Vegetarianism, therefore, had the ability to be a powerful means for demonstrating an individual’s legitimacy as a religious leader. There is also evidence that

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<sup>519</sup> ‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, *Treasury of Knowledge*, 313. Jamgon Kongtrül, *Buddhist Ethics*, 60.

<sup>520</sup> ‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, *Treasury of Knowledge*, 313. Jamgon Kongtrül, *Buddhist Ethics*, 60.

*yon tan gyi tshogs kyis je mtho je mthor ‘gyur zhing gnas skabs dang mthar thug gi don thams cad ‘grub par gsungs pa*

<sup>521</sup> tsong kha pa, *Commentary on the Fifty Verses*, 322. Tsongkhapa, *The Fulfillment of All Hopes*, 29. *mchog dang thun mong gi dngos grub kyi rtsa ba ni bshes gnyen dam pa tshul bzhin du bsten pa nyid la rag las pa*

vegetarianism not only had the ability to confer legitimacy, but actually functioned this way in practice. In this context, it is worth returning once again to Tülku Urgyen's memoirs. As we have seen, he praises his teachers for their vegetarianism, holding this diet up, along with teetotaling and strict celibacy—as proof of their status as genuine monks, in opposition to the “half-hearted renunciant so common nowadays.”<sup>522</sup>

Perhaps the most explicit indication that vegetarianism can serve to legitimate a lama comes from an interview I conducted with a young monk in Degé. In the course of a long discussion of his own vegetarianism, he remarked, “If I meet a lama who is vegetarian, then I know he is a good lama.” For this young monk, vegetarianism served as a sign that a lama upheld Buddhist principles and was, therefore, “a good lama.” While this quote is from the contemporary period, it neatly encapsulates the way vegetarianism can serve to legitimate a lama in the eyes of potential students and patrons.

It is worth noting that almost all of the vegetarians mentioned so far in this chapter were affiliated with the Nyingma school, including Jigmé Lingpa, Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu, Nyakla Pema Düdül, Khenpo Ngakchung and Sera Khandro. The predominance of Nyingma voices here reflects an important facet of vegetarianism during this period: its popularity began among the Nyingma school, and it remained strongest among Nyingma practitioners straight through the nineteen fifties.<sup>523</sup> This suggests that vegetarianism's impact on legitimacy may have extended beyond individuals to impact entire sectarian debates.

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<sup>522</sup> Tülku Urgyen, *Blazing Splendor*, 198.

In many ways, vegetarianism was well situated to play a role in these debates. As noted above, the Nyingma were routinely critiqued by Geluk sympathizers for their allegedly immoral conduct, chiefly the lack of attention to rules of celibacy and other monastic regulations. As a practice with strong connection to ideal monastic practice, vegetarianism would have been well situated to counter these complaints. In the previous chapter, we saw that vegetarianism draws primarily on the Bodhisattva vow, rather than the Vinaya per se. As such, it was an expression of a superior form of monasticism. In the context of nineteenth and twentieth century Kham, the prominence of vegetarianism among Nyingma practitioners would have proclaimed the sect's adherence to ideals of monastic conduct, even if the individuals involved were not actually celibate monastics. Thus, vegetarianism could provide an effective counter to critiques coming from members of the Geluk school.

In addition to the Nyingma, Bön elements were also singled out for criticism. The Geluk scholar Pabongkha (1878-1941), for instance, includes several pages of anti-Bön polemic in his *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. In these critiques, Bön is disparaged, first and foremost because of its non-Buddhist status. At the same time, however, Pabongkha also critiques Bön for unethical conduct and insufficient attention to monastic norms.<sup>524</sup> As the recipient of ethically based sectarian critique, Bön was, in

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<sup>523</sup> This remains the case in contemporary Kham, though the circumstances are significantly different.

<sup>524</sup> pha bong kha pa bde chen snying po, *Liberation in the Hand*, 432-433. Pabongkha Rinpoche, *Liberation in the Palm*, 372.

Pabongkha Rinpoché was based in Central Tibet, though his prominent position within the Geluk school and at least one year-long teaching trip to Kham suggests that his work was well known there. (byams pa chos grags, 390-394. Samten Chhosphe)

many ways, in a similar position to the Nyingma school. At this point, it is perhaps worth remembering that these sectarian critiques could blossom into physical violence, as seen in the destruction of the Bön affiliated Tengchen Monastery at the hands of local Geluk monks who were, apparently, offended by the temerity of their Bön neighbors throwing ritual cakes in their direction.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that vegetarianism seems to have been fairly widespread among Bön practitioners of this period. Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen is the most prominent representative, but both textual sources such as *The History of the Makser Bön Lineage* and oral history suggest that vegetarianism was relatively widespread among Bön lamas of the early twentieth century.<sup>525</sup> As with its Nyingma adherents, vegetarianism's prominence among Bön practitioners would fit well as a response to Geluk critiques.

As we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation, however, vegetarianism during this period was not limited to the Nyingma and Bön, with prominent representatives of both the Kagyü and Sakya school adopting the diet. These schools were not singled out for critique by the Geluk quite as strongly as the Nyingma and Bön, however, and so it would fit the pattern outlined here to note that vegetarianism, while present, seems to have been less widespread among these schools.

Where we do not find a single example of vegetarianism is in the Geluk school. I can only assume that there were some representatives of the Geluk school who adopted vegetarianism during this time, but I have not been able to identify any. This lacunae

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<sup>525</sup> 'jam dpal dpa' bo rdo rje rtsal, *History of Makser Bön Lineage*.

may be a fluke: I may simply not have been looking in the right places.<sup>526</sup> In the context of our present discussion, however, it is hard not to notice that a lack of emphasis on vegetarianism among the Geluk fits well within the picture of sectarian critique and response outlined here. It is practitioners of the Geluk, after all, who are critiquing Nyingma and Bön adherents for not adhering to monastic norms. Vegetarianism works well as a response to this but may have been less necessary for those already claiming the moral high ground of celibate monasticism.

While this model, where vegetarianism serves to legitimate an entire tradition by responding to sectarian critique, aligns well with the outline of the sectarian debate outlined earlier, however, there is little explicit evidence for it. In the case of individuals, we have seen how people such as Tülku Urgyen have explicitly held up vegetarianism as proof of a lama's legitimacy. Similar evidence does not exist for sectarian tension. It would not be surprising, for instance, to find a Nyingma or Bön text responding to critique by extolling the practice of vegetarianism, or critiquing Geluk monasteries for the number of animals killed daily. If such texts exist, however, I have not found them.

As a result, conclusions regarding vegetarianism's place in sectarian debate must remain speculative. The broader picture we have seen suggests that vegetarianism *could* have supplied a response to Geluk critiques of Nyingma and Bön practice. It is also possible, however, that such a response was limited to individuals, rather than these

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<sup>526</sup> I have actively sought out references to Geluk vegetarians from this period, both through querying contemporary Geluk scholars in the region, and through analyzing catalogs of written works composed during this time.

broader sectarian debates. At this point it is worth recalling that even among the Nyingma and Bön, vegetarianism remained a minority practice. It is possible, therefore, that while individual Nyingma and Bön adherents could have adopted vegetarianism, at least in part, as a response to critiques of their schools, the diet may never have been popular enough to become directly implicated in the broader sectarian debates that were current at the time.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the idea that vegetarianism provided a source of religious legitimacy to those who adopted it. By refusing meat, in other words, individuals could project to others (and, potentially, to themselves) the sincerity of their religious practice. This, in turn, could ease the process of gaining disciples, patrons, and the trappings of a religious life. Discussing vegetarianism in these terms may make it seem like a cynical practice, aimed only at worldly ends. While this may have been true of some vegetarians, for the majority, I believe, motivations were more complicated. By way of a conclusion, I will explore this idea of legitimacy, suggesting that rather than simply a cynical attempt to acquire patrons, vegetarianism was a response to animal suffering enabled by the need for legitimacy, the rise of monasticism and the appearance of prominent vegetarian lamas.

At the outset, it should be noted that actively seeking patrons and followers was not necessarily considered inappropriate amongst Tibetans of this time. Admittedly,



Patrül, Dūdjom and others do critique those who pretend to be religious leaders, but seek only worldly gain.<sup>527</sup> For those whose primary aim was religious, however, explicitly seeking the assistance of patrons and the accumulation of followers was not discouraged, a position that can be seen in Dūdjom Lingpa's frank complaints about his attempts to attract disciples.<sup>528</sup> Dūdjom clearly wants to be well known and does not feel like there is anything wrong with this desire.

With that said, there are reasons to believe that vegetarianism was often more than just an intentional strategy for developing legitimacy. The first of these is the emotional content of stories frequently used to describe an individual's conversion to vegetarianism. As noted above, many of these conversion stories follow a particular pattern: the individual has a strong emotional response to the sight of an animal being slaughtered (usually a sheep), and shortly thereafter decides to adopt vegetarianism. These stories are united not only by their similar structure, but also by their emphasis on the emotional content of the situation. One notable exception to this pattern is Nyakla Pema Dūdül, who becomes vegetarian after a dream in which he is chastised by Avalokiteśvara. Following this dream he wakes up and, expressing great remorse for the suffering he has caused by eating meat in the past, fervently vows to never touch it

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<sup>527</sup> dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 103, 161. Patrül Rinpoché, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 70, 105. bdud 'joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 186. Dūdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 138.

<sup>528</sup> bdud 'joms gling pa, *Autobiography*, 108-110, 187-189. Dūdjom Lingpa, *Clear Mirror*, 83-84, 139-140.

again.<sup>529</sup> While Nyakla Pema Dūdül is not responding to the sight of animal suffering, his story also rests on an emotional response to animal suffering.

The language used in these accounts also emphasizes the importance of an emotional response to animal suffering. For Ngawang Lekpa (1864-1941), the revulsion is so strong he is unable to eat at all for several days.<sup>530</sup> For his part, Nyakla Pema Dūdül recalls awakening from his dream with, “My mind and body in pain, as if I had eaten poison.”<sup>531</sup> For these individuals, the emotional impact of the animal suffering they had caused was enough to induce physical pain. Importantly, none of these figures report adopting vegetarianism after sober reflection on the pros and cons of the diet.

The uniformity of these accounts might suggest that they are part of the legitimating process: in order to be legitimate, the conversion to vegetarianism had to be presented as emotionally driven. To some degree, this is the case, as I suggested earlier. At the same time, however, it seems inappropriate to completely reject this testimony as simply an attempt to align with cultural or literary ideals. These individuals all recall powerful moments of empathy for the suffering of animals. If we are going to take these authors seriously, we must accept that at some level these were real experiences, rather than (or in addition to) a calculated attempt to gain legitimacy.

We also need to remember that other strategies for gaining legitimacy were widely available at this time. Dūdjom Lingpa, for instance, relied on a perception that

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<sup>529</sup> nyag bla padma bdud ‘dul, *Advice*. Nyala Pema Duddul, “Song of Advice.”

<sup>530</sup> kun dga’ bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, *Life of Ngawang Lekpa*, 10.

<sup>531</sup> nyag bla padma bdud ‘dul, *Advice*, 162. Nyala Pema Duddul, “Song of Advice,” 3.

his rituals had perceptible, demonstrable results. Others gained respect and legitimacy through a humble lifestyle, extended periods of retreat or scholarship. Meanwhile, vegetarianism, while increasingly popular, remained a minority practice. Clearly, individual lamas could achieve legitimacy without adopting vegetarianism.

Further, we should recall from chapter two that almost all Tibetans, of all time periods, have admitted that meat tastes good. Adopting vegetarianism, therefore, was both unpleasant and unnecessary—in both the sense that it was not expected of anyone and that a sense of legitimacy could be achieved without it. In this context, it seems unlikely that many people would have adopted vegetarianism purely as part of a strategy to increase their own legitimacy. Instead, I would suggest that these individuals are having real, emotional crises sparked by the prospect of animal suffering.

It is in their responses to these experiences that the role of legitimacy becomes important. There is no reason to assume, after all, that such an experience should lead to vegetarianism. In other contexts, in fact, similar experiences did not. The clearest example of this comes from the life of Orgyen Chökyi (1675-1729), an eighteenth century nun living on the border with Nepal. On multiple occasions, Orgyen Chökyi's *Autobiography* recalls her distress at eating animal flesh. Once, she recalls, "When I put goat's meat in my mouth, my mind is sad. Set in this human life, I need food."<sup>532</sup> On another occasion, similar concerns are extended to milk, "Robbing the nanny goat's milk

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*btsan dug zos bzhin lus sems mi bde zhing*

<sup>532</sup> o rgyan chos skyid. *Autobiography*, 9. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 138.  
*ra sha kha ru 'jug dus sems nyid skyo/ mi yi lugs la rten nas zas dgos byung/*

from the mouth of her kid makes my mind sad, but I need the milk. Having been set in a human body, I need milk.”<sup>533</sup>

Orgyen Chökyi has a clear, negative emotional response to meat eating, and even to drinking milk.<sup>534</sup> If Orgyen Chökyi’s story were to fit the pattern we have outlined for nineteenth century Kham, we would expect her to announce that she has become vegetarian. And yet she does not. Instead, despite her clear empathy with the suffering she is causing, she continues to eat meat, giving no indication that she even considers vegetarianism a possibility. We can only speculate about why she does not, but it seems likely that vegetarianism was simply not part of the religious repertoire available in eighteenth century Nepal.

Nineteenth century Kham, on the other hand, strongly encouraged the adoption of vegetarianism. Political and religious instability had led to a situation where individual religious leaders felt a need to actively work to establish their legitimacy. Further, monasticism had become increasingly important over the previous century, making practices associated with it—such as vegetarianism—a marker of religious sincerity and legitimacy. Finally, several of the most important figures of this period had themselves practiced vegetarianism, providing both proof that a vegetarian diet was feasible and a strong incentive for its adoption by others. In this context, those individuals who experienced strong emotional reactions to the prospect of animal suffering were more

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<sup>533</sup> o rgyan chos skyid. *Autobiography*, 8. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess*, 138.  
*ma zho bu yi kha nas phrog dus su/ sams nyid skyod ba'i ngang nas zho dgos byung/ mi yi lus la brten nas zho dgos byung/*

<sup>534</sup> This is the only source I have found that critiques milk alongside meat.

likely to turn that response into vegetarianism than individuals who lived in a different context, such as Orgyen Chökyi.

This chapter has focused on the role of vegetarianism in understandings of religious legitimacy in nineteenth and twentieth century Kham. In part, this focus has been driven by the richness of the available sources, which allow a detailed glimpse of both the cultural environment and vegetarianism's place within it. In contrast, while vegetarianism is well attested for other periods, such as Central Tibet from the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, the available sources are more limited in scope.

This emphasis on Kham should not suggest, however, that vegetarianism was not important in developing legitimacy at other points in Tibetan history. Indeed, this idea can be found as early as third century CE India, where the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* says, “Bodhisattvas, compassionate by nature, wish to protect the minds of many beings, so that they do not denigrate the teachings. Therefore, they do not eat meat.”<sup>535</sup> Here, the concern with meat is not ethical, but is specifically concerned with people's perceptions; if someone eats meat, people may think they are not legitimate.

Similar understandings are suggested by many of the earliest references to vegetarianism in Tibet. Often only brief biographical annotations, these references nevertheless suggest that the authors were impressed by their subjects' abstention from meat. In just one example of many, *The Blue Annals* says of the fourth Karmapa, “He

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<sup>535</sup> Shakyamuni, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 154a.

*blo gros chen po skye bo mang po'i sems rjes su bsrung ba'i phyir bstan pa la skur pa spang bar 'dod pa'i byang chub sems dpa' snying rje'i bdag nyid can gyis sha mi bza'o/*

guarded his monastic commitments with great subtlety, not allowing even a hair's breadth of meat or wine into his presence."<sup>536</sup> Clearly, Gö Lotsawa, the author of this work, was impressed by the Karmapa's vegetarianism, seeing it as a sign of his broader commitment to a religious lifestyle.

Vegetarianism, therefore, had a role to play in understandings of legitimacy well prior to the nineteenth century. The sources are richer for that time, and the context, with the acute need for developing legitimacy, the rise of monasticism as an ideal and the example set by elite leaders, may have been ideal for fostering vegetarianism, but similar patterns have occurred at other times as well.

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<sup>536</sup> 'gos lo zhon nu dpal, *Blue Annals*, 592. Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 499.  
*'dul ba'i bcas pa phra mo rnams kyang bsrung zhing/ sha dang chang spu rtse tsam yang spyen lam du mi 'grim/*

## Conclusion

In the introduction, I described this dissertation as an exploration of intersection between religious calls for vegetarianism and cultural and environmental factors that mitigated against such a diet. As we have seen, the Tibetan environment and culture made adopting vegetarianism difficult. And yet, we have seen that vegetarianism was an active part of Tibetan religiosity. Admittedly, it never became normative for Tibetan Buddhists to eschew meat, but plenty of individuals did. Meat eating, I have shown, was a consistent area of concern and debate, with many people and groups pulled between an idealized vision of compassion towards animals and the practical difficulties of a vegetarian diet.

Those difficulties begin, but do not end, with the Tibetan climate. Given Tibet's elevation, agriculture was difficult, to say the least. Fruit was largely unknown and vegetables were rare, leaving barley as the primary agricultural product. With so few other options, meat was an integral part of the Tibetan diet. This situation was compounded for Tibet's nomads, who depended on their herds of yak and sheep for both their own sustenance and the entirety of their economic output.

There was also the simple fact, widely acknowledged by both meat eaters and vegetarians, that meat tastes good, making many of my informants reluctant to give it up.

Further, unlike for sex, there is no clear prohibition of meat in the monastic code. Those who opposed eating meat had no difficulty finding scriptural passages that supported their views, but those who wished could also find passages allowing it. Meat, therefore, was a pleasure that, while vaguely ethically problematic, was also not strictly prohibited.

Finally, and I argue most importantly, meat eating was associated with some Tibetan cultural ideals. These ideals celebrated strength, power and the domination of others as virtues. Meat eating, in this context, was a good thing. Such ideals were aligned with untamed aspects of Tibetan culture, rather than tamed, Buddhistic norms, but this does not mean that they were unimportant. Indeed, I have argued that meat eating was not a culturally neutral practice, just waiting to be erased by Buddhist ethical critiques. Instead, it carried with it strong, positive cultural connotations that proponents of vegetarianism had to overcome.

And yet, as I have demonstrated, vegetarianism did exist in Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism idealizes compassion for all beings, and a significant minority of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners have drawn on these ideals to both practice and promote a meat-free diet. These arguments come in a variety of flavors. Some authors, for instance, tended to highlight contradictions between meat eating and the vows that monks take. Others highlighted scriptural passages critical of meat. Still others approached the question of vegetarianism from a very personal, emotionally driven perspective, using vivid language to describe both the suffering animals endure and their own response to that suffering.



Despite their differences, however, these arguments all hinge on the importance Tibetan Buddhism places on compassion. As such, vegetarianism aligned closely with the tamed vision of religion promoted by Buddhist ethics. That is not to say that vegetarianism was ever required of those who adhered to the tamed side of Tibetan culture. Instead, as scholars such as Geoffrey Samuel and Stan Royal Mumford have argued, if there is anything that explicitly divides tamed from untamed in Tibet, it is the performance of blood sacrifice.<sup>537</sup> Within this framework, with white sacrifices on the one hand and red offerings on the other, vegetarianism aligns closely with tamed practice. Indeed, in some ways vegetarianism represents tamed ideals taken to their logical conclusion: if meat is bad to offer to the deities, perhaps people should not eat it either. This association between vegetarianism and the ideals of tamed religiosity explains the continuing connection between vegetarianism and monasticism, as well as its ability to display the religious legitimacy of both individuals and communities.

When I would describe this research to friends, many—including western scholars, lay Tibetans and Tibetan scholars—expressed a belief that vegetarianism did not exist in pre-modern Tibet, or at least that it was so rare as to be of little consequence to the broader study of Tibetan religion. If nothing else, I hope that this dissertation has proved such skeptics wrong. The practical difficulties of a vegetarian diet were real, but individuals regularly overcame them. In this discussion of Tibetan vegetarianism,

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<sup>537</sup> Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, 704–705. Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, 7.

therefore, I hope to have illuminated some of the complex dynamic that emerges when religious ideals encounter entrenched practical difficulties.

## Concordance

### Personal Names

*Includes ID numbers for the TBRC database, when available.*

Phonetics	Wylie	TBRC
Ācārya Marpo	a tsArya dmar po	
Atiśa Dīpaṃkara-śrījñāna	a ti sha dI paM ka ra shrI dznyA na	P3379
Chagdū Tülku	lcags bdud sprul sku	
Chatrel Sangyé Dorjé	bya bral sangs rgyas rdo rje	P6036
Chögyel Ngakgyi Wangpo	chos rgyal ngag gi dbang po	P687
Chokgyur Lingpa	mchog gyur gling pa	P564
Devadatta	lhas phyin / lhas sphyin / lha sphyin	
Dilgo Khyentsé	dil mgo mkhyen brtse	P625
Do Khyentsé	mdo mkhyen brtse	P698
Dolpopa	dol po pa shes rab rgyal mtshan	P139
Dorjé Dzeö	rdo rje mdzes 'od	P8838
Drakpa Gyeltsen	grags pa rgyal mtshan	P1614
Dratön Kelzang Tenpé Gyeltsen	dbra ston skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan	P1922

Drigung Könchok Gyatso	'bri gung dkon mchog rgya mtsho	
Drokmi Lotsawa	'brog me lo tsA ba	P3285
Dromtön Gyelwé Jungné	'brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas	P2557
Drukpa Kunlé	'brug pa kun dga' legs pa	P816
Düdjom Lingpa	bdud 'joms gling pa	P705
Dungkar Losang Tinlé	dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las	P1161
Gerab Shepochen	dge rab shed po can	
Getsé Mahapaṇḍita	dge rtse mahApaNDita	P2943
Gö Lotsawa	'gos lo tsa ba	P318
Gönpo Lekden	mgon po legs ldan	
Gönpo Namgyel	mgon po rnam rgyal	P6521
Gorampa	go rams pa bsod nams seng ge	P1042
Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé	'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas	P264
Jampel Pawo Dorjé Tsal	'jam dpal dpa' bo rdo rje rtsal	
Jamyang Gönpo	'jam dbyangs mgon po	P4253
Jamyang Khyentsé Wangchuk	'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang phyug	P1089
Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo	'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po	P258
Jawa Alak	ja' ba a lags	
Jigmé Gyelwé Nyügu	'jigs med rgyal ba'i myu gu	P695
Jigmé Lingpa	jigs med gling pa	P314
Jigmé Sengé	'jigs med seng ge	

Jigme Tenpé Nyima	'jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma	P248
Jigmé Trlné Özer	'jigs med phrin las 'od zer	P293
Jigmé Yeshé Drakpa's	'jigs med ye shes grags pa	P344
Jikten Sumgön	'jig rten gsum mgon	P16
Kakyab Dorjé	mkha' khyab rdo rje	P563
Kangyur Rinpoché	bka' 'gyur rin po che	P734
Karma Chakmé	karma chags med	P649
Karma Pakshi	karma pakShi	P1487
Karmé Khenpo Rinchen Dargyé	karma'i mkhan po rin chen dar rgyas	P2710
Kechok Rangdröl Rangrik	mkhas mchog rang grol rang rig	
Khedrub Jé	mkhas grub rje dge legs dpal bzang	P55
Khenpo Jigmé Püntso	mkhan po 'jigs med phun tshogs	P7774
Khenpo Karthar	mkhan po kar mthar	
Khenpo Ngakchung	mkhan po ngag dbang dpal bzang	P724
Khenpo Shenga	mkhan po gzhan dga'	P699
Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö	mkhan po tshul khrims blo gros	P7911
Kudön Sönam Lodrö	sku mdun bsod nams blo gros	P1682
Künga Tenpé Gyeltsen	kun dga' bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan	P967
Künzang Sherab	kun bzang shes rab	P655
Lagen Kama	lha gen ka ma	
Lobsang Yeshé Tenpé Rabgyé	blo bzang ye shes bstan pa rab rgyas	P304

Lochen Dharmasri	lo chen dharma srI	
Longchen Tar	klong chen thar	
Lopön Tenzin Namdak	slob dpon bstan 'dzin rnam dag	P1655
Machik Labdrön	ma gcig lab sgron	P3312
Metön Sherab Özer	me ston nyi ma rgyal mtshan	P1658
Migyur Namké Dorjé	mi 'gyur nam mkha'i rdo rje	P1710
Milarepa	mi la ras pa	P1853
Mipam Jamyang Namgyel Gyatso	mi pham 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal rgya mtsho	P252
Namchiwé Senggo Lhalung Zik	snam phyi ba'i seng 'go lha lung gzigs	
Namka Gyeltsen	nam mkha' rgyal mtshan	
Nesar Tashi Chöphel	gnas gsar bkra shis chos 'phel	P6173
Ngawang Lekpa	ngag dbang leg pa	P812
Ngawang Tenzin Norbu	ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu	P708
Ngorchen Künga Zangpo	ngor chen kun dga' bzang po	P1132
Nyakla Pema Dödül	nyag bla pad ma bdud 'dul	P2424
Nyammé Sherab Gyeltsen	mnyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan	P1675
Orgyen Chökyi	o rgyan chos skyid	
Orgyen Lingpa	o rgyan gling pa	P4943
Orgyenpa Rinchen Pal	o rgyan pa rin chen dpal	P1448
Pabongkha	pha bong kha	P230

Padma Lhündrub Gyatso	padma lhun grub rgya mtsho	P5174
Pakmodrupa	phag mo gru pa rdo rje rgyal po	P127
Patrül Rinpoché	dpal sprul rin po che	P270
Pema Kelzang	padma skal bzang	P6599
Pema Nyinjé Wangpo	padma nyin byed dbang po	P559
Phulungwa	phu lung ba	
Ritrö Wangchuk	ri khrod dbang phyug	
Rolpé Dorjé	rol pa'i rdo rje	
Sakya Paṇḍita	sa skya pandita	P1056
Samten Gyatso	bsam gtan rgya mtsho	P9904
Sangngak Rinpoché	gsang sngags rin po che	
Sera Khandro	se ra mkha' 'gro	P742
Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl	zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol	P287
Shakyamuni Buddha	shAkya mu ni	P7326
Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen	shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan	P1663
Situ Panchen	si tu paN chen	P956
Tashi Sengé	bskra shis seng ge	
Taklung Tangpa	stag lung thang pa	P2649
Tenzin Gyatso	bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho	
Tertön Migyur Dorjé	gter ston mi 'gyur rdo rje	P659
Tri Düsong	khri 'dus srong	

Tri Songdetsen	khri srong lde'u btsan	P7787
Trinlé Tayé Dorjé	phrin las mtha' yas rdo rje	P10569
Tsering Lama Jampel Zangpo	tshe ring bla ma 'jam dpal bzang po	P6239
Tsewang Dorjé Rigzin	tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin	P5064
Tsewang Lhamo	tshe dbang lha mo	
Tsewang Tenzin	tshe dbang bstan 'dzin	
Tsongkhapa	tsong kha pa	P64
Tuken Chökyi Nyima	thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma	P170
Tülku A-sung	sprul sku a srung	
Tülku Tübtan Pelzang	sprul sku thub bstan dpal bzang	P8555
Tülku Urgyen	sprul sku o rgyan	P867
Urgyen Trinlé Dorjé	o rgyan 'phrin las rdo rje	P5611



## Place Names

*Includes ID numbers for both TBRC & THL databases, when available.*

Phonetics	Wylie	TBRC	THL
Amdo	a mdo	G649	F15348
Ba Chödé Monastery	'ba' chos sde dgon	G4023	
Batang	ba' thang	G2305	F23724
Changtang	byang thang	G3189	F15346
Dartsedo	dar rtse mdo	G1135	F5229
Degé	sde dge	G1366	F23731
Drakkar	brag dkar	G4755	F17344
Drigung	'bri gung	G898	F15482
Dzogchen Monastery	rdzogs chen dgon	G16	F17093
Jyekundo	skye rgu mdo	G869	F1189
Karnzé	dkar mdzes	G500	F1087
Kham	kham	G1326	F5225
Larung Gar	bla rung sgar	G3997	F5224
Lhagang	lha sgang	G3791	F15809
Lhasa	lha sa	G2126	

Litang	li thang	G2304	F23743
Manigego	ma Ni gad mgo		F16026
Minyak	mi nyag	G1033	
Mt. Tsari	tsa ri	G4631	F22392
Namtso	gnam mtsho	G2398	F5298
Ngaba	rnga ba	G2331	F23752
Nubri	nub ri	G4663	
Nyakrong	nyag rong	G1365	F23745
Palpung Monastery	dpal spungs dgon	G36	F17108
Pelyül Monastery	dpal yul dgon	G18	F17447
Pungri Monastery	spung ri dgon	G4015	F17272
Reting Monastery	rwa sgrenng dgon	G74	F16925
Serta	gser thar	G2302	F23740
Shechen Monastery	zhe chen dgon	G20	F17102
Tengchen Monastery	steng chen dgon	G1666	F17118
Tsang	gtsang	G1300	F15354
Ü	dbus	G1115	F17432
Yachen Gar	ya chen dgon	G3812	F17432

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