Epistolary Buddhism:
Letter Writing and the Growth of Geluk Buddhism in Early Modern Asia

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Abstract

At the very time that correspondence knit together an intellectual Republic of Letters across Enlightenment Europe, letters also flourished across early modern Asia in the making of a different kind of enlightened community: the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism. This thesis argues that a distinctively Buddhist letter-writing culture shaped the elite networks among lamas, rulers, and patrons that enabled Geluk Buddhism to spread across vast geopolitical distances and to increasingly influence local social environments.

Examining the rise of Geluk letter-writing manuals and letter collections during the High Qing period, I identify a Tibetan Buddhist movement toward epistolary standardization. This movement was based in Amdo, a region at the crossroads of Tibetan, Chinese, and Mongolian cultures. By theologizing the role of official letters in Buddhist history and by prescribing the formatting and stylistic features of such letters, monastic scholars in Amdo sought to hone a key tool of religious network formation. Their epistolary manuals regulated an economy of correspondence in which lamas identified and promoted new candidates for leadership, religious scholars debated ideas and shared texts, monastic peers exchanged poetic affections, and rulers negotiated the financial, military, and ritual stakes of their support for Buddhist institutions.

Through a diligent literary study with implications for social and political history, I aim to offer a new cultural analysis of Geluk Buddhism during the Qing period. This study contributes a social network theory approach to the study of early modern Tibetan Buddhism and sheds a uniquely literary light on the forging of one of Asia's most powerful empires.

Acknowledgements

As I immersed myself in this project, I discovered in a deeply personal way the power of letters to convey the presence of those far away. Especially during my nine months of dissertation research in China from 2013 to 2014, I was uplifted by the constant company of family, friends, and teachers through their letters of both manuscript and digital varieties. To these companions on my journey, I wish to offer some brief words of thanks and acknowledgement.

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Note on Transcription and Phonetics

For Tibetan proper names and terms presented in the body of the text, I use the phonetic system developed by the Tibetan Himalayan Library (THL) at the University of Virginia.[1] The only exception to this is my rendering of the title Tukwan, a loanword that isn't easily recognizable as "Tuken" in the THL phonetic scheme. In footnotes and in the glossary, I provide Wylie transcription for all Tibetan terms. I use Pinyin transcription for Chinese terms.

Although I am not a student of the Mongolian language, the materials on which I have relied for the present study plunged me into a world populated with Mongolian names, offices, and terms. I have made efforts to employ the Mongolian transcriptions given by Christopher Atwood in his *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, and refer the interested reader to that robust resource.[2] Still, errors in my transcriptions surely remain. Thank you in advance for your forbearance.

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1. While the use of central Tibetan phonetics in a work about the Amdo region is not without problems, it seems the best way to engage readers who are not Tibetan specialists; central Tibetan phonetics are simply easier to read. The Tibetan specialists among my readers will already be aware that pronunciations (not to mention verbal auxiliaries, idioms, and much vocabulary) in the Amdo dialect are markedly different from those in the central Tibetan dialect. For Amdo pronunciation tables, please refer to Kalsang Norbu, Karl Peet, dPal Ldan bKra shis, and Kevin Stuart. *Modern Oral Amdo Tibetan.* Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.
2. Atwood, Christopher P. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire.* New York: Facts on File, 2004.

For William, my favorite letter writer

Table of Contents

Salutatio

Dear Reader,

As I embarked on this project to understand Tibetan letters and their historical, religious, and literary significance, I became acutely aware of the poverty of my technical vocabulary for letter writing. Europe has a long-standing epistolary tradition and classical theories of rhetoric to guide letter-writing practice, just as do Tibet and China; in an effort to translate the intricacies of the Tibetan Buddhist epistolary arts into English, I have found it useful to become better acquainted with the terms and conventions of the Latin epistolary treatises. Otherwise, we have few tools in our native linguistic toolbox with which to identify and analyze the components of Tibetan letters. Even in Tibetan sources, the parts of a letter that are so carefully prescribed are not given succinct identifying labels until the twentieth century.

Claiming the classical vocabulary of the European epistolary heritage so that we may relate to Tibetan letters in more meaningful ways, I structure this dissertation around the five parts of a letter according to the medieval *ars dictandi,* the Latin letter-writing manual adapted from Ciceronian rhetorical theory:

1. *Salutatio*:
   A formal address to the reader
2. *Captatio Benevolentiae:*
   An introduction to secure the reader's goodwill
3. *Narratio*:
   A narration of the background leading to the main petition
4. *Petitio*:
   A presentation of the main petition
5. *Conclusio*:
   A formal conclusion with words of blessing and the place and date of dispatch

I invite you to read this work as an extended letter: an argument in writing, rooted in the concerns of a specific time and place, intrinsically dialogical in nature. This letter is addressed to you and seeks to capture your scholarly attention and goodwill. I hope to convince you of the richness of the Tibetan epistolary tradition so that you will draw upon Tibetan letters in your own field of research, whether it be the study of Buddhism, the history of religions, Tibetan language and literature, rhetorical and poetic theories, or particular epistolary communities, such as the Enlightenment period Republic of Letters.

Finally, as letters invite reply, so does this work seek to open a conversation with you that will advance beyond the limits of this project and into new spheres of humanistic inquiry. I anticipate that my work will expand and improve in the coming years thanks to your engagement with its questions and claims. Please, read on.

Captatio Benevolentiae

Introduction

The Geluk school of Buddhism has dominated the Tibetan political sphere for the past several centuries. Long before the global popularity of the current Dalai Lama, Geluk Buddhism served as a vehicle for international diplomacy in which a patron-priest relationship was the paradigm for Tibetan alliances with foreign powers. Beginning in the seventeenth century, when the Fifth Dalai Lama joined forces with the Mongol ruler Güüshi Khan to conquer the Tibetan Plateau, the Geluk sect rose to dominance over other Tibetan Buddhist schools. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Geluk hegemony extended into Amdo (eastern Tibet), Mongolia, and Russia, even securing a place of honor and influence at the Qing Court in Beijing. Throughout the tumult of the first half of the twentieth century, Geluk lamas served as intermediaries between the Chinese state and the Buddhist minority populations of China's northwest.

This dissertation aims to answer a critical question in the history of Buddhism, a question that is also central to our understanding of early modern Asia. How did the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism both envision and achieve its rise to power on an international scale? For me, this is an instrumental question more than a causal question: I am interested in the mechanics of the growth of Geluk Buddhism, the ways in which one religious sect in a sparsely-populated land leveraged its political, economic, intellectual, and ritual resources to significantly shape the course of Asian history.

The hypothesis I advance in this work is that letter-writing culture served as a key instrument of the Geluk apotheosis. Letter writing is a form of discourse with its

particular language and conventions, but it is also a networking tool that links disparate groups and allows for a flow of information unifying those groups. Here, I explore in depth for the first time the theory, practice, and historical significance of letter-writing culture in early modern Tibetan Buddhism. I argue that the standardization of Buddhist letters equipped the Geluk school to forge an international Buddhist vernacular, to maintain a strong network of institutions across remarkable distances and across ethnic boundaries, and to suffuse Geluk ritual and institutional life with the clerical authority letters embody.

Recent studies of Buddhist monastic culture, in particular Anne Hansen's *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia,* rightly integrate a contemporary cultural studies approach with an understanding of the ancient literature of Buddhist monastic discipline, the *vinaya.*[1] The concerns about etiquette, social presentation, and comportment that emerge in epistolary practice are not merely categories imposed upon Buddhism by modern cultural theorists, but rather are integral to the formation of the Buddhist monastic community and the earliest stratum of Buddhist scriptures. As a vital part of what it means to act like an accomplished Buddhist monk, letter writing became a practice not merely of cultural concern but of *religious* concern in early modern Tibet. The fact that Geluk letter-writing treatises from the period draw upon Buddhist canonical literature to construct their arguments about proper epistolary practice further highlights, for these authors, the inherently Buddhist dimensions of letter writing and the religious value of a letter well written.

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1. Hansen, Anne Ruth. *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

Why Letters Matter

The letter is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of written expression in human history.[2] What other literary form, in ancient times just as now, suffuses the full social spectrum as letters do? While housewives might not write legal briefs, and popes might not write novels, everyone who can write at all writes letters: rich and poor, leaders and subjects, women and men, old and young, religious and lay. The various forms and functions of letters are as wide-ranging as the identities of their authors: different styles of letters govern the affairs of the state, the church, the market, the household, and the mind and heart. As performed expressions of identity, letters embody the basic structures that underlie the shape of human societies. They reveal how we relate to one another and the ideals that guide those relationships.

The modern academy has recently discovered anew the value of epistolary sources for diverse fields of humanistic inquiry; accordingly, scholarship on letter-writing theory and practice has burgeoned over the past couple of decades.[3] Cultural historians

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2. For more on letter writing as a human practice worldwide, see Barton, David, and Nigel Hall, Eds. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice.* Vol. 9. of Studies in Written Language and Literacy. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000.

3. A select survey of some of the major works on letters to have been published since 1980 includes: Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982; Camargo, Martin. *Ars Dictaminis, Ars Dictandi.* Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1991; Dossena, Marina, and Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti. *Letter Writing in Late Modern Europe.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2012; Goldgar, Anne. *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; Goodman, Dena. *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996; Barton, David, and Nigel Hall, eds. *Letter Writing As a Social Practice.* Studies in Written Language and Literacy, v. 9. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub, 2000; Bannet, Eve Tavor. *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Poster, Carol. *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present: Historical and Bibliographic Studies.* Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2007; Grafton, Anthony. *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West.* Harvard University Press, 2009; Haboush, JaHyun Kim, ed. *Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Choson, 1392-1910.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009; Kadar, Daniel Z. *Historical Chinese Letter Writing.* New York: Continuum

are now making rich use of letters as they examine the structures of meaning through which culture is fashioned. Recent studies in manners, morality, child education, and class formation have drawn extensively from letters and epistolary instruction textbooks. For social historians, letters are useful because they capture types of information that are difficult to access through official documents and doctrines alone: casual thoughts and feelings, descriptions of everyday life, gossip, etiquette, administrative details, financial records, many of the seemingly mundane particulars that govern human existence. In this vein, letters have been especially valuable in transmitting the voices of marginalized agents — especially women — whose narratives the stewards of tradition have deemed either irrelevant or heterodox.[4]

As our conception of the world as technologically and economically interconnected fuels a growing appreciation for social network theory, letters also serve as valuable sources for identifying the links that form groups and movements. The early modern Republic of Letters, a transatlantic network of letter writers who saw themselves as citizens of an alternative body politic, serves as a paradigmatic case for the power of epistolary communities to transform political, social, and intellectual landscapes; the western Age of Enlightenment that profoundly shaped the modern world emerged through the Republic of Letters. Digital tools now enable the dynamic mapping of

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International Publishing Group, 2011; Richter, Antje. *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China.* University of Washington Press, 2013.

4. Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature.* Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1989.

epistolary communities like the Republic of Letters in ways that have greatly enhanced our understanding of social networks in the early modern world.[5]

The present work is inspired by a fascination with the ways in which letters work to form the religious person and the religious community. Letters, inherently social and even dialogical in nature, are both artifacts of and vehicles for the performance of identities. If we follow Emile Durkheim, to whom the modern field of Religious Studies owes so much, in viewing religion as an intrinsically social phenomenon, then letters — as means of assessing how relationships are formed, communities unified, and networks maintained — are more than relevant to the study of religion. They are virtually essential to understanding religious life in any literate society.[6]

Exemplary of the cultural turn of the past several decades, a renewed focus on letters has enabled special contributions to the study of religion. Most noteworthy among these is the new engagement with Greco-Roman epistolary theory that has virtually revolutionized theological studies of the epistles in the Christian *New Testament*.[7] In the study of Buddhism, western language translations of the letter collections of Buddhist

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5. See Stanford University's project *Mapping the Republic of Letters* at http://republicofletters.stanford.edu. Accessed on December 8, 2014.

6. Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life.* Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915. "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices […] which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. […] by showing that the idea of religion is inseparable from that of the Church, it makes it clear that religion should be an eminently collective thing," page 47.

7. See Stowers, Stanley K. *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity.* Vol. 5. Westminster John Knox Press, 1989; Classen, C. Joachim. "St. Paul's epistles and Ancient Greek and Roman rhetoric." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric.* Vol. 10, No. 4 (1992): 319-344; Reed, Jeffrey T. "Using ancient rhetorical categories to interpret Paul's letters: a question of genre." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* (1993): 292-292; Klauck, Hans-Josef, and Daniel P. Bailey. *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis.* Baylor University Press, 2006; and Porter, Stanley E., and Sean A. Adams, eds. *Paul and the ancient letter form*. Vol. 6. Brill, 2010. Also, note that the seminal 1927 work of Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the ancient East: The New Testament illustrated by recently discovered texts of the Graeco-Roman world*, was reprinted by Wipf and Stock Publishers in 2004.

masters, especially in Zen (Chinese *chan)* traditions, have steadily grown.[8] Two major monographs dedicated to interpreting Buddhist letters have appeared within the last decade. First, James Dobbins' careful study of the letters of the Japanese nun Eshinni, wife to Shin Buddhism founder Shinran, illuminates the development of a cult among Shinran's family and friends revering him as an emanation of the bodhisattva Kannon.[9] Dobbins also draws from the letters evidence that, notwithstanding the metaphorical explanations of the Pure Land in some of Shinran's writings, Eshinni and her family believed in a literal Pure Land. Second, Anne Blackburn's *Locations of Buddhism* relies heavily on letters to challenge the portrayal of a destabilized Sri Lankan Buddhism at the mercy of the forces of colonialism, revealing instead monastic leaders' deliberate interweaving of tradition and modernity.[10] Her engagement with epistolary sources reveals an alternative mode of agency in Sri Lanka that was largely invisible in official and diplomatic sources from the colonial period.

With such rich cross-disciplinary resources for epistolary studies and the advent of digital tools for analysis, the time is ripe for pursuing a rigorous study of letters and the communities they create in the context of Tibetan Buddhism. This study joins a growing scholarly fascination with letters worldwide, contributing a distinctly religious

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8. See Xiangyun. *Chan Yuan Shi Shu Jian.* Taibei Shi: Pu men wen ku, 1983; Hongyi. *Hongyi Da Shi Shu Jian.* Nantou Xian Shuili Xiang: Lianyin Si, 1985; Rogers, Minor. *Rennyo: The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism: With a Translation of His Letters.* Berkeley, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 1992; Natsume, Sōseki. *Zen Haiku: Poems and Letters of Natsume Soseki.* New York: Weatherhill, 1994; Yuanwu. *Zen Letters: Teachings of Yuanwu.* 1st ed. Boston: Shambhala, 1994; Haukin. *Beating the Cloth Drum: Letters of Zen Master Hakuin.* Translated by Norman Waddell. First edition. Boston: Shambhala, 2012.
9. Dobbins, James C. *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
10. Blackburn, Anne M. *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

perspective on the epistolary form that, I hope, will encourage new questions about the dimensions of epistolary form in a variety of contexts.

Key Concerns in Epistolary Studies

Before we advance into the study of Tibetan letters, I introduce several themes from global scholarship on epistolary literature that will prove useful to our enterprise. First, when working with epistolary sources, it is helpful to investigate our notions of "public" and "private" and to question the boundary between the two with careful attention to context. A contemporary study of a small town in England found that in white families, people compose letters individually and receive and read letters individually; in the same town, a Muslim family and a Gujarati family compose letters collaboratively and read their mail publicly within the larger family unit.[11] This study reminds us to question our assumptions about the private versus public (and individual versus collaborative) nature of authorship and readership, especially when working with materials outside a modern western context. We should also remember that, in the case of personal letters that are archived, collected, and published, letters may enjoy a private life for a certain period of time and later enter the public sphere, thereby existing as both private and public artifacts simultaneously. This ambiguity is one of the challenges inherent to the study of epistolary sources.

A second important consideration to make is that, while the scholar's preconceived notions of public and private may sometimes pose problems, the categories of "official" and "personal" letters more often find solid purchase across cultural

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11. Barton, David, and Nigel Hall, eds. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice.* Vol. 9. John Benjamins Publishing, 2000. Page 3.

contexts. Letters composed by officials to conduct institutional business reflect language registers and lexicons that differ from those of personal correspondence, and are even called by different names than personal letters (such as the English terms "edict," "memorial," "decree," "notice," "petition"; in Ming and Qing period Chinese letters, *shu* refers to official letters and *chi du* to personal correspondence).[12] The distinction between official and personal correspondence even extends to the materiality of the letter itself, as official letters are typically composed on different types of paper and with different script and formatting than personal letters. This fact holds true in ancient Tibet as well as in the contemporary United States. Moments when personal correspondence adopts the characteristics of official letters, or vice versa, are worthy of special notice.

Third, we should remember the highly subjective construction of the epistolary genre *qua* genre. Because the boundaries between letters and other forms of written expression (such as autobiography, poetry, advice literature, political tract, polemic literature, or oratory) are often difficult to delineate, some have argued convincingly that the "letter" may not constitute a genre at all.[13] If the letter is a genre, it is certainly a flexible one capable of layering or nesting with other genres. In the case of letters exchanged in literary circles, the epistolary form can serve as a frame for a work of poetry; and in the case of the epistolary novel, which gained currency in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature, the novel is a frame for letters. I find it useful to take up Jacques Derrida's description of texts as "participating in one or several genres,"

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12. *Shu* (書) and *chi du* (尺牘). Pattinson, David. "The Market for Letter Collections in 17th c. China." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR),* Vol. 28 (Dec. 2006), pp. 125-157. See page 129.
13. For example, see Stanley, Liz. "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences." *Auto/biography* Volume 12 (2004): 201–35.

while allowing that "such participation does not amount to belonging."[14] Rather than confining an epistolary text from a faraway time and place to a narrow genre conception of our own imagining, we do well to observe the ways in which our sources "participate" in the epistolary genre and in other genres simultaneously. In my reading of Tibetan letters, there are almost always other genre markers embedded in letters, waiting to be noticed.

Finally, I highlight that for most of human history, letters have been produced as manuscripts. While printing dramatically increased worldwide beginning in the seventeenth century, facilitating the changes that Elizabeth Eisenstein highlighted in her seminal 1979 work,[15] it is critical to note that manuscript production — especially in the form of letters — *also increased dramatically* as the epoch we term "the early modern" in Europe and America unfolded. The growth of letter writing over the past several centuries offers an alternative narrative to the dominance of printing as a key feature of modernity. Manuscript letters carry no intrinsic connation with the "ancient" or "antique," nor should they appear to us less modern or more traditional than printed materials, because letters signed, sealed, and delivered by hand played a central role in the making of our modern world alongside the growth of printing. It is to underscore this important fact that I often refer to the Qing period Tibetan materials examined in this study as "early modern."

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14. Derrida, Jacques and Avital Ronell. "The Law of Genre." *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 7, No. 1. On Narrative (Autumn 1980), pp. 55-81. See page 65.
15. Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

An Introduction to Letters in Tibet

In Tibet, letters have circulated at every stage of history since the seventh century when the Tibetan script was invented. While literacy in Tibet was traditionally strongest within governmental administrations and monastic institutions, we know that letter writing was not confined solely to those spheres. In the beloved life story of the eleventh-century saint Milarepa, for example, Milarepa's mother as well as his teacher's wife figure prominently as writers, readers, and interpreters of letters. Hanna Schneider's investigation of administrative archives in southwestern Tibet reveals a large collection of petitionary letters submitted by farmers and herders negotiating their land use arrangements. An early nineteenth-century merchant in western Tibet requested that his lama compose a letter-writing manual for his personal use in conducting trade — the list goes on. The Tibetan literary record shows letter writing in a variety of spheres and stations, from women to farmers to traders.

Our challenge as historians is that not all letters have enjoyed equal chances of preservation and transmission. The vast majority of Tibetan letters extant and accessible today are letters composed by high-ranking Buddhist teachers, letters whose contents have been preserved for posterity thanks to well-organized editorial and printing projects financed by monasteries and their wealthy patrons. This means that ordinary letters serving everyday concerns, letters like the one Milarepa's mother sent her son, are for the most part lost because there was no institutional incentive for preserving such texts. Archival holdings, like the treasury of texts in the Dunhuang cache, tend to capture a

more inclusive cross-section of epistolary life; but aside from a few cases,[16] most of the extant Tibetan-language archives remain inaccessible today for political reasons.

Even with the absence of much of Tibet's epistolary record, we have no dearth of sources. The thousands of letters we do have, mostly composed by monks, can serve as rich resources for understanding almost any aspect of Tibetan civilization, from economics to linguistics to gender norms to paper production to the history of science. This wealth of possibilities is due to the opportunities afforded by the epistolary genre itself, because letters record different kinds of evidence than other forms of writing usually do. The present work, at its most general level, makes a case for the value of Tibetan epistolary sources and aims to equip students of Tibetan literature to identify, access, and interpret them.

Since there are too many sources and too much diversity among them to undertake a single comprehensive study of Tibetan letters, I focus my lens on a much smaller genre within Tibet's epistolary corpus: the letter-writing manual. I see letter-writing manuals as moments when the mechanics of culture are laid bare and Tibetan thinkers self-consciously wrestle with questions like "Who are the letter writers in society? How should people of different ranks and stations communicate with each other? What functions do letters serve? How can letter-writing culture serve the spread of Buddhism?" Letter-writing manuals are maps of the Tibetan social *imaginaire*.

My attention in this work, then, is focused not only on Tibetan Buddhist letters themselves, but also on the imagination and governance of letters: the standardization of

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16. For example, the archives of Kündeling (kun bde gling) Monastery in Lhasa have been digitized and catalogued by the Central Asian Seminar of Bonn University, Germany. The collection can be accessed at http://www.dtab.uni-bonn.de/tibdoc/index1.htm. Accessed February 18, 2014.

letter writing as a social practice. This regulation, played out in the production of letter-writing manuals, can be described as a mode of controlling the linguistic means of production (in Marxist terms), or controlling the field of power (in Bourdieuan terms). To govern the very language and culture of correspondence is to mold a society whose members relate to each other through the written word by performing certain kinds of identities. I am particularly interested in the regulation of language in Tibet as a process of culture-making because, at a particular moment in history, it proclaimed itself to be a *Buddhist* undertaking. I am interested in why the Geluk school of Buddhism had a stake in this enterprise, and why it appropriated epistolary standardization from the governmental sphere, in whose domain it had rested until the early modern period. The following section looks to the development of letter-writing arts within the Tibetan Buddhist monastic context. I examine the emergence of Tibetan letter-writing manuals and ask what the birth of a genre can indicate about a particular moment in religious history.

Letter-Writing Manuals in Tibet: An Overview and An Argument

Letter-writing manuals are generally conceived in two major types: formularies and theoretical treatises. Although I adapt these divisions from the European tradition of letter-writing instructions, they work well in the Tibetan context by providing names for a division that is native to the Tibetan materials but without a consistent Tibetan terminology. Formularies are works that offer stock formulas or phrasing examples for letter writers to copy or to emulate. These phrasings might include examples of lines of address for people of various ranks, along with the requisite markers of respect particular

to the station of the addressee, or poetic phrasings used as part of the *captatio benevolentiae* to secure the reader's goodwill with elegant words of flattery and polite inquiry. In contrast to formularies, theoretical treatises provide scholastic treatments of the history, theory, and functions of letter writing. Theoretical treatises offer more than examples to copy; they equip the reader to understand the various concerns inherent to epistolary practice and offer guidelines for attending to those concerns.

In Tibet as in Europe, we find both formularies and theoretical treatises. Tibetan formularies are usually either designated as "epistolary illustrations" *('phrin yig dper brjod*) or "illustrations of official letters" (*chab shog dper brjod*), and are closely related to the more familiar "illustrations of ornate poetics" (*snyan ngag dper brjod*). Theoretical treatises in Tibet usually style themselves as "presentations on correspondence" (*yig bskur rnam gzhag*) or "presentations on letters" *('phrin yig gi rnam gzhag*), although some texts that call themselves "presentations" act as formularies or even as letter collections instead. This fact reveals the slippage among epistolary instructional genres in Tibetan; letter collections can act as formularies, and formularies can make implicit theoretical claims by virtue of their organizational schemata.

I have identified sixteen Tibetan letter-writing manuals composed prior to the twentieth century and expect that more will come to light. Relatively few in number, these texts were composed by elite Tibetan Buddhist intellectuals and leaders. Except for the manual attributed to the King of Tsang, each of these manuals was printed (and valued enough by particular institutions to merit the high costs of print production). These manuals do not represent the only moments of epistolary reflection in Tibetan

history, but they do represent significant institutional investments in shaping epistolary culture, investments whose depth and character are worthy of our analysis.

TIBETAN LETTER-WRITING MANUALS (PRIOR TO 20TH C.)

Date	Author	Type	Length	Sect	Region
ca. 1260s	Pakpa[17]	Formulary	1 folio	Sakya	Mongolia
1636	The King of Tsang[18]	Formulary	30 folios	Kagyü, Sakya	Tsang
ca. 1700	Jamyang Zhepa[19]	Treatise	34 folios	Geluk	Ü, Amdo
mid 18th c.	Zhuchen[20]	Formulary	7 folios	Sakya	Kham
mid 18th c.	Zhuchen[21]	Formulary	19 folios	Sakya	Kham
1763	Sumpa Khenpo[22]	Treatise	70 folios	Geluk	Amdo, Mongolia

17. ‘phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan. *yig bskur rnam bzhag 'gag sdom (A Condensed Presentation on Correspondence).* Appended to dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, *yig bskur rnam bzhag nyung nyu rnam gsal*. TBRC work W1KG1132. Folios 11.a-12.b.
18. karma bstan skyong dbang po. *‘phrin yig gi dper brjod mdo tsam bkod pa blo gsal rna ba’i rgyan (A Brief Letter-Writing Formulary, the Ear Ornament that Clarifies Understanding).* Undated manuscript. Composed in 1636. TBRC work W1CZ854.
19. ‘jam dbyangs bzhad pa’i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson ‘grus. *‘phrin yig gi rnam par bzhag pa blo gsal rna rgyan sin+du w+A ra’i ‘phreng mdzes* (*A Presentation on Correspondence: A Lovely Garland of Sinduwara Flowers, Ear Ornaments that Illuminate the Mind).* In the author's *Collected Works.* Published at Labrang Monastery, 1997?. TBRC work W21503. Volume 1, pp. 363-430.
20. zhu chen tshul khrims rin chen. *bsngags 'os mchog 'bring gi yul rnams la zhu yig 'bul ba'i dper brjod blo gros gsar bu 'jug sgo.* In the author's *Collected Works* (*gsung 'bum,* sde dge blockprint edition). TBRC W10347. Volume 7: 406-419. Delhi: [s.n.], 1972-.
21. zhu chen tshul khrims rin chen. *srid zhi'i yon tan dad stobs 'byor mchog dman par pas bsdus pa'i yul rnams la bsngags pa las brtsams pa'i zhu yig stob pa'i dper brjod snyan dngags ngag gi 'dod 'jo.* In the author's *Collected Works* (*gsung 'bum,* sde dge blockprint edition). TBRC W10347. Volume 7: 566-603. Delhi: [s.n.], 1972-.

ca. 1800	Mipam Dawa[23]	Formulary	38 folios	Geluk	Amdo
1806	Mipam Dawa[24]	Treatise & Formulary	106 pages	Geluk	Amdo
ca. 1831	Alak Sha & editors[25]	Formulary	12 folios	Geluk	Amdo, Mongolia
early 19th c.	Welmang Pandita[26]	Formulary	12 folios	Geluk	Amdo

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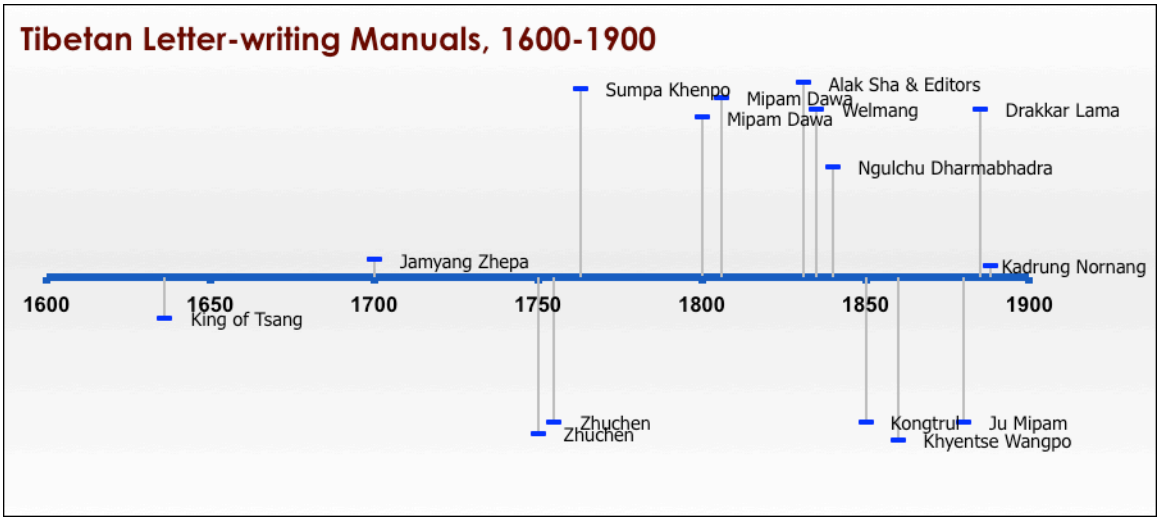
22. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal ‘byor. *Yig skur sogs kyi rnam bzhag blo gsar dga' ston sgo 'byed (Opening the Door to a Feast for Young Minds: A Presentation on Correspondence, Et Cetera)*. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975. TBRC work W29227. Volume 7, pp. 819-958.
23. mi pham zla ba. *’phrin yig gi rnam par bzhag pa blo gros sgo brgya 'byed pa'i legs bshad 'phrul gyi lde mig (A Presentation on Correspondence: The Magical Key of Elegant Advice that Opens the Hundred Doors of Understanding)*. Undated manuscript. Publication information unknown. Held at Minzu Wenhua Gong (Cultural Palace of Nationalities), Beijing.
24. mi pham zla ba. *phrin yig gi rnam bzhag dper brjod dang bcas pa padma dkar po’i phreng mdzes* (*A Presentation on Correspondence, Along with a Formulary: A Lovely Garland of White Lotuses)*. Xining: mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang (Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House), 1986. TBRC work W20450. This is modern format edition from 1994. I was unable to access a woodblock edition of this text.
25. A lag sha ngag dbang bstan dar lha rams pa. *yig bskur rnam gzhag* (*Presentation on Correspondence)*. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Lanzhou: [kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang], 2011. Volume 2, pp. 413-425. Alak Sha also composed a commentary to the "Letter to a Friend" in the Tibetan Buddhist canon, as well as illustrations of poetic synonyms and treatises on grammar, orthography, and ornate poetics. I attribute his letter-writing manual in part to the editors of his *Collected Works* because the colophon to the woodblock edition text reads: *yig bskur rnam gzhag ‘di bla ma rin po che’i gsung ngo ma shog tshar kha shas yod pa’i ‘di bzhin bris nas tshig kha shas bsgyur pa dang tshig kha yar bsnon ‘phri byed cing gsung ‘bum gras su bcug pa lags*. “This *Presentation on Correspondence* is the Word of the Precious Teacher. Having written [phrases] like these that were in [the Teacher’s] original finished documents, changing some words and making a few additions or deletions, [we] have included [this text] in the Collected Works.” The editors compiled this formulary in addition to a separate collection of Alak Sha's letters, the *'phrin yig gi skor phyogs gcig tu bkod pa (Cycle of Letters Arranged Together)*.
26. dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan. *yig bkur rnam bzhag nyung nyu rnam gsal,* (*Presentation on Correspondence: A Little Enlightenment)*. In the author's *Collected Works*. Woodblock edition published at Amchok (*a mchog)* Monastery. TBRC work W1KG1132.Volume 4, pp. 383-406.

early-mid 19th c.	Ngülchu Dharma-bhadra[27]	Formulary	15 folios	Geluk	Western Tibet
mid 19th c.	Jamgön Kongtrül[28]	Formulary	28 folios	Rimé	Kham
mid 19th c.	Khyentsé Wangpo	Formulary	130 folios	Rimé	Kham
late 19th c.	Ju Mipam[29]	Formulary	6 folios	Nyingma, Rimé	Kham
late 19th c.	Drakkar Lama[30]	Formulary	12 folios	Geluk, Rimé	Kham
1888	Kadrung Nornang[31]	Treatise	67 folios	Geluk	Ü

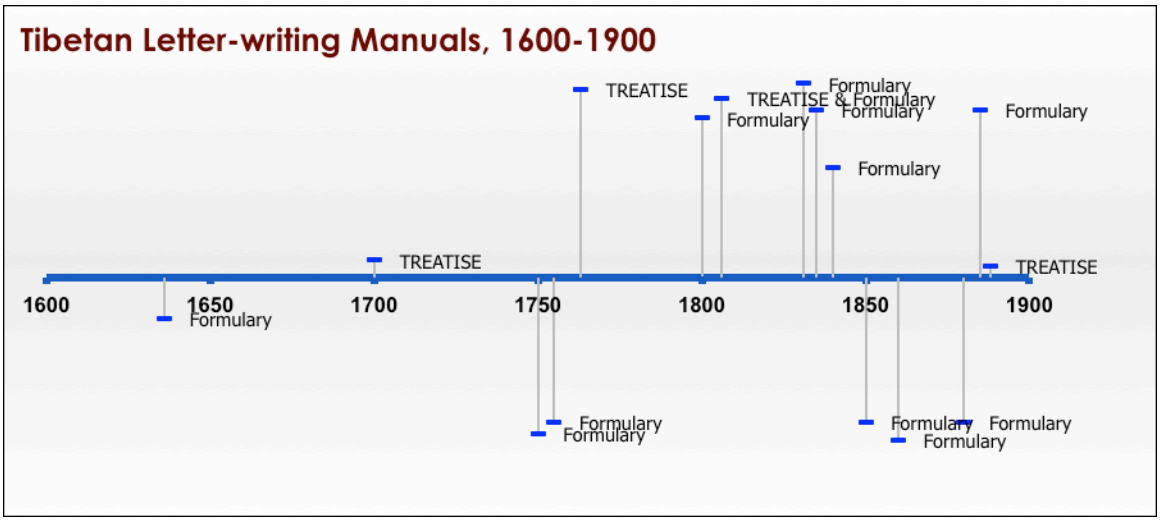
27. dngul chu dharma bha dra bla ma chos bzang, 1772-1851. *yig bskur rnam gzhag mdor bsdus* (*Abbreviated Presentation on Correspondence)*. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Woodblock edition printed at Ngulchu (*dngul chu)* Monastery. TBRC work W6493. Volume 5, pp. 175 - 190.
28. ‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas. *yig bskur rnam bzhag nye mkhor brjod pa dbyangs can rgyud mangs (Presentation on Correspondence: A Melodious Lute of Communicative Desiderata)*. In *rgya chen bka' mdzod*. New Delhi: Shechen, 2002. TBRC work W23723. Volume 9, pp. 181 - 235.
29. ‘ju mi pham rgya mtsho. *yig bskur gyi rnam bzhag mdo tsam brjod pa me tog nor bu'i phreng ba, (Presentation on Correspondence Expressed in Brief: A Jeweled Garland of Flowers)*. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Chengdu: [gangs can rig gzhung dpe rnying myur skyobs lhan tshogs], 2007. TBRC W2DB16631. Volume 2, pp. 677 - 690.
30. bra dkar blo bzang dpal ldan bstan ‘dzin snyan grags, 1866-1928. *yig bskur gyi dper brjod blo gsal rna bar spro ba'i rgyud mang (Illustrations for Correspondence: A Lute that Delights the Ears of the Intelligent)*. In the author's *Collected Works (*gsung 'bum). Chengdu: [dmangs khrod dpe dkon sdud sgrig khang nas spel], 2001. TBRC work W23608. Volume 1, pp. 479-502.
31. bka’ drung nor rgyas nang pa dbang ‘dus tshe ring. *yig bskur rnam gzhag nyer mkho smyug 'dzin dbang po'i yid gsos dpyid kyi pho nya'i glu dbyangs (The Song of the Spring Messenger: Presentation and Desiderata on Correspondence to Nourish the Mental Faculties of Those Who Wield the Pen)*. Publication information unknown. Composition date 1888. TBRC work W1KG12659.

Visualized differently, the timeline below charts the production of letter-writing manuals in Tibet between 1600 and 1900 (exempting Pakpa's thirteenth-century manual for better legibility of the graph). Geluk authors are plotted above the center axis and non-Geluk authors are plotted beneath it. Each label's distance from the center line corresponds to the author's relative distance from Lhasa, the center of the Ganden Government. The timeline makes clear that the majority of the known Tibetan epistolary manuals were composed by Geluk scholars, and that most of these Geluk manuals were composed far from the power center of Lhasa, where official correspondence lay in the hands of the central government and the study of composition was removed from the curricula of the three major Geluk monasteries.[32]



32. Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. See pages 120-123, "Orthodoxy and the Repression of Writing."

The following graph illustrates the distribution of formularies and theoretical treatises among the letter-writing manuals. In comparison with formularies, theoretical treatises are rarer. According to the present (admittedly nascent) state of our epistolary bibliographic record, theoretical treatises composed before 1900 have emerged only in Geluk contexts.



This survey, though small in scope, leans heavily toward eastern Tibet. It is clear that both Geluk writers in Amdo and non-Geluk writers in Kham dominate Tibet's early modern epistolary history, while the Geluk lead the production of theoretical treatises. Because I am most interested in the theory of letter writing and the standardization of official epistolary practice, the present study focuses on the Amdo Geluk story line, hoping that the exploration of epistolary production in Kham will be taken up by an expert in that region's local histories and in the contours of the Non-sectarian (Rimé) movement.

Nine of the fifteen manuals mapped above were authored by Geluk writers, and six of those nine, including three out of our four known witnesses of theoretical treatises, were produced by Geluk monks active in the Amdo region of Tibet within the span of a

century and a half.[33] For such a specialized genre, produced by elite figures and with only a handful of known examples, we are led to ask: why was a critical mass of letter-writing manuals composed *when, where,* and *by whom* they were composed? Why the long eighteenth century? Why in the Geluk school? And why in Amdo? In other words, did letter writing play a role in the expansive growth of the Geluk school in Amdo (and beyond) during this particular time? How did letter writing evoke religious ideals for these monastic authors, and how did letters come to function in their religious institutions and relationships? What stake did Geluk monks in Amdo have in standardizing Buddhist epistolary practice?

In this dissertation, I examine the religious, political, and literary factors surrounding the early modern movement of epistolary standardization in Tibet. By so doing, I not only describe the genre of Buddhist letter-writing manuals as a historical phenomenon, but I also argue that letter-writing culture served as an important vehicle for the growth of Geluk Buddhism based in Amdo during this period. Through close readings of letter-writing manuals and case studies of particular letters and letter writers, I show that the articulation of a Buddhist letter-writing culture was integral to the Geluk strategy for growth in terms of administration, intellectual life, patronage support, and ritual identity.

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33. Jamyang Zhepa likely composed his manual while he still resided in central Tibet, but his most significant historical contribution was the founding of Labrang Monastery in Amdo. He represents a moment of transition from central Tibet to Amdo in the production of epistolary instructional materials.

Contributions of the Present Study

This dissertation makes contributions to several distinct areas of scholarly inquiry. First, I illuminate the importance of epistolary texts within Tibetan Buddhist institutional life. Schneider has examined Tibetan letters as legal documents, particularly within governmental archives in southwest Tibet.[34] Takeuchi has helpfully identified several distinct epistolary forms in the Old Tibetan documents from Dunhuang.[35] Ishihama has made skillful use of letters to decipher diplomatic hierarchies in the relationships between the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent Sangyé Gyatso, the Qing Emperor Kangxi, and the Mongol Galdan Khan.[36] Forthcoming work by Holly Gayley and Dominique Townsend promises to illuminate the social contours of epistolary style in the works of prominent figures in the Nyingma school. Other than these few works, there have been no studies that take Tibetan Buddhist epistolary culture as their focus. I offer the first such book-length study, a rigorous interpretive introduction to early modern Tibetan Buddhist letters

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34. Schneider, Hanna, Ed. *Tibetische Handschriften und Blockdrucke TEIL 17: Tibetischsprachige Urkunden aus Sudwesttibet (Spo-Rong, Ding-Ri und Shel-Dkar). Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Band 2: Verfplichtungserklarungen, Vergleichsurkunden, Schlichtungs- und Teilungsurkunden.* David Brown Book Company, 2012; Schneider, Hanna, Ed. *Tibetische Handschriften und Blockdrucke: Teil 16: Tibetischsprachige Urkunden aus Sudwesttibet (Spo-Rong, Ding-Ri und Shel-Dkar). Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Band 1: Herrscherurkunden, Grundverordnungen und Generalerlasse, Konfirmationsurkunden, Rechtsentscheide, Hand*. David Brown Book Company, 2012; Schneider, Hanna. "The Formation of the Tibetan Official Style of Administrative Correspondence (17th-19th Century)." Pages 117-126 in Alex McKay, Ed. *Tibet and Her Neighbors -- A History.* London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2003; Schneider, Hanna. "Tibetan Epistolary Style." In *The Dalai Lamas: a Visual History*. 1st English ed. Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2005; Schneider, Hanna. "Tibetan Legal Documents of Southwestern Tibet: Structure and Style." In *Tibet, Past and Present.* Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the IATS, 2000. Henk Blezer, Ed. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

35. Takeuchi, Tsuguhito. "A Group of Old Tibetan Letters Written Under Kuei-I-Chun: A Preliminary Study for the Classification of Old Tibetan Letters." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. vol. 44, no. issue 1–2 (1990): 175–90.

36. Ishihama, Yumiko. "An Aspect of the Tibet, Mongol, and China Relationship in the Late 17th Century from the View of Tibetan Letter Format. -- Based on the Letters of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho and the Mongolian Prince Galdan." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. No. 55 (1998): 165-189. (In Japanese with English summary).

that will help others locate, decipher, and apply Tibetan letters in their various areas of research.

Second, in terms of the history of Tibetan Buddhism, I contribute the first literary hypothesis for the remarkable growth of the Geluk school following the ascendancy of the Ganden government in the seventeenth century. My examination of the epistolary dynamics of Geluk Buddhism helps reveal the literary strategies by which the Geluk made significant inroads eastward and northward from Amdo, using the symbolic authority as well as the material expediency of official letters to secure their position of power in the heart of early modern Asia.

Third, the arguments that I make in this study carry significant implications for our understanding of the patron-priest (*yon mchod*) paradigm that has characterized the political relationships between Tibet and other Asian powers for much of the past millennium. Patron-priest rhetoric portrays the Tibetan hierarch as the priest or religious preceptor (*mchod gnas,* the object of offering) and neighboring heads of state as Buddhist patrons (*yon bdag*, the honorific for *sbyin bdag* or Sanskrit *dānapati*, donor or alms-giver).[37] Thus, the traditional relationship between the ordained monastic community (Sanskrit *sangha*) and the alms-giving lay community is writ large upon the imperial stage, with Tibet as the sangha providing a foreign state with merit and moral legitimacy while that state acts as patron, offering Tibet financial and military support. Closely associated with the patron-priest relationship is the paradigm of "joining religion and politics" (*chos srid zung 'brel)*, a discourse in Tibet that characterized the Mongol-Sakya

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37. See especially the introduction by David Seyfort Ruegg in Lumbini International Research Institute. *The Relationship Between Religion and State (Chos Srid Zung 'Brel) in Traditional Tibet: Proceedings of a Seminar Held in Lumbini, Nepal, March 2000.* Edited by Christoph Cüppers. LIRI Seminar Proceedings Series, vol. 1. Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2004.

government of the Yuan dynasty as well as the rule of the Dalai Lama's Ganden government during the Qing dynasty. My study adds a new literary dimension to our understanding of how patron-priest relationships were expressed through a highly prescribed system of communication that bridged religious and political spheres.

As a window into the rhetoric of Qing period Sino-Tibetan relations, this work also contributes a heretofore-missing piece of the history of Geluk Buddhism's role in the making of the modern Chinese state. As Gray Tuttle has shown in his *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China,* during China's Republican period (1912-1949) Geluk Tibetan Buddhists played a pivotal role in integrating the Buddhist minority groups on the frontier into the discourses and identities propagated by the Nationalist Party.[38] Nicole Willock has shown that in the Maoist and post-Maoist years, Geluk monks from Amdo like Tseten Zhapdrung[39] served as linguistic and cultural translators between the Tibetan sphere and the Communist state, successfully secularizing the monastic curriculum for use in state-run public universities. In the same vein, my study, detailing Geluk relations with Mongols and Manchus during the Qing period, adds a foundation for a panoptic view of Geluk Buddhism in the making of the Chinese state over the past several centuries. Interestingly, despite the dramatic political upheavals and regime changes that have marked China's nineteenth and twentieth centuries in particular, it is a story with several consistent themes: Tibetan Buddhism as a vehicle for Sino-Tibetan discourse, the ritual structures of the patron-priest relationship, and the support (and control) of Geluk monasteries by the Chinese bureaucracy.

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38. Tuttle, Gray. *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
39. tshe tan zhabs drung jigs med rig pa'i blo gros, 1910-1985.

Finally, this work adds to the growing global epistolary literature by contributing for the first time a ritual interpretation of the form and rhetoric of letters. In Chapter Four, I analyze the ritual gestures embodied in the physical formatting of letters of submission to those of higher rank and illuminate the ritual theory at work in the letter-writing manuals. By considering letters as ritual objects and epistolary relationships as ritual relationships, we see a new dimension of epistolary culture operative in Tibet that may prove a useful tool for investigation in other cultural and religious contexts.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter One, I provide an overview of the development of letter-writing culture in Tibet and its origins within both the imperial state and within Buddhist literary circles. This appears to be the first such overview in a European language, and I hope it will prove a useful resource for beginning to construct a proper genealogy of Tibetan letters. I humbly remind the reader that the limits of the present work prohibit me from treating the topic in a comprehensive way, detailing the historical trajectory of letter writing across the entirety of Tibetan history and in the many various geographical and sectarian contexts in which letters were produced. Such a study would constitute a truly monumental undertaking because we find letters in virtually every layer of Tibetan literate culture. Instead, I introduce letter-writing practices in Tibet very broadly, across religious and governmental spheres.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four, focused on the early modern period, offer a magnified view of the three most significant letter-writing treatises produced in Tibet's long eighteenth century. I consider the lives of their authors and the sociopolitical

contexts in which their authors lived and wrote these manuals, and I detail my close readings of the manuals themselves, summarizing their contents but also highlighting the most meaningful moments of culture-making visible in their instructions. These chapters, constituting the core of this study, follow a chronological arch, but not all the arguments presented in these chapters are arguments about change over time. Much of the data I draw from the manuals serve to build thematic case studies; with the three manuals and their three authors, hailing from three of the most prestigious Geluk monasteries in Amdo, we glimpse a spectrum of the various functions that epistolary culture served within Geluk Buddhist life during this period.

Chapter Five concludes the study by drawing on social network theory and a theory of social and cultural capital to sharpen the historical claims I make in the core chapters. These theoretical frameworks offer both strength and precision to my study of the mechanics of early modern Geluk epistolary culture. Finally, I consider official letters as agents of change that propelled Geluk Buddhism farther abroad and deeper into local life, enabling the school to extend the personal agency of its leaders across distances and to harness the authority of governmental traditions of letter writing in a distinctly Buddhist idiom.

Narratio

Chapter One:

Buddhism and Empire in the Early History of Tibetan Letters

Imperial Letters

In the seventh century of the Common Era, a petty king in the Yarlung valley of central Tibet commenced an ambitious military and cultural consolidation of the peoples of the Tibetan Plateau. For more than two centuries, while the Byzantine Empire ruled eastern Christendom and the new Islamic religion swelled across Arabia, the Tibetan Empire ruled the Plateau as a unified polity powerful enough to demand Chinese royal brides for its emperors and to sack the capital of Tang dynasty China.[1] The imperial Tibetan government managed a population census, military conscription, transport system, and taxation system across a territory of roughly 2.5 million square kilometers on the world's highest plateau.

The emperor Songtsen Gampo, the Yarlung Dynasty's thirty-third monarch who forged the empire, left two important cultural legacies in addition to his military feats. First, he commissioned the invention of a Tibetan script around the year 650. Second, on the basis of the newly invented script, he established a legal code. In Tibet, the written word served an administrative function before it was employed for the transmission of Buddhism. This section overviews the roots of Tibetan letters, in oral and written forms, within the imperial administration.

1. Tibetan emperors ordered Chinese royal brides in 640 and again in 710 C.E. In 763 C.E., the Tibetan army sacked the Chinese capital at Chang an (present-day Xi'an).

The Oral Messenger System

Both before and alongside the creation of the Tibetan script in the seventh century, the administrative and diplomatic needs of the expanding empire were served by a well-developed oral messenger system. Imperial messengers held an important place in the ancient Tibetan bureaucracy. During the imperial period, the Tibetan government granted ensigns to mark the rank of its official functionaries; the Tibetan ensigns were images made of precious materials whose value corresponded to the rank of their wearers: turquoise, gold, silver, bronze, iron, and so forth.[2] Worn on the chest or shoulder, the ensigns employed metaphorical symbols — usually animal images — to designate the wearer's office. Imperial messengers bore the ensign of either a flying bird or a flying horse; one of the Old Tibetan terms for "messenger" is a pegasus, or half-bird half-horse creature.[3] The degree of urgency of the messenger's duties was further signified by his wearing one or more silver falcons.[4] According to Stein, ensigns appear to have served both as honorific distinctions and later as seals; the use of seals, then, has roots in the imperial ensign system, even before the spread of a written language and epistolary culture.

In order to safeguard the secrecy of a message, oral messages were sometimes coded or constructed as riddles (*lde'u*). For example, there is a well-known tale of a

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2. The following discussion is based on Stein's analysis of Dunhuang manuscripts and of descriptions in the Chinese Tang dynasty annals. Stein, Rolf A. *Tibetica Antiqua: With Additional Materials*. Boston: Brill, 2010. Part II, "The Use of Metaphors for Honorific Distinctions of the Epoch of the Tibetan Kings." Pp. 98-99. The Tibetan terms that Stein translates as "ensigns" are *yi ge* and *yig tshang*, homonyms for "letter" and "document."

3. Tibetan *bya ma rta*. Stein, *Tibetica Antiqua*, page 99 footnote 5 reads: "These winged horses or horse-birds are frequently mentioned in the epics (and elsewhere, e.g. India). Bya ma rta is attested in the Li shi'i gur khang." Another more common Old Tibetan term for "messenger" or "envoy" was *pho nya*, which literally renders "male-fish," although its etymological origins remain unclear. Interestingly, in Chinese epistolary tradition, letter couriers are also imagined as either birds or fish.

4. Silver was the material of choice for middling functionaries: Stein, *Tibetica Antiqua*, pp. 108-109.

messenger who served as a relay between the Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo and his sister, Queen Semarkar, who had entered into a diplomatic marriage with the king of Zhang Zhung, the kingdom bordering Tibet to the west. Dissatisfied with the circumstances of her marriage, Semarkar sent a riddle message to her brother with secret instructions on how to overthrow Zhang Zhung and release her. Her coded message passed safely back to Tibet; the plot was successful, the Tibetan army defeated Zhang Zhung, and the messenger was promoted to the high office of fiscal governor.[5] Coded messages also play a part in the life story of Milarepa; his mother entrusts to a traveling yogin a cloak with gold nuggets sewn into the lining, along with a coded letter directing Milarepa to the gold by means of a riddle.[6]

The oral messenger system served as the basis for official letter writing in the imperial period and its roots persisted in early modern letter-writing culture in Tibet. Aural metaphors for sending and receiving letters remained in use; phrases like "I heard your letter" and "your letter was melodious," as well as the titling of letters after musical instruments, which elicit sonic rather than visual aesthetic associations, are common even today as part of the Tibetan epistolary lexicon. The ancient description of a courier as a pegasus is also not unknown in modern materials. Letter couriers are often imagined as flying, as in the famous Sanskrit poem *The Cloud Messenger (Meghadūta)* by Kālidāsa;[7] in Tibet, this poem served as a model for an early twentieth-century work, "Young Döndrup the Courier," where the courier is a cloud-god instructed to fly across the

5. See Dotson, Brandon. *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History.* Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009. He recounts this tale in his section on "Conscription, the Transport Network, and the Alert System," page 56.
6. Gtsang smyon he ru ka. Andrew Quintman, Translator. *The Life of Milarepa.* New York: Penguin Books, 2010. Page 36.
7. See Mallinson, James. *Messenger Poems.* New York: NYU Press, 2006.

valleys and settlements of Amdo to deliver a letter.[8] Such portrayals of celestial couriers evoke the use of flying couriers in the imperial ensign system.

The Postal Relay System

The imperial oral messenger system overlapped with an extensive goods transport system, and it was upon this shared infrastructure that a postal relay came into use. The goods transport network was comprised of stations *(sa tshig)* connected by routes used by merchants, soldiers, and travellers. The postal relay system, similarly, was comprised of stations (*slung tshangs)* spaced about thirty *le dbar,* or fifteen kilometers, apart:

> Messengers (*pho nya*) traversed these areas bearing sealed messages and official and military correspondence, about which we find a number of strict protocols in Old Tibetan documents. Messengers were regulated by *slungs* officials (*slungs dpon)* who were responsible for provisioning the messengers and punishing them should they fail in their duties.[9]

Letter delivery was serious business, since the functioning of the imperial government depended upon it. After the development of a Tibetan script and the employment of written documents within the imperial bureaucracy, the postal relay came to serve as the main conduit through which official letters were transported across the empire. It is not clear whether private correspondence ever passed through the official postal relay.

When the Mongolian Yuan dynasty ruled Tibet (ca. 1264-1350), the Mongols established their own administrative networks and postal system. A collection of Chinese and Tibetan archival documents assembled in Tibet in the fifteenth century records that

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8. The short title for this work is *zhu 'phrin pho nya gzhon nu don grup*, "Young Dondrup the Courier." The poem was composed by sgis steng blo bzang dpal ldan (1880-1944) and is available in Volume 3 of *Literature: Nuggets of Gold,* TBRC work W19680, page 623 ff.

9. Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, page 56 ff. He makes reference to Bsod nams skyid. "Gna' bo'i bod kyi yig rnying las 'slung tshang' dang 'slungs dpon' zhes pa'i tha snyad la rags tsam dpyad pa." In: Kha-sgang bkra-shis tshe-ring (ed.) *Bod kyi yig rnying zhib 'jug.* Beijing: mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003. Pp. 266-71.

the Mongol official named Tamen divided the Tibetan Plateau into twenty-seven divisions.[10] The divisions were made based on the population density, natural resources, and soil conditions of each unit. These divisions were termed *'jam,* a Mongolian word for "post" or "station." Tucci explains that

> This division … follows the enforced stations lying along the caravan roads which, from the extreme frontiers between China and Tibet, branched off throughout the country. This of course implied a firm administrative organization, because the districts through which the highroads passed were obliged to furnish personal services, contributions, means of transport, which the Mongols claimed from vassal or subject territories.[11]

In total, the Mongols established four postal divisions in Central Tibet (Ü), seven in Tsang, seven in Amdo (*mdo smad*), and nine in Kham (*mdo stod*).[12] There is a village named Jamo (*'jam mo)* directly across the river from Rongwo Monastery, the large Amdo Geluk institution featured in Chapter Four, and some current residents of the village claim that its name derives from its former status as one of the Mongolian postal relay stations.[13]

The integrity of the Tibetan infrastructure for moving goods and communications fluctuated over the centuries in response to changes in regional stability and the reach of the central government. Still, its basic form appears to have persisted into the twentieth century. Goldstein writes that before the Ganden Government of the Dalai Lamas effectively ended in 1959, a transportation and relay network made up of stations (*sa tshig*), each a half-day's walk apart, covered Tibet. Anyone with a permit issued by the

10. Dpal 'byor bzang po (15th c.). *Rgya Bod Yig Tshang Chen Mo.* Chengdu (khreng tu'u): Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House (si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang), 1985.
11. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, pp. 12-13.
12. Rgya Bod Yig Tshang Chen Mo. Page 275. My thanks to Eveline Yang for this reference. Yang points out that Tucci, following Das, incorrectly inverts the numbers of '*jam mo* for Ü and Tsang from those listed in the *Rgya Bod Yig Tshang.*
13. Personal communications during fieldwork, August 2013.

central government was entitled to free corvée or transport from the local landowners.[14] The postal system that persisted into twentieth-century Tibet was remarkably similar to that established by the imperial government more than a thousand years earlier.[15]

Letters on Stone

Our earliest evidence of a recognizable epistolary format in the Tibetan script comes from Old Tibetan inscriptions engraved on stone pillars during the imperial period.[16] At the Zhé Temple complex, eighty kilometers northeast of Lhasa, there are two pillars, now damaged, with inscriptions dating from 800-810 (west pillar) and 812 (east pillar).[17] The inscriptions are engraved reproductions of edicts issued by the child emperor Tri Dé Songtsen (ca. 798-815) granting titles and privileges to local individuals who had faithfully served the empire.[18]

Two components of the Zhé pillar inscriptions explicitly relate to Tibet's letter-writing culture. First, the opening line of each inscription reads, “By command of Emperor Tri Dé Songtsen, the Emanational God, King of Broad Heaven” on the west

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14. Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*, page 55. Here he refers to Goldstein, Melvyn C., and Gelek Rimpoche. *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. Page 4.

15. It is as yet unclear to me to what extent private correspondence may have passed through the official postal relay. Early modern Tibetan sources speak frequently enough of couriers and messengers dispatched from monasteries that we can be confident that alternative institutional channels for sending correspondence existed, even if their precise structures have not been elucidated. Additionally, early modern sources attest that letters were sometimes personally carried by monks travelling to the recipients' destinations. A systematic study of biographical literature, representing various geographies and historical periods, would reveal much more about the circulation of private letters.

16. The Old Tibetan inscriptions are recordings of oaths, treaties, and grants cut into rock so that the terms of the imperial pronouncements may be both publicly attested and permanently fixed.

17. Tibetan *zhwa'i lha khang*. Li, Fanggui and W. South Coblin. *A Study of the Old Tibetan Inscriptions.* Nankang, Taipei, Taiwan: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan li shi yu yan yan jiu suo, 1987. Page 261 ff.

18. See the translation of the inscription on the western pillar that refers to both the written decree and the pillar inscription: "And because it has been put in place, let my sons and grandsons who afterwards exercise power and the ministers of state who afterwards hold sway, etc. cause that one shall never diminish, tamper with, or make changes in what comes from the text of the decree or what is written on the pillar." Li and Coblin, Old Tibetan Inscriptions, pp. 277-278.

pillar; and “By command of the Emperor Tri Dé Songtsen, the Emanational God, whom the gods made the King of Men” on the east pillar.[19] The phrasing “by command of” (*gyi bkas*), ending with an instrumental particle, mirrors the phrasing inscribed on the seal of the Fifth Dalai Lama given to him by Güüshi Khan: “By the authoritative command of” (*gyi bka’ lung gis*). [20] This instrumental phrase is the standard phrase that early modern Tibetan letter-writing manuals prescribe as the only way for kings, emperors, and Dalai Lamas to open their letters: “By the word of” (*gyi gtam gyis*) or “By the authority of” (*gyi lung gis*). The main text of the Zhé inscription follows in the first-person voice of the emperor: as an edict, it acts as an open letter with the general public as its addressee.[21]

The second epistolary attribute visible on each of the Zhé pillar inscriptions is a square socket cut into the lower right corner of the stone face where the imperial sealing would have been affixed.[22] Though the sealings themselves have long disappeared, the inscription describes the original seal placement: “a stone pillar was set up, after which the main points of the decree were clearly written on the stone and a seal was affixed [at] the end."[23] The Zhé pillar inscriptions indicate, in stone facsimile form, the use and placement of imperial seals in official Tibetan letters. As self-conscious imitations of

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19. Li and Coblin. *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, page 264.
20. Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door to a Feast for Young Minds: A Presentation on Correspondence, Etc. (Yig skur sogs kyi rnam bzhag blo gsar dga' ston sgo 'byed)*. In the *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)* of ye shes dpal 'byor. TBRC work W29227. Volume 7: 819 - 958. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975. See Page 822, folio 3b.3.
21. Because the manuals assume that supreme leaders write in the declarative mood, and not in the supplicatory, there is much genre slippage from official letters or edicts to decrees, grants, and laws. What is important is that within the native categorizing schema of the letter-writing manuals themselves, “edicts” (*bka’ shog*) are categorized as letters; they are the only letter type attributed to monarchs, even though in practice, the Fifth Dalai Lama for example does not follow this phrasing in all his letters. I call this edict a "letter in stone" because the Tibetan letter-writing manuals themselves categorize royal edicts as correspondence (*yig bskur)*, even though such a categorization may run counter to our notions of what a letter is.
22. Li and Coblin, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, pp. 262-263. I use the term "sealing" to differentiate the clay or wax bearing the impression from the "seal," the engraved object used to create the impression.
23. Li and Coblin, *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*, pp. 277-278.

written text, the Zhé inscriptions offer insight into the format of imperial decrees during a time period from which few original materials remain; they are our earliest connection to official letters in the Tibetan language.[24]

Letters on Wood and Paper

Our earliest extant Tibetan letters in portable form — wood and paper — come from the cache of manuscripts discovered at the oasis center of Dunhuang on the Silk Road, which hugs the northern rim of the Tibetan Plateau. Among the many epistolary materials we find in the Dunhuang collection are letters inscribed on wood slips and written on paper. Wood slips were sophisticated documents: one example detailed by Takeuchi shows that a wood slip with a brief text, such as the name of an outpost and the term "barley," would serve as a tally stick with a section excised so the outpost officer could verify the identity of the message by matching the two pieces of wood together.[25] Notches in the wood served to denote quantities of the designated material to be conferred on the wood slip's courier. A significant amount of information could be conveyed, and identity verified, on a very small slip of wood and with little ink spilled. In addition to this abbreviated style of messages and receipts for the imperial bureaucracy, longer narrative letters also appear on wood slips in the Dunhuang collection with letter markers such as "[I] submit this epistle" (*mchid gsol ba).*

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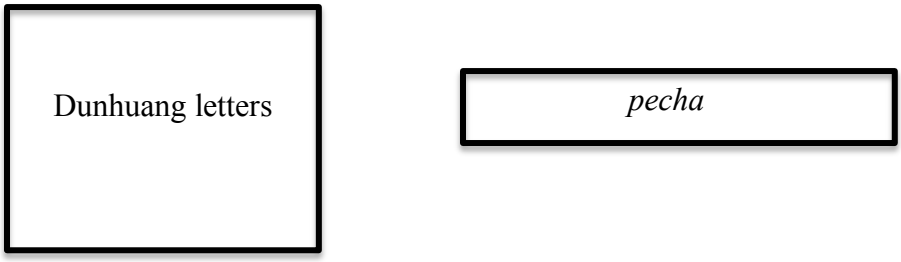
24. On the Old Tibetan documents, see Scherrer-Schaub, Cristina A. 1999. "Towards a Methodology for the Study of Old Tibetan Manuscripts: Dunhuang and Tabo." *In* Scherrer-Schaub, C.A. and E. Steinkellner (eds.). *Tabo Studies II. Manuscripts, Texts, Inscriptions and the Arts.* Serie Orientale Roma 87. Roma: Is.I.A.O., 3-36.

25. Takeuchi, Tsuguhito. Blog entry on International Dunhuang Project website: http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=60323598828;bst=1;recnum=6727;index=1;img=1 Accessed September 3, 2014.

The *Old Tibetan Annals* detail the yearly administration of the Tibetan empire from about 640 to 750 CE. In these records, we read of the imperial administration's gradual transition from wood slips to paper records during the early eighth century.[26] A wide variety of paper letters populates the Dunhuang collections: memorials to superiors, letters of passage for pilgrimage and trade, letters of introduction to Buddhist lamas,[27] administrative messages, and so on. The paper on which the letters are written is cut into large square or rectangular leaves with crease lines, indicating that they were folded many times into small slips resembling wood slips. Notably, this paper shape is quite different from the traditional *pecha* style: wide, shallow rectangular pages cut in imitation of palm leaves and used for Buddhist scriptures and other religious publications in Tibet.[28] Both paper types vary in scale.



Dunhuang documents testify that by the time of the empire's fall in the ninth century, letters were deeply embedded in everyday religious, political, and commercial activity along the Silk Road. Tibetan letter-writing activity involved not only the Tibetan-

26. Dotson, *Old Tibetan Annals*. [year 702-703] "The council was also convened at 'On-cang-do. They abolished the great wooden document(s) [in favor of paper]." (Dotson, page 101. While Dotson points out that the translation of this passage poses some problems, he supports this translation well with reference to other similar passages in the text.) Also see: [year 744-745] "They carried out a great administration of soldiers. By the Btsan-po's decree, the red tally was transferred to yellow paper." (Dotson, page 124. Tibetan: dmag myI mkhos chen po bgyIste/ btsan po bkas khram dmar po shog shog ser po la spos par)
27. Van Schaik, Sam. "Silk Road Phrasebooks." Blog entry on early Tibet.com. Entry dated May 12, 2014. Accessed at http://earlytibet.com/2014/05/12/silk-road-phrasebooks/ on September 3, 2014.
28. *Dpe cha* has come to more generally mean "book" in Tibet.

speaking clans but also Chinese and Khotanese travelers. Van Schaik has analyzed in depth two illuminating examples from the Dunhuang collection — the first, a Tibetan letter written in Khotanese script, is from a Buddhist pilgrim on his return to Khotan from Wutai Shan. The letter reads, in van Schaik's translation:

> To the great teacher, the eyes of the Buddha, who sees lowly ones like us with the eyes of wisdom. Although we do not share a language, and we are not skilled in the Tibetan language of the lords of the dharma, the local rulers, please do not break your commitments. This is addressed to the great master. I respectfully enquire whether you are well, and in particular whether your precious and noble body has become fatigued. We humble ones have ridden to see the face of the Noble Mañjuśrī and are returning to [the land of] Śākya[muni], the god of gods. May we be permitted to come and make an offering to all who have seen the face of Mañjuśrī?[29]

The letter begins with a *salutatio* praising the recipient as the "eyes of the Buddha" and continues with a *captatio benevolentiae* that is particularly concerned with whether the teacher is fatigued. This is a feature that van Schaik associates with a formal convention of Buddhist letters in China and Tibet of inquiring whether the teacher has been fatigued by his meditation practice.[30] The one-sentence *narratio* explains the circumstances of the sender, and the final line presents the *petitio,* a request for an audience with the teacher so that an offering can be made. No formal closing or *conclusio* appears here.

Second, van Schaik describes a series of letters of passage from the 960s CE carried by a Chinese monk-pilgrim on his way to India, on a path that takes him through Amdo to Dunhuang.[31] The letters are written by local officials and addressed to the heads of Tibetan monasteries in the region, requesting safe passage for the monk and

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29. Van Schaik, "Silk Road Phrasebooks."
30. Van Schaik, Sam, and Imre Galambos. *Studies in Manuscript Cultures: Manuscripts and Travelers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim.* Munich: Walter de Gruyter, 2011. Pp. 147-8.
31. In this case, copies of letters — the originals would have been sealed and sent ahead of the pilgrim.

permission for him to make offerings at various monasteries in Amdo. During the so-called "Age of Darkness" after the fall of the Tibetan empire in 842, letters lit the pilgrimage routes from China through Tibet to India like lamps in the night.

We know that even in the Dunhuang documents, which date from the late imperial period to the eleventh century, Tibetan letter writing already followed highly formalized protocol that was specialized according to the context of writing and the hierarchical relationship between the sender and the recipient. We also know that scribes at Dunhuang were busy practicing various epistolary formats. Takeuchi, who has extensively studied the Old Tibetan letters found among the Dunhuang documents, mentions that there are "many scribal exercises written in the margins" that practice the variety of greeting patterns he sees exhibited in the collection. He gives an example of a letter exercise-cum-joke: "To *nang rje po,* the minister 'Lamed (One),' the dog's letter is hereby sent to you; (in the presence of) the dog-like one; is your mind peaceful or not? If not peaceful, eat shit!"[32] Even this humorous example reinforces the importance of pattern and protocol in the Dunhuang letters. Takeuchi characterizes the Dunhuang Tibetan letters as falling into three major types:

1. Formal-official: The letter begins with the name of the official and the governing body dispatching the letter; the date is listed and the placement of a seal of dispatch is stated; the addressee is sometimes omitted. Honorific language denotes "conferring an epistle" (*mchid stsal pa*) from someone higher to someone lower.

2. Informal-official: The letter begins with the sender's name (although this may be omitted); the date is omitted; and the addressee is designated with the language of

32. Takeuchi, Tsuguhito. "A Group of Old Tibetan Letters Written Under Kuei-I-Chun: A Preliminary Study for the Classification of Old Tibetan Letters." *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. vol. 44, no. issue 1–2 (1990): 175–90. See page 183 ff.

"sent this letter to" (*la spring ngo*), which register is neutral in terms of the hierarchical relationship between sender and recipient. Most examples of these letters are invoices and receipts.

3. Personal: More than three quarters of the Tibetan letters from Dunhuang fall into this category, by Takeuchi's estimate.[33] The addressee is listed first along with his title of office or of respect; the date is usually omitted; humilific language indicates "submitting an epistle" (*mchid gsol pa*) from someone lower to someone higher. Takeuchi calls this type a "letter of courtesy."

Takeuchi further identifies two subtypes to the category of personal courtesy correspondence. In both subtypes, the body of the letter begins with an inquiry after health along with other formalized niceties. In the first subtype, which we will call 3A, they consist of inquiring after the addressee's "peacefulness of mind" (*thugs bde*). In type 3B, they refer instead to the fatigue (*'o rgyal*) that religious activities may have caused the addressee; this convention is the same that van Schaik identifies in Tibetan and Chinese letters, as noted above. Type 3B letters also introduce a new formatting feature: the inclusion of several lines of blank space after the name of the addressee and before the self-identification of the sender and the body of the letter. This is important because, as we will see later, the particular epistolary format that appears most similar to early modern Tibetan letters is the 3B style including this drop-down space. Thus, while the inquiry about meditation fatigue does not persist in later Tibetan letters, the insertion of a drop-down space does, and it takes on rich symbolic value, as we will explore below.

From identifying the personal and place names listed in these Old Tibetan letters, Takeuchi ascertains that Type 3B letters were all composed after the year 848 (and

33. Takeuchi, "Old Tibetan Letters," page 181.

mostly during the tenth century) after the Tibetan control of Dunhuang transferred to the hands of Chinese forces.[34] Did the Chinese takeover of Dunhuang in 848 usher in Chinese influences on Tibetan letters that would persist into the early modern period? While I have no evidence at present that the drop-down space originates from a Chinese tradition (after all, Chinese letters read vertically), we know that Dunhuang was a crossroads of intercultural exchange and that some of the characteristics of the Tibetan letters found there were likely either adapted from or shared in common with Chinese, Khotanese, or Uighur epistolary practices. For example, there is a "finger seal" method whose basic form was shared among Chinese, Tibetan, and Khotanese contracts; the method was to trace the outlines of the fingers and joints of those party to the contract and write each one's name beside his finger outline. We do see that the seasonal greeting common in medieval Chinese letters makes its way occasionally into Tibetan letters from this period; is quite possible that the inquiry about meditation fatigue entered Tibetan letters through Chinese contact. Perhaps the development of the drop-down space derived from non-Tibetan sources as Tibet's influence in Dunhuang faded; in any case, it does not appear on the stone inscriptions from the Tibetan imperial period, and seems to be a post-imperial development.

What we learn from this early history of Tibetan letters is that letter writing came to permeate political, economic, and religious life in Tibet after the empire's fall. To reflect the range of letter-writing contexts, there were formalized epistolary protocols and scribes who practiced them even from the early centuries of the establishment of a Tibetan script. While the origins of the various components of Tibetan epistolary formatting and phrasing are largely unclear, there is no evidence that these protocols were

34. Takeuchi, "Old Tibetan Letters," pp. 187-188. This Chinese ruling force was the *kui yi jun* 歸義軍.

derived from Indian Buddhist literary influence. Letters in Tibet were not native Buddhists; they were *converted.*

Buddhist Letters

Histories written by Tibetan monastics often imagine that Tibet's unification under the imperial government and its adoption of Buddhism were part of a single "civilizing process."[35] Such accounts anachronistically portray Songtsen Gampo as a great Buddhist emperor whose legal code reflected the ethics and virtues of bodhisattva kingship.[36] Native histories likewise portray Tibetan society as warlike and barbaric before the taming influence of Buddhism; this is illustrated in the Tibetan myth that describes the placement of Buddhist stupa monuments across the Tibetan landscape as pins holding down the body of a demoness. The construction of the Tibetan body politic was directly correlated with Buddhism's subduing the body of the demoness, the wild native Tibetan spirit.

In order to understand the development of Tibetan letters, we need to unravel this myth that too easily conflates Tibet's imperial legacy with Buddhism. As we recall, the Tibetan script was established around the year 650; it was not until the late eighth century, however, that the emperor Tri Song Détsen formally converted to Buddhism (probably in 762), constructed the first monastery in Tibet (Samyé Monastery, ca. 779),

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35. I borrow this concept, of course, from Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1969 (volume I) and 1982 (volume II).

36. Kapstein, Matthew. *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. See pp. 56-57. "…The Old Tibetan Chronicle, which attributes the redaction of the laws to Songtsen Gampo, says nothing at all that would lead us to see the influence of Buddhist ethics at work here. This impression is borne out by surviving fragments of the old laws, which are similarly devoid of references to Buddhism. Later Tibetan tradition, however, while retaining some records of the old laws, asserts them to have been built upon foundations derived from basic Buddhist morality and the traditions of Indian Dharmashastra."

and established an imperial bureau for the translation of Buddhist scriptures.[37] The translation bureau created grammars and dictionaries, in essence crafting its own "Buddhist Tibetan" language derived from carefully translating the Sanskrit texts of the Buddha's Word *(bka' 'gyur)* and its Commentaries (*bstan 'gyur)*. Between the years 650 and 779 are five or six generations separating the creation of the administrative Tibetan lexicon and the Buddhist Tibetan lexicon.

Matthew Kapstein also assumes a two-lexicon history of the Tibetan language. He hypothesizes that the Buddhist lexicon prevailed over the administrative lexicon in later centuries because, during the so-called Age of Darkness that followed the collapse of the Tibetan empire in 842, literacy was preserved primarily in religious circles:

> One sign that Tibetan remained alive as a literary language during this time, primarily in surviving (and perhaps even growing) Buddhist circles, is that the literary Tibetan that develops after the tenth century is to a great degree derived from what had earlier been a language of scriptural translation. At the same time, the archaic literary Tibetan known from Dunhuang, the old royal inscriptions, and other early sources, gradually falls out of use, becoming increasingly obscure to later generations of Tibetans. Thus, it seems plausible that following the collapse of the dynasty, as the archaic language used by the civil and military administration became obsolete and a literate culture was preserved largely among Tibet's Buddhists, Buddhist usage gradually emerged as the standard, even in writing about subjects such as history that had previously been written in the language employed by the state bureaucracy.[38]

While the political structures of the empire crumbled, Buddhist communities of householder tantric practitioners maintained lineages of education and transmission in Buddhist texts. The lexicon of Buddhist translation that marked religious discourse persisted into the classical period and came to serve as *the* literary Tibetan language, while Old Tibetan vocabulary and structures faded from use. Following Kapstein's argument that there were, in a sense, two Tibetan languages, I argue that letter-writing

37. Kapstein, Matthew. *Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism,* xvii.
38. Kapstein, Matthew. *Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism,* page 11.

style in Tibet can likewise be traced to two distinct lexicons with their attendant literary cultures. The first was that of the imperial administration, outlined above; the second was that of Buddhism, imported to Tibet from India.

Letters in the Canon

Buddhism's most obvious contribution to Tibetan epistolary culture is the collection of letters in its scriptural corpus. Thirteen epistles are included among the more than five thousand texts included among Tibetan Buddhist canonical literature.[39] Most of the thirteen epistles in the Tibetan canon are located in a "letters" (*spring yig*) division in the second part of the canon, the Tanjur (*bstan 'gyur),* or the "translated treatises" and commentaries on the Word of the Buddha. These letters are categorized as "commentaries on sutras" (*mdo 'grel*) because they are viewed as elaborations on the teachings of the Mahayana sutras: the cultivation of the six perfections, the achievement of Buddhahood for the sake of all beings, and the importance of skillful ways of living in the world, either as monastics or as lay people. The letters read as spiritual advice from a teacher to a disciple; seven of these epistles are letters to Buddhist kings.[40] Epistolary relationships between monks and royal Buddhist patrons have an ancient precedent in the scriptural heritage, a precedent that will be heavily influential in the formation of a patron-priest epistolary idiom in the thirteenth century and beyond.

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39. More than twenty unique Buddhist canons have been produced in Tibet, and the canons include on average about 5,250 texts and 230,000 pages (folio sides). For a good introduction to the Tibetan Buddhist canons, see the essay at http://www.thlib.org/encyclopedias/literary/canons/about/wiki/tibetan%20canons%20introduction.html. Accessed February 20, 2015.

40. See Nance, Richard F. "How to Address Kings: Buddhist Letters to Indian Rulers." In *Trails of the Tibetan Tradition: Papers for Elliot Sperling,* Ed. Roberto Vitali. Dharamsala (H.P.), India: Amnye Machen Institute, 2014. In the chart below, letters 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, and 12 are addressed to kings, the first 5 to Indian kings and the latter two to the Tibetan emperor Trisong Detsen.

The most well-known canonical letter is the "Letter to a Friend," (Tib. *bshes pa'i spring yig*, Sanskrit *Suhrllekha),* attributed to the Mahayana saint and expounder of Middle-Way philosophy Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna wrote this letter for his friend — and, we can presume, his disciple and patron — a South Indian king whom Nāgārjuna praises as a virtuous Buddhist ruler. Composed in accessible verse and replete with metaphors drawn from everyday experience, the "Letter to a Friend" reads as wisdom literature that illuminates the most sublime of Mahayana ideals with language that is easy to grasp and easy to recite. In the Tibetan context, the content of this letter is best described as elegant advice, *legs bshad,* that which is "well-spoken."[41] The letter is popular among Tibetan Buddhist communities internationally, having been translated at least nine times into European languages, and shows a strong presence in the Tibetan commentarial tradition. One canonical commentary and at least eight extra-canonical commentaries on the letter, stemming from each of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, are extant. Even more commentaries on the text can be found published on Buddhist organizations' websites today. We also see three translations of this letter in the Taisho edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon.[42]

41. Nāgārjuna's letters are often grouped with other advice texts in a collection called the "advice collection," or *gtam tshogs*.
42. Dietz, Siglinde. *Die Buddhistische Briefliteratur Indiens: Nach Dem Tibetischen Tanjur. Asiatische Forschungen, Bd. 84*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984. Page 5.

CHART OF LETTERS IN THE TIBETAN CANON[43]

#	Author	Tibetan Title	English Title Translation
1.	Avalokiteśvara	'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang byug gis dge slong rab gsal gzhon nu la springs pa'i phrin yig[44]	Letter Sent from the Noble Avalokiteśvara to the Monk Prakāśakumāra
2.	Nāgārjuna	bshes pa'i spring yig[45]	Letter to a Friend
3.	Candragomin	slob ma la springs pa'i spring yig[46]	Letter Sent to a Student
4.	Mātṛceṭa	rgyal po chen po ka nis ka la springs pa'i spring yig[47]	Letter to the King Kaniṣka
5.	Jitāri	sems rin po che rnam par sbyang ba'i rim pa zhes bya ba'i spring yig[48]	Letter Entitled "Steps for Thoroughly Purifying the Jewel of the Mind"
6.	Āraṇyaka	bla ma la spring ba[49]	[Letter] Sent to a Teacher
7.	Sajjana	bu la spring ba[50]	[Letter] Sent to a Son

43. Culled from Siglinde Dietz, *Die Buddhistische Briefliteratur Indiens*, pp. 4-11.
44. Sanskrit title *Āryāvalokiteśvarapreṣitabhikṣuprakāśakumāralekha*
45. *Suhṛllekha*
46. *Śiṣyalekha*
47. *Mahārājakaniṣkalekha*
48. *Cittaratnaviśodhanakramanāmalekha*
49. *Gurulekha*
50. *Putralekha*

8.	Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (Atiśa)	dri ma med pa rin po che'i spring yig[51]	Letter [that is] a Stainless Jewel
9.	Mitrayogin	rgyal po zla ba la springs pa'i spring yig[52]	Letter Sent to the King Candra
10.	Kamalaśīla	lho za mo tshangs pa'i dbyangs la sdug bsngal brgyad kyi bye brag bstan pa[53]	To Lhozamo the Brahma-Voiced, a Description of the Eight Kinds of Suffering
11.	Buddhaguhya	rje 'bangs dang bod btsun rnams la spring yig[54]	Letter to the Tibetan Lord, Subjects, and Monastics
12.	Dpal dbyangs (Śrighoṣa)	gces pa bsdus pa'i phrin yig bod rje 'bangs la brdzangs pa[55]	Condensed Letter Dispatched to the Tibetan Lord and [His] Subjects
13.	Padmavajra	shes rab kyi 'phrin yig[56]	Letter of Insight

Embedded within the scriptural canons of Tibetan Buddhism, then, is an authorization of the letter as a sacred scriptural form and an expectation that letters can convey spiritual advice from master to student and from monk to royal patron in an

51. *Vimalaratnalekha*
52. *Candrarājalekhaka*
53. no Sanskrit title
54. *Bhoṭasvāmidāsalekha*
55. *Preṣitabhoṭasvāmidāsasārasaṃgrahalekha* (probably originally composed in Tibetan. See Nance, Richard F. "How to Address Kings: Buddhist Letters to Indian Rulers." In *Trails of the Tibetan Tradition: Papers for Elliot Sperling,* Ed. Roberto Vitali. Dharamsala (H.P.), India: Amnye Machen Institute, 2014. Page 209.)
56. *Prajñālekha*

orthodox way. The precedent set by the canonical epistles is quite specific: for the most part, they follow the “elegant advice” style, composed neither in ornate poetics nor in ordinary prose but in a mid-register style of poetry that seeks to render complex philosophy into lovely but familiar terms.

Most of the epistles in the Tibetan Buddhist canon are Tibetan translations of Sanskrit texts that stem from a different cultural and linguistic heritage than that of Old Tibetan letters. The canonical epistles employ the terms *spring yig* or *phrin yig/ 'phrin yig* for "letter," a marked contrast to the prominent use of *mchid* in Tibetan personal and religious correspondence from Dunhuang. The letters likewise show few markings of social hierarchy that are so prominent in the Old Tibetan letters; these texts begin with lines of homage to the three jewels, bodhisattvas, or religious teachers, not with official lines of address to the recipient. Whatever epistolary framing originally surrounded the body of the letter — the address and salutation, standardized spacing, words of closing, listing of gifts, the place and date of dispatch, seal impressions, and so forth — was stripped away long ago, if indeed it ever existed. For our present purposes, it does not matter what the Sanskrit originals looked like. In the received tradition in Tibet, the canonical Buddhist epistles resemble advice literature rather than Old Tibetan letters.

What the Buddha Wrote

While the canons do not preserve any letters written by the hand of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni himself, a canonical narrative text recounts an episode from the Buddha’s life when he engaged in teaching and blessing through correspondence. The

source for this narrative is the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine of Avadāna Tales,*[57] composed in the eleventh century by the lay poet Kṣemendra.[58] In one episode of the narrative collection, a Singhalese princess named Muktālatā hears merchants from India singing the praises of the Buddha. She is moved to faith and writes a letter to the Buddha expressing her devotion; the Buddha replies by sending her a letter via the merchants, along with a painted image of himself and instructions for taking refuge. When Muktālatā sees these, she immediately attains the level of a stream-enterer, the first of four main stages on the path to Buddhist enlightenment.[59] She also makes copious offerings of pearls and other riches to the Buddha and his monastic community.

For Tibetan Buddhists, this story sets a doctrinal precedent for the effectiveness of letters in accomplishing the aims of the dharma: disseminating sacred objects for worship, instructing disciples in practice, and eliciting donations for the sangha. The authors of letter-writing treatises appeal to this story as a model for the importance of letters in maintaining relationships between Buddhist monastics and their royal patrons, including female patrons, as well as for the efficacy of letters in transmitting the teachings. In the Tibetan Buddhist imagination, which sees Tibet (like Muktālatā herself) located at a distance from the heartland of Buddhism in India, the letter serves as an expedient vehicle for the spread of the religion.

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57. Tibetan title *byang chub kyi sems dpa'i rtogs pa brjod pa dpag bsam gyi 'khri shing*. See Nancy Lin, "Adapting the Buddha's Biographies: A Cultural History of the Wish-Fulfilling Vine in Tibet, Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries." 2011: U.C. Berkeley, Dissertation.

58. His drew his source material from the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya literature — narratives and legal cases relating the early formation of the Buddhist monastic community — as well as from other Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures. The text was first translated into Tibetan in 1270 (by Shong ston lo tsa ba rdo rje rgyal mtshan and Nepalese pandita Laksmikara) under the patronage of Pakpa, the state preceptor and Tibetan Buddhist chaplain for the Mongol leader Kubalai Khan. From its beginnings in Tibet, the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* was associated with court culture and an elite Indian pedigree. See Nancy Lin, "Adapting the Buddha's Biographies," pp. 9-10.

59. The episode of Muktālatā is translated in Nancy Lin, "Adapting the Buddha's Biographies," pp. 40-41.

Several other narratives from the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* featuring Buddhist kings of ancient India serve as key sources for the early modern Geluk epistolary treatises. One such narrative is the story of King Prasenajit, who eagerly desired to meet the Buddha and so sent a letter to the Buddha's father, King Śuddhodana: "Now that the Son of the Gods has discovered the immortal nectar, [let Him] nourish the people [with it]!" So, King Śuddhodana in turn sent a letter of invitation to his son Shakyamuni. The *Vine* recounts that the Buddha received the letter into his own hands and read it himself, perhaps as a sign of special respect for his father.[60] In the *Vine,* letters are cultural products of the royal court. They serve the important function of inviting Buddhist masters (including the Buddha himself) to introduce the dharma to new kingdoms.

Another royal epistolary episode from the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* is King Aśoka's letter to the king of the *nagas,* underwater serpent deities. Sea merchants traveling to Aśoka's kingdom are troubled by *nagas* who pirate away their treasures. They appeal to King Aśoka, who sends a letter to the *naga* king commanding him to return the merchants' wealth for the sake of Buddhism. In artistic depictions, the letter to the *nagas* is dispatched directly into the ocean.[61] The narrative appeals to the authority of kings to send letters or edicts in the name of Buddhism, as well as to command the obedience of non-human agents under their dominion.

Finally, the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* describes an epistolary friendship between two Buddhist kings, Bimbisāra and Udrāyana:

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60. This narrative is found as story 22 in the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine*, Dege edition, text 4155, folio 192.a ff.
61. This narrative is found as story 73 in the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine,* Dege edition, text 4155. For an English translation of this episode, see *Leaves of the Heaven Tree: The Great Compassion of the Buddha.* Trans. Deborah Black. University of Virginia: Dharma Publications, 1997. Page 348 ff. For an artistic rendering of the story, see Himalayan Art Resources, image ID 65034, from the *Avadāna* cycle directed by Situ Panchen Chokyi Jungne(si tu pan chen chos kyi 'byung gnas), 1700-1774.

> Udrāyana the King of Raurukā sent a letter to King Bimbisāra, and sent as a gift a suit of armor made of very precious jewels, pleasing to the touch, difficult to break, difficult to pierce, poison-repellent — and it came with pieces for all the five limbs. Since, [when given a gift,] one is not able to send anything less in return, King Bimbisāra couldn't find anything to send back. Then the *brahmin* Vārsikāra said, 'Have an image of the Buddha painted, and send that.' The King requested permission of the Buddha, and it was granted.
>
> But those who were painting the figure of the Tathāgatha couldn't capture his image, no matter how they designed it – so, they traced in pigment the way that the light from the Teacher's body fell upon the canvas, and so the image was painted and sent with a letter saying: "My friend, to you has been sent a gift that is the most especially noble in all the three worlds [...]."[62]

This narrative places Buddhist letters within a gift economy where letters accompany the most supreme gift of all — the dharma. In this case, the dharma is embodied in the painted image of the Buddha; in the advice epistles in the Buddhist canon, the gift of dharma is conveyed in the letters' words of wisdom and insight.

Buddhist Skepticism of Letters

Not all Buddhist traditions have unequivocally embraced letters as effective teaching devices, however. From the perspective of the Chan or Zen Buddhist lineages in China and Japan (who did not inherit the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* as a canonical text), letters and the distances in space and time that they represent can be seen to interfere with the immediacy of face-to-face instruction that those traditions so highly prize. An example stemming from the Japanese Rinzai Zen sect is a letter from the Kamakura period master Bassui Tokusho to one of his disciples, a Buddhist priest named Iguchi:

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62. Recounted in the letter-writing manual by 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *'phrin yig gi rnam par bzhag pa blo gsal rna rgyan sin+du w+A ra'i 'phreng mdzes* (*A Presentation on Correspondence: A Lovely Garland of Sinduwara Flowers, Ear Ornaments that Illuminate the Mind).* In the author's *Collected Works.* Published at Labrang Monastery, 1997?. TBRC work W21503. Volume 1, pp. 363-430. See folios 2b.5-3a.6. Also, see the original source as story 40 in the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine,* Degé edition, text 4155, folios 307.a ff.

> I have written as you have asked me to but reluctantly. Once you have read this letter burn it. Don't reread it but only search deeply for the one hearing. My words will seem like so much nonsense when you experience enlightenment yourself.[63]

Bassui's words indicate a strong preference for face-to-face dialogue with his students; for him, letters ossify experience and weigh down the momentary movement of insight, the "one hearing." Letters also pose the risk of distracting the student with "such detail," clouding the mind with unproductive intellectual activity rather than breaking through such thought structures into insight. Letters furthermore open the risk of unauthorized others seeing the master's words, which are only "true" in the context of a particular student's development, and applying those words out of context. This could be a reason for Bassui's injunction to burn the letter. Finally, as products of dualistic language and thought, letters will seem like utter "nonsense" in comparison with the non-dual experience of enlightenment.

While it is clear that the letter poses certain problems as an instructional medium in the Zen tradition, I read Bassui's epistolary reluctance as a largely rhetorical move.[64] After all, Chan and Zen hierarchs composed numerous letters through the centuries and their students painstakingly preserved letter collections as valuable means of instruction.[65] Bassui's insistence on the letter's inadequacy serves rhetorically to spur his practitioners onward into deeper, more experiential practice; his appeal to burn the letter reads just as dramatically as the most paradigmatic Zen dialogues do.

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63. Kapleau, Philip. *The Three Pillars of Zen.* New York: Random House, 2013. Page 206.
64. For an influential essay on the role of rhetoric in Zen Buddhism, see Sharf, Robert. "Experience." In *Critical Terms in Religious Studies,* Ed. Mark C. Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Pp. 94-116.
65. For example, see the collected letters of Song dynasty Chan master Dahui. Refer to App, Urs, and Taehye Chonggo. *Daie sho ichiji sakuin* [Texte imprimé] = Concordance to the Letters of Dahui. Hanazono Daigaku Ichiji Sakuin Sōsho. Kyōto: Hanazono Daigaku Kokusai Zengaku Kenkyūjo, 1996.

The rhetoric of immediacy that may render letters problematic from a Zen perspective is not central in Geluk Buddhism, whose central paradigm for spiritual realization is a graded path of stages or levels. Such a rhetoric of immediacy is, however, prominent in other Tibetan Buddhist traditions, in particular the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) tradition of the Nyingma school in Tibet. As shown in the compositions of prominent teachers like Terdak Lingpa, even Great Perfection masters have used formal letters as means of invoking the spontaneity and naturalness that characterize their tradition's approach to practice.[66]

Thus, the early modern letter-writing manuals produced by Nyingma scholars such as Ju Mipam Gyatso are just as formal and highly prescribed as the Geluk manuals.[67] While emphasis on certain themes may vary from sect to sect, and creative play with the epistolary form varies from writer to writer, the overarching attitudes toward formal correspondence across Tibetan Buddhist sectarian contexts in the early modern period are remarkably similar. In Tibet, skills in language and composition fall within the "common arts and sciences" division of knowledge, the secular basis for education that all denominations of Tibetan Buddhism claim to hold in common; it is perhaps for this reason that, despite diverse attitudes about the role of immediacy in spiritual development, sectarian difference is not strongly asserted in Tibetan Buddhist instructions on formal letter writing.

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66. gter bdag gling pa, 1646-1714. See Townsend, Dominique. "Epistles of Interdependence: Preliminary Reflections on the Fifth Dalai Lama's Letters to Terdak Lingpa." In Bogin, Benjamin and Andrew Quintman, eds. *Himalayan Passages: Tibetan and Newar Studies in Honor of Hubert Decleer*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014.

67. ‘ju mi pham rgya mtsho. *yig bskur gyi rnam bzhag mdo tsam brjod pa me tog nor bu'i phreng ba, (Presentation on Correspondence Expressed in Brief: A Jeweled Garland of Flowers).* In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Chengdu: [gangs can rig gzhung dpe rnying myur skyobs lhan tshogs], 2007. TBRC W2DB16631. Volume 2, pp. 677 - 690.

Epistolary Replies to Questions or Objections

In Tibetan Buddhism, the use of letters for religious instruction, and in particular the composition of letters of poetic advice, found an authoritative precedent in the canonical epistles. Another prominent epistolary form within Tibetan Buddhist literature stems from the oral exchange of questions and answers customary between a student and Buddhist teacher: the genre of "replies to questions" (*dris lan* or *zhu lan/ zhus lan).*

The exchange of questions and answers in a Buddhist teaching context is typically an oral event; sometimes, these oral encounters are transcribed. Perhaps the student wants to remember more clearly the details of a complex answer, or the teacher wants to record the lesson in order for other students to benefit from it. In these cases, a *dris lan* text reads as a transcript or record of an oral event, recalling the position of letters on the boundary between orality and literacy. Other times, a person poses questions in epistolary form because an intervening distance between teacher and student makes a face-to-face meeting difficult. A short *dris lan* text redacted for the *Collected Works* of seventeenth-century Geluk lama exemplifies this circumstance well.[68] The letter offers a series of questions on tantric ritual posed to the Panchen Lama, with the Panchen's clarifying answers written in a smaller script after each question.

This genre is a quintessentially Buddhist epistolary genre, distinct from the official letter. It represents the heart of instruction between teacher and student in an ongoing relationship of dialectical exchange. Similarly, emerging from the tradition of oral debate that is especially vital to Geluk monastic education is the genre of "replies to

68. Letter by shar skal ldan rgya mtsho along with replies by Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. Found in the *Collected Works* of shar skal ldan rgya mtsho. Rongwo Monastery woodblocks. Found as TBRC work W9683. Volume 1, pp. 465-469. The colophon to the two-folio letter reads, “The answers, written in small letters, were hand-written by the Dharma Proponent Lozang Chökyi Gyeltsen, from the Residence of Tashi Lhünpo, Gyeltsen Thünpo, as a reply to the letter asking for expertise sent by the Scholar of the Ten Difficulties, Kelden Gyatso of Rongwo [Monastery], from far away in the land of Amdo.”

objections" (*brgal lan).*[69] In the context of monastic debate, a questioner probes a defendant for his stance on a particular item of dispute. The defendant is responsible for refuting the questioner's position, establishing his own position, and dispelling any counter-attacks of his position.[70] In a similar ritual posture, the sender and recipient of a replies-to-objections letter are formally positioned as debating opponents, but we have evidence that this genre was also used in Tibet as a vehicle for friendlier dialogues between teachers and students. One *brgal lan* text called *Reply to Objections: The Cleansing of the Ketaka Gem* by Tukwan Lozang Chökyi Nyima, addressed to his teacher Sumpa Khenpo, is a case in point.[71]

Epistolary replies to questions and objections are literary embodiments of two types of interactions central to Buddhist practice: questioning a teacher and challenging an opponent. As such, they eschew the features of official letters and are better understood as literary extensions of ritualized meetings.

Letters and the Joining of Religion and Politics

Above, we have overviewed the Old Tibetan epistolary culture that emerged from the imperial administrative lexicon. We have seen in the late imperial and post-imperial Tibetan letters at Dunhuang that epistolary styles for administrative and private correspondence were highly standardized according to context. We have also seen the introduction of Indian Buddhist influences on Tibetan letters. These influences include the translations of, and commentaries on, epistles in the Tibetan Buddhist canon; the

69. For a good introduction to monastic debate in the Géluk context, see the essay by Georges Dreyfus accessible at http://www.thlib.org/reference/dictionaries/tibetan-dictionary/#!essay=/dreyfus/drepung/monasticed/s/b41. Accessed February 20, 2015.
70. gzhan lugs dgag pa rang lugs bzhag pa rtsod pa spong ba gsum
71. *dgag lan nor bu ke ta ka'i byi dor.* TBRC work ID W2123. The work was excluded from the monastery production of Tukwan's *Collected Works,* likely because the text supports Nyingma perspectives.

translation of the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* narratives about letter writing during the lifetime of the historical Buddha; and the composition of Tibetan Buddhist doctrinal literature in the form of epistolary replies to questions and objections stemming from Buddhist ritual contexts.

These two lexicons — one governmental, one Buddhist — and the epistolary cultures they governed appear to have operated as distinct spheres of literary production for some time. Indeed, just as the functions of letters in each sphere differed, so did the style and even the nomenclature of the letters themselves. The first known Tibetan letter-writing manual marks the creative integration of these two distinct epistolary lineages as a monastic scholar who found himself in a position of political influence sought to unify Tibetan letter-writing practices into an elegant whole that would function well in both administrative and religious spheres. Our story, then, continues in the thirteenth century with a "joining of religion and politics" whose effects would spill into the realm of epistolary standardization.

Pakpa and His Historical Context

Our first extant Tibetan letter-writing manual appears in the thirteenth century, in the brief window of less than a century (ca. 1264-1350) in which the Mongol Empire, or the branch of the Mongol Empire proclaiming itself the Yuan dynasty of China, held suzerainty over the Tibetan Plateau. The infamous Chinggis Khan who conquered most of Eurasia had never invaded Tibet, so the task fell to one of his successors, Köten Khan. In 1240, Köten sent a raiding party into central Tibet and began a political scheme to win over the powerful Khön *('khon)* family, in whose hereditary line rested the abbatial seat

of Sakya Monastery.[72] The abbot of Sakya in 1240 was none other than the luminary scholar Sakya Pandita (the Pandit of Sakya), Künga Gyeltsen, famous for his treatises on logic, doctrine, rhetoric, and the Sanskrit language arts.[73] Köten summoned Sakya Pandita to his court in Liangzhou, where Sakya Pandita served as the Khan's chief representative of Mongol policy to the Tibetan populace. The Sakya-Mongol alliance served to propel Tibetan Buddhism to a position of influence over Mongolia and China and the Sakya sect to a position of unique authority within Tibet.[74]

Sakya Pandita did not travel to Köten's court alone — he brought with him two young nephews, one of whom was called Pakpa, the "Noble One."[75] After Sakya Pandita died in 1251 and Köten Khan fell from power, the teenaged Pakpa found himself in Shangdu at the court of the new grand governor of Mongol China, Qubilai Khan. Pakpa was later promoted to serve as the Buddhist chaplain to Qubilai, granting the Khan and his family tantric initiations that included the worldly benefits of protecting the royal family's health and bolstering the empire's success in military affairs. Pakpa was appointed National Preceptor (Chinese *guo shi),* chief among all the Buddhist clergy in Tibet and China; he served as emissary to Tibet on several occasions, carrying Qubilai's edicts that guaranteed protection for Tibetan monasteries and relieved them from the burdens of taxation, military conscription, and corvée obligation on behalf of the Mongol Empire.

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72. sa skya dgon chen, founded 1073.
73. sa skya paN+Di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182-1251.
74. For a fuller description of the period of Sakya-Mongol rule, see Petech, Luciano. *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-Skya Period of Tibetan History.* Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990.
75. His longer name and title are: 'gro mgon chos rgyal 'phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan: The Noble One, the Dharma King, Protector of Beings, Lodro Gyeltsen (1235-1280).

Qubilai charged Pakpa with creating a new script based on the Tibetan alphabet, a script that would also serve as a transliterative script for Chinese and Mongolian language documents. In 1269, Pakpa presented the new script to the throne and it was adopted as the national script to be used in all official documents, including banknotes and government badges. Pakpa was awarded the title of Imperial Preceptor (Chinese *di shi)* soon thereafter, marking the height of his career. The seal of his office reads: "Below the sky, upon the earth, son of the Indian God, emanation Buddha, composer of the script, the one who places the royal realm in happiness, Pandit of the five fields of knowledge, Imperial Preceptor Pakpa."[76] Though its use in China and Mongolia faded with the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1379, the Pakpa script continued to be used in Tibet for seals and inscriptions.

The relationship between Pakpa and Qubilai appears to have been the first in which the contours of the patron-priest (*mchod yon*) relationship were delineated in the Tibetan political imagination.[77] Pakpa provided religious guidance, ritual protection, and moral legitimation for the Khan, while the Khan offered his lama extensive material gifts as well as military protection and a position of influence for the Sakya sect. These reciprocities were formally outlined in two edicts that Qubilai conferred upon Pakpa, known as the "Edict in Tibetan Script" (*'ja' sag bod yig ma*) and the "Pearl Edict" *('ja' sag mu tig*).[78] Several sources describe their patron-priest relationship embodied at court by Pakpa sitting on a higher throne than the Khan when giving religious teachings, and

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76. Shakabpa, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden. *One Hundred Thousand Moons: An Advanced Political History of Tibet.* Leiden: Brill, 2009. Page 224.
77. David Seyfort Ruegg, "Introduction." In Cueppers, Christoph, Ed. *The Relationship Between Religion and State (chos Srid Zung 'Brel) in Traditional Tibet: Proceedings of a Seminar Held in Lumbini, Nepal, March 2000.* Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2004. Page 9.
78. For translations of these texts, see Shakabpa, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden, *One Hundred Thousand Moons,* page 220 ff.

Qubilai sitting on a higher throne than his lama when conducting official business (this elegant solution is traditionally ascribed to Qubilai's wife, the Empress Chabui). Oral tradition also attributes to this time period a popular saying that "In the sky there is the one pair, the sun and the moon. On the earth, there are the two aspects, the preceptor and the patron."[79] The seeds of a patron-priest theology planted at this historical moment would grow to influence the Tibetan sociopolitical imagination for centuries to come.

It is highly significant that our first known Tibetan letter-writing manual stems from the period in which the patron-priest relationship was first articulated, a time of "joining religion and politics" when a Buddhist lama became closely involved in the Mongol government. At such a moment, it makes sense that Pakpa's official correspondence style would need to account for the dual authority systems of religion and politics on which his position of influence rested. It is also significant that this "joining of religion and politics" occurred across lines of ethno-linguistic difference. Geluk monks during the Qing period saw vivid parallels between the Sakya-Mongol alliance and their own relationship with multi-ethnic Qing China, and they drew upon those parallels to imagine the role of letter writing in the joining of religion and politics in their day. Even in the twentieth century, ex-officials of the Ganden government have testified that Pakpa's letter-writing manual was the main text studied in the Ganden Accounting Office (*rtsis khang*).[80] The full influence of this short text on later political history in Tibet remains to be investigated.

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79. Shakabpa, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden, *One Hundred Thousand Moons*. Page 222.
80. This claim is based on personal communication in February, 2014 with Tsering Gyel (tshe ring rgyal) of the Lhasa Archives, who has conducted many interviews with former Ganden government officials in Lhasa.

Pakpa's Manual

As discussed above, European scholarship on letter-writing manuals identifies two main types of epistolary manuals: the formulary and the theoretical treatise. Formularies are collections of model sentences with ornate or polite phraseology that letter writers can copy directly. Theoretical treatises undertake more comprehensive treatment of the history and theory of letter writing, in addition to providing practical instructions and phrasing suggestions. Pakpa's manual is a short formulary, although its title, "A Condensed Presentation on Correspondence," employs what later became the more general term for a treatise (*yig bskur rnam bzhag*) rather than a formulary.[81] The work is less than a full folio long and composed in meter, comprising four sections of several stanzas each. Its composition style renders it easily memorized, and differences in the text as it is quoted in the letter-writing manuals by Jamyang Zhepa and Sumpa Khenpo indicate that it may have been memorized and transmitted orally, resulting in variations over the centuries.

The formulary gives terse practical instructions about the proper vocabulary and formatting to use when addressing letters, identifying letters as replies (important for acknowledging the receipt of previous correspondence), stamping, and sealing. Pakpa's prescriptions conform well with the Yuan dynasty Tibetan language edicts that have been preserved in the archives of the Tibetan Autonomous Region; for that reason, and because of the presence of several Mongolian terms in the text, I see no reason at present

81. 'phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan. *yig bskur rnam bzhag 'gag sdom (A Condensed Presentation on Correspondence).* Appended to dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, *yig bskur rnam bzhag nyung nyu rnam gsal. TBRC work W1KG1132. Folios 11.a-12.b.*

to doubt the text's attribution to the hand of Pakpa, or at least to his office at Qubilai's court.[82]

The manual opens with a Buddhist verse of homage to Manjuśri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, but does not prescribe a Buddhist homage (such as the homages with which the canonical epistles open) at the beginning of official letters. Pakpa's verses relay specific instructions for letter writers of various ranks within the imperial bureaucracy. To open their official letters,

> Mongolian kings put "declare" (*bzlo ba*);
> Tibetan kings put "send" (*springs pa*);
> [The letters] of yogis get "thus" (*'di lta*);
> [The letters of] commanders of hundreds or thousands get "send" (*bskur ba*).
> [They] put a drop-down space (*gong 'og)* of eight finger-widths.[83]

The formulary's guidelines differ significantly from the Old Tibetan epistolary patterns found in Dunhuang documents. The sending verbs Pakpa prescribes are new, with the sole exception of *springs pa;* furthermore, he indicates the use of a drop-down space even in official letters, whereas in Dunhuang documents the drop-down space is reserved for letters of personal courtesy. In particular, Pakpa's text introduces a prostration formula for letters submitted from inferiors to superiors:

> To those whom you know are definitely greater than you,
> As well as elder relatives, put "submitted before the feet of so-and-so." [...]
> After that, put "reverence is offered" (*phyag tu phul ba)* [...]
> To lamas, spiritual teachers, parents, and so forth —
> Anyone to whom you yourself offer reverence (*rang nyid phyag 'bul byed pa)* —
> Write "offered on this date."[84]

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82. Archives of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (bod rang skyong ljongs yig tshags khang), Compiler (Tibetan). *Collection of Historical Archives of Tibet (bod kyi lo rgyus yig tshags gces btus*). Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House (rig dngos dpe skrun khang), 1995.
83. Phags pa. *yig bskur rnam bzhag 'gag sdom (A Condensed Presentation on Correspondence).* Appended to TBRC work W1KG1132, *yig bskur rnam bzhag nyung nyu rnam gsal* by dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan. Folio 11.b, line 5 ff.
84. Phags pa. *yig bskur rnam bzhag 'gag sdom (A Condensed Presentation on Correspondence)*. Folios 11.b-12.a.

The phrase that I have translated "to offer reverence" also means, by extension, "to prostrate," which meaning is employed in later Tibetan interpretations of Pakpa's manual.

This formula that describes the sender prostrating before the feet of the recipient is not unique to Pakpa's formulary. We find a similar convention in an ancient Ugaritic formula letter to a queen: "At the feet of my lady, (from) afar, seven (times) and seven (times) do I fall."[85] Centuries later, we also see this convention in a Sanskrit model letter to a teacher found in a formulary of legal documents from medieval Gujarat: "Saluting, in reverential prostration of body with great modesty, the lotus-like feet [of the *guru*]."[86] An investigation of the ancient origins and widespread occurrence of the prostration formula would make an important contribution to global epistolary history. Still, lacking a fuller picture at present, we may wonder whether Pakpa had any contact with Sanskrit letter-writing manuals, or whether Pakpa's correspondence with Sanskrit literary scholars like the Nepalese translator Lakṣmīkāra may have influenced the prostration formula he prescribes in his manual. Clearly, Pakpa's formulary marks a departure from the Old Tibetan epistolary style; foreign letter-writing practices, which would have been easily accessible given the cosmopolitanism of the Mongol Empire, appear to have shaped the official Pakpa's Tibetan letter-writing style at the Yuan court.

The only references to Buddhist personages in Pakpa's manual are the prescription for how yogis should address their edicts and instructions for how to address one's guru. Otherwise, the manual is concerned with guiding the correspondence of kings, military commanders, and officials. Pakpa's formulary addresses the administrative needs of a

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85. Pardee, Dennis, and Robert M. Whiting. "Aspects of Epistolary Verbal Usage in Ugaritic and Akkadian." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, No. 01 (1987): 1-31. See page 6.
86. Prasad, Pushpa. *Lekhapaddhati: Documents of State and Everyday Life from Ancient and Early Medieval Gujarat, 9th to15th centuries.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Page 129. I thank Jason Neelis for this reference.

cosmopolitan Mongol court with a Buddhist consciousness. The "joining of religion and politics" I see in his manual is a case of augmenting an administrative art — the art of writing official state letters on behalf of the Khan — with an acknowledgement of the importance of Buddhist actors on the political stage. Pakpa's manual represents an early and modest interpolation of Buddhist concerns within the overall framework of an imperial ministry of official correspondence. As an epistolary manifestation of "joining religion and politics," Pakpa's formulary is our earliest witness to a genre that slips from the record for several hundred years to appear again in the seventeenth century.

The King of Tsang's Manual

Our next known Tibetan letter-writing manual surfaces in the administrative documents of the seventeenth-century King of Tsang, Karma Tenkyong Wangpo. The King of Tsang, a supporter of the Karma Kagyü school of Buddhism, was the staunch enemy of the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Geluk-Mongol alliance based in nearby Ü. The letter-writing manual attributed to him was composed in 1636, only six years before the king would be killed by Güüshi Khan in the campaign that decisively delivered the Tibetan Plateau into the hands of the Fifth Dalai Lama's government.

The only edition of the king's letter-writing manual that I have located is a manuscript of thirty folios written in the headless (*dbu med*) script. Styling itself as a formulary (*dper brjod*), the text is appended to a manuscript of Karma Tenkyong Wangpo's legal code, *The Great Royal Law in Sixteen Judgments*.[87] Because the legal code and the letter-writing formulary are written in the same hand and numbered consecutively, it is clear that the extant version of the two texts was produced as a single

87. *rgyal khrims chen mo zhal lce bcu drug*. Undated manuscript. TBRC work W1CZ854. The law codes were compiled by one spel ser ba, about whom I have no further information.

unit. This fact suggests a close relationship in early modern Tibet between letter-writing manuals and administrative literature. This manual is our first known formulary of substantial length and deserves more thorough study than I am able to provide here. Nonetheless, a brief examination of its introduction and root outline reveals its particular approach to joining religion and politics.

The manual opens with a religious invocation and several poetic verses of praise, a Buddhist ritual frame for the composition. The main text begins with a peculiar etiology:

> First, as for the history of how letters (*'phrin yig)* gradually arose in the world: according to the scriptures and commentaries, the written word (*yi ge)* served to render hostility into equanimity. As for briefly laying out practical instructions for the needs of those with new minds: to hostile recipients (*yul gnyan pa rnams)*, in order not to call their names directly, [address them with] lavish praise, and after that, like a stainless plow for terracing the land, a large hierarchy space (*'bebs*);[88] and definitively positioning yourself under their feet, [write] your name, and the preliminary "offered with great reverence," and so on.[89]

The text continues with instructions on how to address one's root lama, then proceeds through a long list of possible recipients including both religious personages and government officials, from kings down to county heads. It reads as an expanded version of Pakpa's composition, although whereas Pakpa employs a top-down schema beginning with the edicts of kings, the King of Tsang works from the bottom-up, opening with instructions for offering letters from a humilific stance. Multiple phrasing examples

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88. The term this manual employs for the drop-down space, *'bebs,* differs from the *gong 'og* Pakpa uses. By comparing Yuan dynasty archival documents with Tibetan documents from the seventeenth century, we can see that the terms do carry slightly different meanings. The *gong 'og* Pakpa's office used leaves a blank space only on the left half of the page, while the *'bebs* constitutes several full lines of blank paper.

89. Karma bstan skyong dbang po. *'phrin yig gi dper brjod mdo tsam bkod pa blo gsal rna ba'i rgyan, A Brief Letter-Writing Formulary, the Ear Ornament that Clarifies Understanding.* Manuscript. Composed in 1636. TBRC work W1CZ854. The Tibetan reads: thog mar 'jig rten du 'phrin yig gi rim pa ji ltar byung ba'i lo rgyus/ gsung rabs [sic] kyi lung 'brel sogs rgya bshad rnams[?] yi ges 'jigs pas btang snyoms su byas/ blo gros gsar bu ba 'ga' zhig la nye bar mkho phyir dngos don rags tsam 'god pa ni/ yul gnyan pa rnams la mtshan dngos 'don byar mi rgyur bas bsngags brjod che ba'i mthar khams stegs kyi rmo dri ma med pa lta bu la 'bebs che bar/ drung 'og tu tshud nges pas rang ming sngon du 'gro ba'i gus pa chen pos zhu ba sogs dang/ rang gi rtsa ba'i bla ma dang rgyal ba yab sras lta bu la ni [...]. Folio 52a, lines 4-8.

follow each prescribed recipient or situation.

This text displays an immersion in the scriptural and ritual authority of Buddhism; its religious invocation and its reference to the "scriptures and commentaries," not to mention the variety of religious offices addressed in the formulary, situate the text in a world where Buddhist agents matter. Still, the manual's foremost concern and indeed its justification for its own existence is the task of "rendering hostility into equanimity" by means of conciliatory letters to those antagonistic to one's own interests. In this text, formal correspondence is promoted as one of the diplomatic arts of governmental administration, and a knowledge of religious authority and rank helps to inform its effectiveness in a world where Buddhist institutions hold sway. We know from the context of violent conflict surrounding its composition that the manual had real-world concerns at the heart of its instructions. Unfortunately, its aspirations toward epistolary diplomacy were not an adequate match for the threat of the most hostile enemy of the day, the Fifth Dalai Lama.

Ganden Government Handbooks

After the King of Tsang was killed in 1636 and Güüshi Khan's conquest of the Plateau drew to a decisive close in 1642, the Fifth Dalai Lama established the Ganden Government and gradually expanded its reach with the help of a mastermind regent named Sangyé Gyatso. The administrative apparatus of their government, housed in the newly constructed Potala Palace, entailed an impressive bureaucratic array of archives, offices, and ministries. In addition to the possible influence of Pakpa's formulary, other governmental handbooks were used within the Ganden Government with relevance to

official letter-writing practice. While much work remains to be carried out on these materials, they are worth mentioning here in preliminary fashion as a contrasting backdrop for the distinctively Buddhist letter-writing manuals that will emerge after the Fifth Dalai Lama passes away and a new generation of Geluk leaders looks eastward.

First of note is a handbook on the principles of administration called *The Crystal Clear Mirror Illuminating What To Accept and Reject,* authored by the regent Sangyé Gyatso.[90] The seventh chapter of the handbook concerns the role of scribes or secretaries (*yig mkhan)* in the Ganden Government, including instructions about delivering, reading, and archiving official letters. One piece of advice Sangyé Gyatso gives, for example, is never to read a letter publicly until you have ascertained whether its nature is sensitive; if it is, you can take urgent action first and concoct an excuse later for your delay in making the letter public. The work is terse and employs technical administrative vocabulary. Although it includes quotations from Buddhist sources (for example, in the chapter on scribes, extolling the virtues of literary knowledge), its primary orientation is toward the practical aspects of official government duties.

Another Ganden Government handbook worth introducing is a formulary for drafting official documents whose forms often resemble letters, replete with the drop-down space. *The Formulary of the Great Book of Indentures*[91] is a model collection of official records such as contracts and deeds. Its contents detail standard ways to draft administrative documents as the Ganden Government managed its affairs with

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90. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *blang dor gsal bar ston pa'i drang thig dwangs shel me long (The Crystal Clear Mirror: A Straight Line That Clearly Reveals What to Accept and Reject).* Composed in 1681. Dolanji, H.P., India: Sonam Drakpa, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1979. From the 20th c. Lhasa New Zhol Printery woodblocks. Pages 1-83 of TBRC work W8234.

91. *she bam chen mo'i dper brjod*. Available in TBRC work ID W30145, *Legal Compendium (zhal lce phyogs bsdus)*. Lhasa: [bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang], 2007. Pages 127-200. I have not been able to verify the date of this handbook's composition. Its bibliographical entry on the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center places it within a collection of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tibetan legal texts.

surrounding noble and monastic polities, such as the residential colleges of the Geluk seats in Lhasa. The text exemplifies how official letter-writing instructions are integrated within legal formularies for other types of government documents. A standalone Ganden Government epistolary manual does not seem to appear until 1888.[92]

The several examples mentioned here, along with Pakpa's manual and its place in the political theater of the Yuan, all indicate that regulating epistolary practice was traditionally the purview of governments. Letter-writing instructions seem first to emerge in Tibet in legal contexts and serve administrative functions. The "joining of religion and politics" at work in these materials is unidirectional: governments are adapting Buddhist sources of authority to their statecraft practices. In early modern Geluk letter-writing manuals, we see the opposite directionality occur: Buddhist monks appropriate the governmental genres of official letters and letter-writing manuals to religious institutional life.

92. This is the landmark text by bka' drung nor rgyas nang pa dbang 'dus tshe ring. *yig bskur rnam gzhag nyer mkho smyug 'dzin dbang po'i yid gsos dpyid kyi pho nya'i glu dbyangs (The Song of the Spring Messenger: Presentation and Desiderata on Correspondence to Nourish the Mental Faculties of Those Who Wield the Pen).* Publication information unknown. Composition date 1888. TBRC work W1KG12659.

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Chapter Two:

Buddhist Language and Jamyang Zhepa's Manual

Pakpa's formulary marks the first known attempt to promote an official Tibetan epistolary style that integrates Buddhist influence within the governmental sphere of power. Full-fledged theoretical treatises on letter writing — scholastic attempts to standardize and theologize a wide spectrum of epistolary practices — do not seem to have emerged, however, until the Qing period. These manuals emerged in a specific historical *milieu* with its own challenges and prospects, and they emerged with a distinctly Buddhist orientation in a particular school of Buddhism. In this chapter, I begin the narrative of why and how letter writing served the growth of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism in the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. I introduce the letter-writing manual composed by the eminent Geluk monastic scholar Jamyang Zhepa; I describe the political and scholastic environments in which he produced his manual and make an argument about the manual's functions and significance within that landscape; and I detail the contents of the manual and extract Jamyang Zhepa's overarching views on the Buddhist contours of proper epistolary language.

Jamyang Zhepa's Life, Times, and Networks

The Ganden Government in the Late Seventeenth Century

Our first author of a theoretical treatise on Tibetan letter writing, a reincarnate lama known as "Manjuśri's Smile" or Jamyang Zhepa, came of age during a time of vibrant intellectual activity and dramatic political change. The scene opens in Lhasa during the latter half of the seventeenth century: the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Geluk school, which had long been overshadowed by the ruling family of central Tibet and the Kagyü sect of Buddhism they patronized, had been granted new rule over the Tibetan Plateau.[1] The Geluk's sudden rise to power was accomplished by Güüshi Khan (1582-1655), the Mongol warlord and Geluk patron who invaded the territories of Kham and central Tibet in a 1637-1642 campaign to suppress the enemies of the Geluk and symbolically present the conquered territories of Tibet as an offering to his guru, the Fifth Dalai Lama.[2] Although Güüshi Khan would claim the title "King of Tibet" until his death in 1655, when full sovereignty passed to the Fifth Dalai Lama, as early as 1642 the Fifth began his task of developing a religious government named for the Ganden Palace (*dga' ldan pho brang*) at Drepung Monastery, expanding the Geluk network of institutions and patrons, and securing the future of the sect, which now seemed brighter in the light of two suns rising in the east: the Mongols and Manchus, who were willing to offer both monetary and military support for the Geluk teachings.

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1. The Fifth Dalai Lama was ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682. See Tuttle, Gray. "A Tibetan Buddhist Mission to the East: The Fifth Dalai Lama's Journey to Beijing, 1652-1653." In Cuevas, Bryan. J., and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, eds. *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries : PIATS 2003 : Tibetan Studies : Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003*. Leiden: Brill, 2006. Page 65.
2. This well-known event is described in Sangyé Gyatso, *Life of the Fifth Dalai Lama: Volume IV, Part I.* Trans. Zahiruddin Ahmad. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1999. Pages 260-261.

In this environment of political transition and spurred by the promise and peril of shifting alliances, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his administration turned their efforts toward diplomacy. Dignitaries, envoys, scholars, and merchants from across the Asian world appeared at court. A prolific scholar and writer as well as an ambitious statesman, the Fifth Dalai Lama made his mark on Tibet's epistolary record with extensive diplomatic correspondence with kings and emperors in China, Mongolia, Nepal, and Himalayan border kingdoms. His more than three hundred official letters (*chab shog)* are still studied in Tibetan classrooms today for their regal elegance and historical import.[3] Schneider describes the Fifth Dalai Lama's process for penning official letters: rather than compose in his own hand, the Fifth typically dictated his letters to a secretary, who would produce a draft for the Fifth's approval, and would then seal the letter in his presence with all the requisite attention to folding the letter, wrapping it in a white offering scarf, and sealing it properly.[4] Official copies of all Ganden Government correspondence were archived. Although a Ganden Government letter-writing manual proper had not yet appeared on the scene, it is evident that official epistolary styles were well standardized within the Ganden Government by the seventeenth century. For not only was the Fifth's diplomatic correspondence highly prescribed, but the replies he received from foreign rulers like the Züngar Mongolian Galdan Khan adhered to the same meticulous formal and phrasing conventions with which the Dalai Lama himself wrote.[5]

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3. The 302 political letters of the Fifth Dalai Lama are found in his *Collected Works.* Lhasa: Zhol Printing House, 199?. TBRC work W1KG825. "The Melodious Lute: Letters Set in Ornate Verse to the High, Middling, and Low Ones in China, Tibet, Mongolia, and Monguor Lands" (rgya bod hor sog gi mchog dman bar pa rnams la 'phrin yig snyan ngag tu bkod pa rab snyan rgyud mang). Volume 19, pages 83-659.
4. Schneider, Hanna. "Tibetan Epistolary Style." In *The Dalai Lamas: a Visual History*. 1st English ed. Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2005. Page 260 ff.
5. See Ishihama, Yumiko. "An Aspect of the Tibet, Mongol, and China Relationship in the Late 17th Century from the View of Tibetan Letter Format. — Based on the Letters of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the

In addition to the maintenance of diplomatic and patronage relationships through correspondence, the massive project of state-building that now lay in the hands of central Tibet's Geluk hierarchs also required the creation of new symbolic capital to bolster the Dalai Lama's domestic image as spiritual leader and king of Tibet. To this end, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his ambitious young regent, Sangyé Gyatso, sponsored an array of architectural, ritual, scholastic, and artistic projects — not the least among which was the construction of the majestic Potala Palace, which would serve as the Dalai Lama's residence and government headquarters — all to showcase and to strengthen the authority of the Ganden Government.[6] Among the chief efforts of the Regent on the scholastic front was a revival of Indian knowledge in the Sanskrit language arts.[7] Consequently, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Regent invited Sanskrit grammarians from the Indian subcontinent to tutor Tibet's top linguists and translators and reinvigorate the study of ornate Indian poetics (Sanskrit *kavya,* Tibetan *snyan ngag)* among lay and monastics alike. The Fifth Dalai Lama studied ornate Indian poetics under a layman named Mön Dropa Jamyang Wangyel Dorjé and employed highly ornate language in his political letters, even though there was some resistance at court to the idea that an ordained monk would practice what was perceived as a layman's poetic craft.[8] Still, perhaps due to the

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Regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho and the Mongolian Prince Galdan." *Journal of Asian and African Studies.* No. 55 (1998): 165-189.

6. This state-building project in presented in depth by Schaeffer, Kurtis. "Ritual, Festival and Authority." In Cuevas, Bryan. J., and Kurtis R. Schaeffer, eds. *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries : PIATS 2003 : Tibetan Studies : Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

7. Schaeffer, Kurtis. "New Scholarship in Tibet, 1650-1700." In Pollock, Sheldon, Ed. *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Page 295.

8. smon 'gro pa 'jam dbyangs dbang rgyal rdo rje, dates unknown. Lin, Nancy. "In Layman's Terms: The Politics of Poetry at the Fifth Dalai Lama's Court." Unpublished paper presented at the XIII Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (2013). Page 2 ff. The two primary texts serving as the basis for the Dalai Lama's education in poetics were the *Mirror of Poetics* and the *Wish-fulfilling Vine of Bodhisattva Tales*. While the study and practice of poetics had a long history among

as yet understudied impact of lay administrative training at Mindroling Monastery, letter writing at the highest echelons of society had become, by the Fifth Dalai Lama's day, closely related to the study of ornate poetry.[9] Praising one's recipient by employing the semantic and phonological devices described in the *Mirror of Poetics* (Sanskrit *Kavyadarśa)* was the ultimate expression of respect for one's audience and display of one's own literary erudition in the Tibetan Buddhist cosmopolitan world of the seventeenth century.

At the Dalai Lama's court, elite poetic language based on Sanskrit theory served simultaneously as a stratifying and as a universalizing medium. While only the most highly educated scholars were trained in the use of ornate poetic language, scholarship on *kavya* spread across lay aristocratic and monastic spheres and through many Tibetan regions where the spoken languages were mutually unintelligible, and even into the Mongolian, Indian, and Chinese circles where Sanskrit scholarship flourished. The transnationalism of *kavya* challenges any facile equation of "vernacularism" with colloquial speech; on the contrary, in Tibetan, Chinese, and Indian civilizations, elite literary language was held in common across many geographical and ethnic boundaries, while spoken languages divided peoples even from valley to valley. Ornate poetics thus

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monastic scholars in Tibet, including Tsongkhapa (tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa, 1357-1419) the Geluk founder himself, there appears to have been some controversy at the court of the Fifth about whether the study of the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine,* written by a lay person (albeit a Buddhist adept and king) was an appropriate course of study for religious hierarchs. Jamyang Zhepa will make a case for the Buddhist (and monastic) relevance of ornate poetic studies in his manual, as will be discussed below.

9. The Nyingma educational center at Mindroling Monastery (smin 'gro gling), founded in 1676 south of Lhasa to serve as both a monastery that would perform protective rituals for the Ganden government and as a university for the Tibetan aristocracy, most likely contributed as well to the development of the Ganden government epistolary style. At Mindroling, education in the arts and sciences, including subjects like grammar, poetry, and calligraphy, was among the best in Tibet and lay administrative officials for the Dalai Lama's government were often trained at Mindroling. Unfortunately, the single book-length study on cultural production at Mindroling is yet unpublished, and so information about the precise role of Mindroling in developing early modern Tibetan epistolary culture is not available at present. The study to which I refer is Townsend, Dominique. “Materials of Buddhist Culture: Aesthetics and Cosmopolitanism at Mindroling Monastery.” Ph.D., Columbia University, 2012.

served both to limit (by rank) and to expand (by geography) communities of discourse. As a sharp tool for carving out new "imagined communities,"[10] ornate poetics remained deeply relevant to the cultivation of a Buddhist epistolary culture among transnational elite during the seventeenth century, a phenomenon that would not escape Jamyang Zhepa's interest.

Jamyang Zhepa's Education and Influence

Jamyang Zhepa was born in the remote reaches of Amdo in 1648, a mere six years after Güüshi Khan gifted the territories of Tibet to the young Fifth Dalai Lama and the Geluk ascendancy began. He studied diligently under his uncle, a monk, and gained proficiency in many Buddhist doctrinal subjects as well as in the Tibetan and Sanskrit language arts. In 1668, at the age of twenty-one, he traveled to Lhasa to undertake his monastic education at the great Geluk bastion of Drepung Monastery where he enrolled in Gomang Philosophical College and completed the Geluk exoteric curriculum. At Gomang, he also continued to study poetics and grammar intermittently, although his biography does not list his teachers in these fields.[11]

In Lhasa, Gomang College was the central hub of a network of scholars from far-flung Mongolian principalities and from the Amdo region of northeastern Tibet. Regionalism within the monastic university system not only served the practical end of allowing for the ease of oral communication, given the diversity of spoken languages and dialects across the Tibetan Plateau, but also helped cement institutional networks between

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10. I invoke this term, now widely used, from Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised and extended. ed.). London: Verso, 1991.
11. dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *A Port for Entering Wondrous Fortune: The Life Story of the All-Knowing Jamyang Zhépa, the Almighty Who is Learned and Accomplished (mkhas shing grub pa'i dbang phyugs kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar skal bzang 'jugs ngogs),* hereafter the *Life Story*. In his *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Published at Labrang Monastery (bla brang bkra shis 'khyil), 1999. TBRC work W2122. Volume 2, pages 79 - 324. See folio 15a.2.

central Tibet and outlying regions. Almost every lama from Amdo or southern Mongolia during this period studied at Drepung Gomang, using the same curriculum and textbooks, learning the same ritual practices for protector deities specific to the Geluk school, and connecting with monks who would become fellow Geluk administrators in eastern regions. At Gomang College, Jamyang Zhepa studied with a teacher named Lodrö Gyatso who would later serve as an appointed missionary to Mongolia and to the Qing Court of Emperor Kangxi.[12] It was also at Gomang that Jamyang Zhepa met the second Changkya (*lcang skya*) incarnate lama, Lozang Chöden (blo bzang chos ldan, 1642-1714), another Qing missionary lama whose important relationship with Jamyang Zhepa will be examined below.[13]

Jamyang Zhepa was a precocious student and appears to have greatly impressed his colleagues at several monasteries while on his debating tour. He took full monastic vows from the Fifth Dalai Lama himself in 1674 and then enrolled in the Lower Tantric College (*rgyud smad grwa tshang)* in Lhasa to further his pedigree in esoteric ritual and meditation. Jamyang Zhepa steadily rose in the ranks of Geluk monastic administration and was appointed to the abbacy of Gomang College in 1700. As abbot of Drepung Gomang, Jamyang Zhepa attended the 1707 council that deliberated over the deceased Fifth Dalai Lama's reincarnation and the military aggression of Mongol lord Lazang Khan. During this famous council of the three Geluk seats of Drepung, Sera, and Ganden Monasteries, Jamyang Zhepa broke with Regent Sangyé Gyatso over whether to send the

12. blo gros rgya mtsho, 1635-1688. See Nietupski, Paul Kocot. *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709-1958*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011. Page 119.
13. From dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *mkhas shing grub pa'i dbang phyugs kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar skal bzang 'jugs ngogs (A Port for Entering Wondrous Fortune: The Life Story of the All-Knowing Jamyang Zhepa, the Almighty Who is Learned and Accomplished).* In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Published at Labrang Monastery (bla brang bkra shis 'khyil), 1999. TBRC work W2122. Volume 2, pages 79-324. See folio 13b.3-4.

newly-recognized Sixth Dalai Lama to Beijing at the Qing emperor's request. While the Regent was determined to resist Qing intervention, maintain the autonomy of the Dalai Lama, and placate domestic factions in central Tibet, Jamyang Zhepa was eager to leverage Qing support for the Geluk School, even at the expense of Lhasa's power base. He saw cooperation with the Qing network of Manchus and Mongols as key to the future of the Geluk teachings and stepped down from the Gomang abbacy in order to pursue Qing patronage farther afield.[14] This political decision to side with the Qing mission over and against the Ganden Government was the beginning of Jamyang Zhepa's venture to found a new monastery in Amdo and further develop Geluk support among Mongols and Manchus.

I introduce the political context of turn-of-the-eighteenth-century Lhasa in order to demonstrate the implications of Jamyang Zhepa's engagement with Mongolian and Qing-affiliated monastics and patrons earlier in his career. It was likely while he was still at Gomang that a Mongolian monk, whom Jamyang Zhepa identifies as a member of the royal family line of Altan Khan, requested that Jamyang Zhepa compose a letter-writing manual.[15] Jamyang Zhepa accepted his charge and made use of the libraries and archives at his disposal in Lhasa to compose his pioneering history and instructional guide of Tibetan Buddhist correspondence.

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14. Nikolay Tsyrempilov. "Dge lugs pa divided: Some aspects of the political role of Tibetan Buddhism in the expansion of the Qing dynasty." In Schaeffer and Cuevas, Ed. *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.* PIATS 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003. Boston: Brill, 2006. See pages 57-60.

15. The text's colophon identifies the requester as follows: "He who comes from the family of the white god of Heaven, in the lineage of Chahar Altan Khan; who turns the wheel of might; the royal renunciant, replete with the marks of kingship, who bears the crown of the Three Jewels and who is ornamented with the seven good qualities of exalted status, commanded: 'Write something like this' [...]." *gnam gyi lha dkar po'i rigs las stobs kyi 'khor los bsgyur ba/ cha gar al tan rgyal po sogs kyi rigs su son pa/ mtho ris kyi yon tan bdun gyis spras shing/ dkon mchog gsum po gtsug gi cod pan du 'dzin pa'i lha btsun pa rgyal mtshan can gyis 'di lta bu zhig gyis zhes bka' stsal pa [...].* 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 33b.4-6.

In light of his formation in late seventeenth-century Lhasa, where diplomacy with Mongols and Manchus was increasingly important and studies of the language arts heavily supported at court, it makes sense that Jamyang Zhepa was asked to compose a letter-writing manual. A gifted scholar with high-status connections, Jamyang Zhepa had close access to the workings of the Ganden Government and its diplomatic correspondence style; yet Jamyang Zhepa was not a mouthpiece for the Ganden Government, but a zealous monk seeking to present an administrative art in distinctly Buddhist terms and with his own political agenda. We can view his letter-writing manual as a translation of Ganden Government diplomacy into a new international iteration of Geluk Buddhism. Through letters, he envisioned that vast networks of missionizing and patronage for the Geluk school would be managed on the basis of a Buddhist iteration of clerical administration. By attempting to cultivate the epistolary practices of Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu Geluk supporters and to craft a transnational Buddhist mode of communication, Jamyang Zhepa planted the literary seeds of a Geluk-Qing alliance that, though not without its problems, would remain strong for more than a century.

The Manual

We find Jamyang Zhepa's letter-writing manual in the first volume of his extensive *Collected Works* alongside treatises on Sanskrit grammar, prosody, and ornate poetry.[16] Entitled *A Presentation on Correspondence: A Lovely Garland of Sinduwara Flowers, Ear Ornaments that Illuminate the Mind,* the manual sets out to describe the

16. Jamyang Zhepa's *Collected Works* are TBRC work 21503. Kurtis Schaeffer counts 143 individual texts and 6,343 woodblocks (or 12,686 pages) in the collection. See Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. Page 35. The manual is found in Volume 1, pages 363-430 and is entitled *'phrin yig gi rnam par bzhag pa blo gsal rna rgyan sin+dU wA ra'i 'phreng mdzes,* hereafter *Presentation on Correspondence.*

Buddhist history of letters in India and then to prescribe proper style, language register, and formatting for letters to people of varying ranks in his contemporary Tibetan context. While the manual is not dated, the references therein suggest a date of composition between 1680 and 1707, after Jamyang Zhepa had met one of his teachers, the Segyü Lama, yet before he had broken with Sangyé Gyatso and moved from central Tibet to Amdo.[17] The manual was written by Jamyang Zhepa himself (the colophon specifies *bris pa,* "wrote," rather than the less precise *brtsams pa,* "composed"), and later printed as part of Jamyang Zhepa's *Collected Works* at Labrang Monastery under the supervision of his reincarnation, the second Jamyang Zhepa Könchok Jigmé Wangpo.[18] The Labrang block print comprising fifteen volumes is the only edition of the *Collected Works* I have located thus far, although it has been reprinted several times with slightly varying volume configurations.[19]

The sources Jamyang Zhepa consults to compose his thirty-four folio (sixty-eight page) manual are many and varied. He draws directly upon Pakpa's manual, as well as upon a formulary attributed to the lay Kadam master Dromtön that I have been unable to

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17. We can date the text's composition to after 1680, when Jamyang Zhepa was introduced to the Segyü lama (srad rgyud rdo rje 'chang dkon mchog yar 'phel, b.1602). The story of Segyü lama seeking out Jamyang Zhepa in order to pass on the transmission of the Ganden Nyangyü (dga' ldan snyan rgyud) teachings is recounted in Jamyang Zhepa's life story (dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *A Port for Entering Wondrous Fortune*) on folio 30b.2 ff., and the Segyü Lama is specifically mentioned as Jamyang Zhepa's teacher in the colophon to the letter-writing manual. The manual's references to the Fifth Dalai Lama and to the Regent Sangyé Gyatso, as well as its lack of references to Labrang Monastery or to Jamyang Zhepa's Amdo patron the Mongolian prince Erdeni Jinong, indicate that the text was composed while Jamyang Zhepa was still residing in central Tibet.

18. Kurtis Schaeffer dates the publication of the *Collected Works* to between 1758 and 1791, according to "evidence internal to the colophons" of several texts within the collection. *The Culture of the Book in Tibet,* Page 35.

19. Three different printings of the *gsung 'bum* have different numbers of volumes. TBRC work W21503 (publication tentatively attributed to Gomang College in South India in 1997) contains 16 volumes because volume *tha* with its 1,360 pages is split into two parts. TBRC work W1KG9409 (published in New Delhi between 1972-1974 as part of the "Gedan Sungrab Minyam Gyunphel Series") is printed from the same Labrang woodblocks but presents volume *tha* as a single volume, numbering 15 volumes total. TBRC work W22186, an undated printing from the Labrang woodblocks, omits the second volume, *kha,* which was deemed to be restricted (*bka' rgya ma*) due to its tantric content.

locate at present.[20] He culls stories from the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine of Avadāna Tales* to give precedents for Buddhist letter writing in the historical Buddha's lifetime; he also refers several times to the epistles preserved in the *Translated Treatises* of the Tibetan Buddhist canon. Jamyang Zhepa uses various sutras, histories, biographies, and letters written by well-known Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs to extract examples of elegant terms of address according to rank, and refers to the *Wheel of Time Tantra* to describe proper ways to date one's letters in poetic astrological terms.[21] He even draws from Chinese archival records to make a comparative analysis of Tibetan and Chinese styles of seals and signets.[22] In Jamyang Zhepa's eyes, the full array of Buddhist scriptures, scholastic works, and official archives at his disposal teemed with wisdom about letter writing that could serve the spread of Buddhism in his own day.

20. *'brom gyis mdzas pa'i shog gcig ma.* Reference in Jamyang Zhepa's *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 11b.4. This unknown text by Drom is quoted in brief several other times in Jamyang Zhepa's text.
21. Sanskrit *Kālacakratantra,* Tibetan *dus kyi 'khor lo rtsa rgyud*
22. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 10b.1.

OUTLINE OF JAMYANG ZHEPA'S PRESENTATION ON LETTERS

Title Page (folio 1a)

Verses of Homage (1b.1-2b.3)

The *Presentation on Letters* (2b.3-25a.6)

1. The Origins of Letters (2b.5-11.b)
    - i. Origins Proper (2b.5- 6a.1): *on letters in Buddhist India*
    - *ii.* Explanation of Terminology (6a.1-11.b): *terms of address, the formatting of the salutation, and display of rank in Indian letters*
2. Explanation of Current Conventions for Sending and Replying (11.b-25a.6)
    - i. How to Send Letters (11b-22a.4): *Tibetan epistolary style*
    - ii. Replies (22a.4-23a.6)
    - iii. Presentation on Sealing Letters (23a.6-24a.6)
    - iv. How to Imprint Inner and Outer Stamps (24a.6-25a.6)

Advice for Abiding in the Dharma (25b.1-33b.4)

Colophon (33b.4-34a.2)

Jamyang Zhepa opens his manual with Buddhist verses of homage and a quotation from the Buddha's *Garland of Life Stories:* "When meeting nobles, the most supreme of gifts [make them glad]; in the monastic assembly, learned ones make them glad."[23] Jamyang Zhepa's opening makes clear that his manual will guide correspondence with both lay and religious audiences by enabling the writer to bring delight to each in the appropriate way. The dharma — the most supreme gift as well as the most sublime wisdom — gladdens the hearts of kings and Buddhist scholars alike. His next quotation, from the *Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutras,* again speaks of delight: "Like something forged from gold, or like the unfolding of a lotus; like eating

23. Sanskrit *Jātakamālā,* Tibetan *skye pa'i rabs kyi rgyud.* The quotation reads, *ya rabs rnams dang 'phrad na skyes kyi mchog/ tshogs kyi nang na mkhas pa mgu par byed.* From 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 1b.2.

food that satisfies when one is afflicted and quivering from hunger; like hearing a lovely letter and like opening a treasure chest, the dharma gives rise to pleasure more supreme than these here spoken."[24] The manual's primary aim is to educate its user in the task of delighting both lay and religious audiences with the dharma by using elegant language befitting the faith, language whose beauty quells the suffering of beings and fulfills their desires.

After this opening, Jamyang Zhepa presents his outline for the manual. He proceeds with the first section of his treatise, on the Indian Buddhist origins of letters, by recounting several stories from the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine:* the story of King Bimbisara sending his friend King Udrāyana a letter along with a portrait of Shakyamuni Buddha; the story of King Prasenajit writing a letter to King Śuddhodana, requesting to meet the Buddha; and the story of Princess Muktālatā sending the Buddha a letter along with an offering of seven vessels of pearls and receiving a reply from Shakyamuni himself.[25] These three stories situate Buddhist letter writing in ancient India squarely within the context of patronage: one party offers a gift, the other offers the dharma, and letters make the exchange possible in both directions. Relationships with lay patrons will remain a key concern for Jamyang Zhepa as he constructs his vision for Buddhist letters.

The manual continues with Jamyang Zhepa's list of twenty of the most important letters in Tibetan Buddhist history, the first native Tibetan Buddhist epistolary lineage.[26] Jamyang Zhepa first lists Indian Buddhist letter writers and then (with entry twelve)

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24. Sanskrit *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra,* Tibetan *mdo sde rgyan* From 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 1b.3-4.
25. These stories are recounted in 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folios 2b.5-4b.1.
26. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 4b.3 ff.

makes a similar survey of Tibetan letter writers, from the first emperor of Tibet, Songtsen Gampo, to the Fifth Dalai Lama of Jamyang Zhepa's own day. The survey reads:

1. King Aśoka's letter to the Naga King[27]
2. Nāgārjuna's letters to King Surabhibhadra, the "Letter to a Friend"[28] and the "Precious Garland" letter of advice[29]
3. Candragomin's "Letter to a Student"[30]
4. Master Mātṛceṭa's "Letter to King Kaniṣka"[31]
5. The noble Avalokiteśvara's "Letter to Young Prakāśakumāra"[32]
6. The monk Āraṇyaka's "Letter to a Teacher"[33]
7. The Brahmin Sajjana's "Letter to a Son"[34]
8. Mitrayogin's "Letter to King Candra"[35]
9. Buddhaguhya's letter to King Trisong Detsen and letters of advice[36]
10. The Master Donyö Char's "Precious Garland of Questions and Answers," sent to the King Nyanak Khen[37]
11. Atiśa's letter to Nidyapha, the King of Nepal, "The Stainless Letter of Questions and Answers"[38]
12. King Songtsen Gampo's letters to the kings of Nepal and China to invite his Nepali bride Tritsün and his Chinese bride Kongjo
13. The letter in verse by Dromtön, the Kadam forefather from Mangyul, to all the high lamas of Tibet requesting that they invite Lord Atiśa
14. Lord Tsongkhapa's official letters to the Fifth Karmapa[39] and to the Ming Emperor[40]

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27. *Wish-Fulfilling Vine,* story number 73. For an English translation of this episode, see *Leaves of the Heaven Tree: The Great Compassion of the Buddha.* Trans. Deborah Black. Berkeley, CA: Dharma Publications, 1997. Page 348 ff.
28. "bshes pa'i spring yig." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge edition). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 82-94. Delhi: Delhi karmapae choedhey, gyalwae sungrab partun khang, 1982-1985.
29. "rgyal po la gtam bya ba rin po che'i phreng ba." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 172: 215-253.
30. "slob ma la springs pa'i spring yig." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 94-107.
31. "rgyal po chen po ka nis ka la springs pa'i spring yig." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 107-114.
32. " 'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gis dge slong rab gsal gzhon nu la springs pa'i phrin yig." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 80-82.
33. "bla ma la spring ba." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 128-135.
34. "bu la spring ba." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 135-141.
35. "rgyal po zla ba la springs pa'i spring yig." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 144-148.
36. "bod rje 'bangs dang btsun pa rnams la spring yig." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 271-279.
37. "dri ma med pa'i dris lan rin po che'i phreng ba." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 203: 253-256.
38. "dri ma med pa rin po che'i spring yig." In *bstan 'gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W23703. Volume 173: 141-144.
39. blo bzang grags pa'i dpal. "chos rje kar+ma pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i drung du zhu yig." In the *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)* of the author (zhol edition). TBRC W635. Volume 2: 601-604.The Fifth Karmapa was kar ma pa bde bzhin gshegs pa (1384-1415).

15. Khedrup Jé's official letters to the Dharma King of Ngari,[41] the Gyetsé Regent, and the Rinpung Lord[42]
16. The official letters which were conferred by Lord of all the Victors (Gendün Drup, the first Dalai Lama) to all the Tibetan lamas and communities
17. The Panchen Lama Losang Chökyi Gyeltsen's official letters to high and low
18. Translator Tro's letter to the Pandit of Kashmir (Shakya Śri) inviting him to Tibet
19. The letters of Translators Sa, Shong, Pang, Bu, and so forth,[43] the letters of all the great ones who are learned and accomplished;
20. The letters of the Fifth Dalai Lama to high and low; for example, to the Panchen Lama and to the Sakya [hierarchs], and letters to the wheel-turning monarchs of India and China.[44]

In this selective survey, Jamyang Zhepa skillfully emphasizes key moments of religiopolitical interaction in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist history. Kings and heads of independent polities figure at least *eighteen times* in this list. Here, the Indian Buddhist heritage of writing letters to royal patrons is integrated seamlessly with the Tibetan history of kings supporting Buddhism. The sectarian traditions highlighted in this list are, of course, the Geluk school and its founding forefathers in the Kadam tradition: Dromtön, Atiśa, Tsongkhapa, Khedrup Jé, and Gendün Drup. Dalai Lamas, Panchen Lamas, and translators are especially featured for their roles in Buddhist governance and bringing international Buddhist knowledge to court.

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40. blo bzang grags pa'i dpal. " 'jam mgon tsong kha pa chen pos gong ma ta ming rgyal por stsal ba'i chab shog." In the *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)* of the author (zhol edition). TBRC W635. Volume 2: 741-744. Delhi: Mongolian lama guru deva, 1978-1979.
41. The letter to the King of Ngari (mnga' ris) can be found in the anthology *Literature: Nuggets of Gold (rtsom rig gser gyi sbram bu)*. Ed. blo bzang chos grags and bsod nams rtse mo. Xining: Qinghai People's Press, 1988. Listed under the title "gu ge'i mnga' bdag khri nam mkha'i dbang po phun tshogs sde dpal bzang por phul ba'i yig lan," pp. 438-442.
42. dge legs dpal bzang. "rin spungs drung nor bzang la phul ba." In the *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)* of the author (zhol edition). TBRC W384. Volume 9: 777-779. Delhi: Mongolian lama guru deva, 1980-1982.
43. *Sa lo* likely refers to Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen (sa skya paN+Di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182-1251). Following appear to be references to translators Shong (shong lo tsA ba rdo rje rgyal mtshan, b. 13th c.), Pang (dpang lo tsA ba blo gros brtan pa, 1276-1342), and Butön Rinchen Drup (bu ston rin chen grup, 1290-1364).
44. ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (Fifth Dalai Lama). *rgya bod hor sog gi mchog dman bar pa rnams la 'phrin yig snyan ngag tu bkod pa rab snyan rgyud mang* (*The Melodious Lute: Letters Set in Ornate Verse to the High, Middling, and Low Ones in China, Tibet, Mongolia, and Monguor Lands)*. In the author's *Collected Works.* Lhasa: Zhol Printing House, 199?. TBRC work W1KG825. Volume 19, pp. 83-659.

Jamyang Zhepa's survey also emphasizes moments of new beginnings: when Songtsen Gampo and his foreign queens first introduced Buddhism in Tibet, when Kadam luminaries forged the foundations for the Geluk school, and when the Fifth Dalai Lama established the Ganden Government. Jamyang Zhepa had in mind a similar new beginning for Geluk Buddhism in Amdo, a beginning that would require the same epistolary diplomacy and joining of religion and politics that he saw in Tibet's religious past. Through this survey, Jamyang Zhepa articulates a vision in which official Buddhist letters secure royal patronage, invite foreign scholars, and conduct Buddhist governance. Letters are courtly products, operative at the most elite and authoritative level of governmental administration.

Jamyang Zhepa closes his survey with a summary of the Buddhist letter-writing tradition as he sees it, an art form that relays profound subject matter, presents its content in beautiful form that adheres to learned conventions, and elicits a response of pleasure in the reader:

> In sum, as for the official letters (*chab shog*) handed down to high and low, to all classes of gods and men, including the great servants of the Dharma, for the sake of both religious and secular life: their subject matter is as deep as the ocean, composed from the profundities of the sutras, tantras, and arts & sciences; in terms of their approach, content, and form, they excel all others with majesty like that of Mount Meru; and engaging the history of both religion and secular society, as well as synonymy, prosody, and various translations, they delight the minds and eyes of those who hear and read them, like the flourishing of a divine tree.[45]

By summarizing the survey with the term "official letters" (or "political letters," *chab shog*), Jamyang Zhepa makes clear that he is focused on formal and governmental letter-

45. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 5b.3-5. Tib. mdor na chos srid kyi ched du mka sdod chen po rnams tshun chad kyi lha dang mi'i rigs mtho dman ji snyed la gnang ba'i chab shog dag ni/ mdo sngags rig gnas kyi zab gnad las brtsams pa'i brjod bya rgya mtsho ltar zab cing/ sgo srog lus rnams gang las kyang khyad thon nas lhun po ltar brjid pa/ chos dang srid kyi lo rgyus dang mngon brjod sdeb sbyor dang/ skad shan sbyar sna tshogs 'brel ba lha'i rkang 'thung spel ba bzhin lta ba dang nyan pa po'i mig dang yid 'phrog par byed.

writing practices that effect diplomacy and forge international Buddhist relationships. In his vision of official Buddhist letter-writing culture, Jamyang Zhepa not only appeals to both religious and lay spheres of influence, but also unites the fields of religious and secular learning within a single vision, despite whatever misgivings about integrating ordained and lay spheres of knowledge may have been circulating at the Fifth Dalai Lama's court. Jamyang Zhepa asserts that the effective Buddhist letter writer should know the full array of arts and sciences as well as the religious treatises in order to cultivate a proper aesthetic sensibility that will convey Buddhist truths in the form and style worthy of their content. Pleasure in beauty is an expedient means for elevating the dharma to its rightful position of influence; pleasure is also the defining feature of the realm of the gods in the Indian Buddhist imagination, a realm in which earthly kings with their power and riches already seem to dwell.

Indian Epistolary Practice

The tradition of Buddhist letter writing in which Jamyang Zhepa imagines himself is one in which the Indian Buddhist heritage directly informs Tibetan official correspondence. The problem with this "invention of tradition" is that he notices discrepancies between Nāgārjuna's letters in the canon and Tibetan official letters in terms of how their lines of address are composed. Whereas an official Tibetan letter opens with a formal line of address to the recipient followed by the drop-down space, the "Letter to a Friend" omits both: Nāgārjuna refers to himself first and makes no indication of rank by way of a drop-down space.[46] In order to harmonize his epistolary Buddhism so that the tradition is internally consistent, Jamyang Zhepa explains that letters

46. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 6a.2-3.

constituting replies to religious questions or requests for spiritual advice need not conform to the rules of official letters, and that "anyone can know this by investigating the evidence."[47] Our analysis in Chapter One of the distinct epistolary styles of official letters and Buddhist advice letters agrees with Jamyang Zhepa's interpretation: Buddhist advice letters do often seem to eschew the characteristics of official or formal correspondence.

Jamyang Zhepa finds more formal models for Buddhist letters in the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* and other physical descriptions of letters from the scriptural canon. He summarizes the style of ancient Indian Buddhist letters as follows:

> In terms of medium, [the letters convey] auspicious words and reverence in ornate poetics (*snyan ngag chen po*) and the like; in terms of content, they express any of the four topics (religion, wealth, pleasure, and liberation); and in terms of form, [they are written in] prose, poetry, or a blend of the two. At the end [of a letter], a dedication [is offered], an address is inscribed, and it is made into a booklet (*glegs bam*)*:* instead of [being rolled into] a scroll, it is folded twice or thrice.[48]

This model, indebted to the influence of *kavya* poetic theory that post-dates the writings of Nāgārjuna, is the model for formal Buddhist correspondence Jamyang Zhepa prescribes in the manual.

As for Indian use of seals, Jamyang Zhepa recounts the narrative from the *Perfection of Wisdom* in which the bodhisattva Sadaprarudita asks,

> "Where is this *Perfection of Wisdom*, the mother and guide of the Bodhisattva?" Śakra answered: "The holy Bodhisattva Dharmodgata has placed it in the middle of this pointed tower, after he had written it on golden tablets with melted beryl, and sealed it with seven seals."[49]

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47. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 7a.4-5.
48. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 6a.3-5.
49. Adapted from Conze, Edward, Trans. *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary.* Section Five, "The Meeting with Dharmodgata." Accessed on April 7, 2015 at http://huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/resources/downloads/sutras/02Prajnaparamita/Astasahasrika.pdf.

Jamyang Zhepa never indicates that letters should be sealed seven times. Instead, he is content that an Indian Buddhist precedent for sealing letters exists. Jamyang Zhepa is interested in the precious materials from which seals can be manufactured, as well as the styling of seal images. From the stories of the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine,* he concludes that the use of signets and seals engraved with an individual's name is a practice only reserved for householders. From the *vinaya* literature and its commentaries, he relates that monks are permitted to seal (*rgya*) letters but not bind (*gdags*) them. The *vinaya* describes the proper monastic seal as falling into one of two types, either corporate or individual. A monastery seal displays the familiar image of a wheel flanked by two deer, which Jamyang Zhepa explains as representing the practice of the dharma (the wheel) and the value of impartiality (the symmetry of one deer on each side).[50] The name of the monastery's "owner" or main donor is engraved on the seal as well. This type of seal image can be seen in ninth- and tenth-century sealings from Nalanda Monastery held at the British Museum.[51] The seal of an individual monk, on the other hand, should bear the image of bones or a skull; Vogel excavated sealings of this type in India at Kasia (a possible location for Kushinagar where the Buddha passed into nirvana).[52] Jamyang Zhepa's faithful interpretation of the *vinaya*'s instructions on seals corresponds precisely with the Indian Buddhist archaeological record.

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50. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 8b.1 ff.
51. See museum number 1937,0414.4 accessed at http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=248374&partId=1&searchText=+Sealing+Nalanda&page=1 on April 7, 2015. Also see Schopen, Gregory. "Doing Business for the Lord," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* Volume 114 (1994): page 539 ff. Note 50.
52. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 8a.3-4.

Tibetan Epistolary Practice

In the second section of his manual, Jamyang Zhepa moves from historic models of letter writing in Buddhist India to contemporary Tibetan practices of sending, replying, and sealing. Luckily for Jamyang Zhepa, "For the most part [...], letters in the Holy Land of India were similar to those of today."[53] By analyzing the common features of the Buddhist letters at his disposal, he develops a standardized protocol that he presents as *the* Buddhist way to write letters. He is concerned here only with official and formal correspondence; he offers no instructions on writing informal letters of Buddhist advice or replies to questions or objections, despite the fact that he has identified distinct precedents for both official and advice letters in Buddhist India. His requestor, and his broader audience, are likely monastics and aristocrats who are closely engaged in politics and want Buddhist guidelines for how to conduct correspondence in the official sphere.

Jamyang Zhepa's epistolary protocol, like Pakpa's, is based on a clear understanding of the hierarchical relationship between sender and recipient, a concern central not only to Tibetan traditional society but also to Buddhist relationships among teachers and students. In an effort to apply Pakpa's formulary directly to his late seventeenth-century Tibetan context, however, Jamyang Zhepa realizes that neither "king" nor "yogi" is a suitable designation of rank for the Fifth Dalai Lama, who combines religious and worldly authority in a single office. This is evident from the fact that before quoting Pakpa's instructions about how kings, yogis, and military commanders should open their edicts, Jamyang Zhepa spends several lines describing the unique situation in Tibet in which "he who has become the lama of gods and men, in

53. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 6a.2.

terms of both religion and politics," has "mastered the full array of sutras and treatises of the Old and New Translations, and expounds all the wisdom of all the fields of knowledge."[54] The Great Fifth, Jamyang Zhepa relates, adorns his opening lines with large header-ornaments (*yig mgo,* depicted as ꡏ *)* with sweeping tails; he announces his title in fine letters but in grand poetic style, along with "by command of" or "by authority of."[55] A large drop-down space follows, and then he designates his recipient: "for example, sent *(springs pa)* to all great and small, high and low, established in this vast world."[56] His use of *springs* follows Pakpa's rules for how Tibetan kings open edicts. The regent Sangyé Gyatso, Jamyang Zhepa continues, also uses *springs* for his edicts.[57]

Only after these descriptions of the Dalai Lama's and regent's official letters does Jamyang Zhepa take up Pakpa's instructions for how "the wheel-turning monarchs of India, Mongolia, and Tibet" should open their edicts, with the verb "declare" (*bzlo ba).* Jamyang Zhepa has effectively created a new rank above the world's great monarchs: the Dalai Lama. For Jamyang Zhepa, the Ganden Government is a joining of religion and politics that surpasses all other forms of rule in the world. Although after the Fifth's death Jamyang Zhepa would break with the regent Sangyé Gyatso, the power of the new Ganden Government instilled in him a vision of Buddhist statecraft that extends well beyond the context of the Ganden administration. His manual adapts the epistolary behavior of a theocratic government to a Geluk monastic agenda for institutional growth.

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54. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 12b.6-13a.4.
55. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 13a.4.
56. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 13a.6.
57. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 13b.1.

The manual continues with instructions that letters exchanged among monastic sees, like the three Geluk seats, or among the Sakya hierarchs or among Buddhist translators, should use "send" (*springs),* just as the epistles in the canon do. Then, after a drop-down space, these letters can include "thusly to you" in order to accord with Pakpa's instructions that yogis should address their letters "thus" (*'di lta*). Commanders of ten thousands, thousands, hundreds, and the like can write the header ornament, large letters, their own names, then the drop-down space, then "sent" *(bskur ba).* All these instructions indicate a close reading and loyal application of Pakpa's formulary.

Someone of lower rank writing to a superior — a lama, religious teacher, lord, or parent — should write a very small header ornament, then the line of address in small and fine script with respectful praise in ornate *kavya* poetic style, followed by "before the feet of," or "before the precious feet of."[58] The writer should leave a dropdown space of about eight finger-widths after the address and then the prostration formula of "offered" (*zhu ba*), or "offered with great respect, with ten fingers and palms clasped." When naming the qualities of one's recipient, the writer can use an honorific punctuation marker (*che mgo,* depicted as ྅). The writer should then inquire after the superior's health and circumstances in lovely turns of phrase, making one's requests with sincere humility and not gushing incessantly about one's own situation.[59]

An accurate assessment of one's social standing relative to the addressee is critical to proper letter-writing etiquette. In the context of church-state relations, however, the determination of social rank is not always straightforward because secular leaders are

58. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 14a.3 ff.
59. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 15a.2.

judged by their pedigree and power, whereas men of the cloth should be esteemed for their learning and realization and not for their class background. In these cases, Jamyang Zhepa emphasizes erring on the side of humility, citing exhortations from the *Great Stages of the Path* by Tsongkhapa.[60] He also urges letter writers to make accommodations when their addressees lack Buddhist training. For example, in the case of a monk writing to his parents who are uneducated, Jamyang Zhepa gives an example of address that uses honorific language to praise their "glorious bodies" without need to refer to their level of learning.[61]

Jamyang Zhepa then moves to a lengthy discussion of seals. He cites Chinese records (*rgya nag gi yig tshang)* in his description of the several seals and titles given by Altan Khan to the third Dalai Lama.[62] Before the time of Tsongkhapa, he claims, Buddhists in Tibet were ignorant of even the basic *vinaya* rules about the three robes, so of course they failed to follow the *vinaya* prescriptions about monastic seals. After the reforms of Tsongkhapa, the *vinaya* seal guidelines were still not instituted in Tibet, although for different reasons: Jamyang Zhepa claims that engraving a monastery donor's name on a seal would cause jealousy among others, and also that for an individual monk's seal, the image of a skull and bones would further frighten people who already fear death.[63]

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60. blo bzang grags pa'i dpal. *lam rim chen mo*. In *gsung 'bum*, Labrang Monastery edition. TBRC W22273. Volume 13: 5-1026.
61. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 22b.6. Tib. pha ma yon tan med pa'i rigs can la/ sku gzi mdangs rgyas zhes sogs.
62. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folios 10a.6-10b.1.
63. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 10b.5 ff.

One of Jamyang Zhepa's bolder arguments is that monks do not break the *vinaya* prohibition against owning gold when they accept golden seals gifted to them by patrons, because lay people need the opportunity to practice the perfection of generosity. Here he cites the prohibition against rejecting gifts, even gifts of gold or silver, from Asanga's *Bodhisattva Stages*.[64] He refers to the seals and titles given by Qubilai Khan to Pakpa, and by Altan Khan to the Third Dalai Lama, in making a justification for gold seals as "unsurpassed expedient means" for the spread of the dharma.[65] This section of the manual highlights Tibetan lamas' relationships with Mongolian and Chinese rulers, recalling the alliance between Yuan dynasty emperors and Sakya Buddhist hierarchs during Pakpa's day in order to envision a similar alliance between the Qing dynasty and Geluk lamas.

Seals were important concerns during Jamyang Zhepa's time for several reasons. First, seals were often gifts from rulers, such as the Mongol and Manchu emperors mentioned above, that enabled their conferees to exercise authority using new titles. The gifting of titles and seals by the Qing to Tibetan lamas in Amdo has been well described by Nietupski as a semantically complex act in which the Qing asserted political authority over Tibetan Buddhist leaders, while the Tibetans considered such titles as tokens of prestige and patronage support that did not necessary imply a political acquiescence to the Qing.[66] With all its ambiguity and multivalence, the practice of conferring seals and titles was a widespread diplomatic practice in Tibetan, Mongolian, and Qing contexts.[67]

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64. This prohibition is found as rule six in the "Forty-five Misdemeanors to be Confessed and Rectified."
65. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 10b.3.
66. Nietupski, Paul. *Labrang Monastery.* Pages 115 ff.
67. The Dalai Lama's government also conferred titles and seals upon Mongolian nobles. This is shown by Ishihama Yumiko, "A Study of the Seals and Titles Conferred by the Dalai Lamas," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies,* ed. Ihara Shoren and

A second aspect of the importance of seals is their ability to verify the identity of the sender and thus the legitimacy of the words or orders contained in the letter. In Jamyang Zhepa's discussion earlier in the manual of Indian customs for formatting lines of address, one of the letters to which he refers as a model is actually a forged letter from a story in the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine*.[68] This letter was composed by Queen Suvarnamalā, wife of King Aśoka, while her husband was ill and she held temporary rule over the kingdom. Despite her moral failings, she was nonetheless an educated letter writer, for her formatting style was correct in Jamyang Zhepa's estimation. Interestingly, a forged letter was also at the heart of Güüshi Khan's invasion of Kham and central Tibet. In the 1637 meeting between Güüshi Khan and the Fifth Dalai Lama, the two discussed plans for Güüshi Khan to attack the kingdom of Beri in Kham. A forged letter attributed to the king of Beri, containing threats to invade Lhasa, was produced as justification for this military venture that resulted in the total obliteration of the Beri kingdom in 1639. From Beri, the Khan led his forces straight to Tsang and waged the final war that would win decisive victory for the Geluk school.[69] The dangerous distance between sender and recipient sometimes led to a kind of epistolary anxiety, and the seal was a useful tool for guaranteeing the authenticity of a message, both by identifying the sender and by showing the letter to have been unopened on the road.

Continuing with the instructions of the manual, Jamyang Zhepa advises that when dating one's letters, one should use the Mongolian calendric system to name the months

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Yamaguchi Zuiho (Narita: Naritasan Shinsoji, 1992), 501-514. Reference from Paul Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery,* page 115.

68. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, pages 6a.5-7a.2.

69. See entry "The Fifth Dalai Lama" on *Treasury of Lives* (www.treasuryoflives.org). Entry by Alexander Gardner, December 2009.

because this system was widely known throughout the Qing. The Mongolian calendar (*hor zla)* had been in use in China, Mongolia, and Amdo since the Yuan dynasty reign of Qubilai Khan and his national preceptor Pakpa. In addition to the Mongolian astrological system, Jamyang Zhepa draws from the *Immortal Treasury*[70] and the *Wheel of Time Tantra* to list various poetic ways of naming the months and phases of the moon. His concerns here are both conformity with international diplomatic correspondence and excellence in elite poetic expression to garner prestige. He moves to the poetic expression of place names, and then lists a wealth of beautiful *kavya* forms of address and salutation along with instructions about how to praise others well and what kinds of qualities deserve such praise.[71] Jamyang Zhepa's attention to the expression of time and place adds a cosmological dimension to his letter-writing theory; his manual places Geluk letter writers within a particular calendric system and a highly poeticized geography.

This section of the manual describing the proper expression of dates, places, and names also provides confirmation of an important historical note: that it was standard in official Tibetan letters to list the date and place of composition. The letters anthologized in the collected works of Tibetan Buddhist scholars have been edited for block print publication and in this process, historical markers such as names, dates, and places contained in the address and postscript have often been eliminated.[72] Thus, even though access to original letters from the seventeenth century is somewhat limited, from the manual we can reconstruct the standard presentation of official letters from the period.

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70. *Amarakośa*
71. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 13a.5.
72. A similar problem with textual transmission exists among Chinese letters, as Antje Richter has described at length in *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013.

The Soteriology of Elegant Language

After practical instructions about folding, sealing, and wrapping letters, we read Jamyang Zhepa's spiritual advice. This concluding section of his manual reads as a Buddhist humanities manifesto: he makes a theological argument for the importance of a well-rounded education, reminding his readers that the bodhisattva cannot achieve perfect enlightenment without studying the various fields of knowledge, and that the ten stages of the bodhisattva path are not absent from the ten arts and sciences.[73] He provides numerous quotations from scripture that expound the virtues of wisdom (*shes rab*), learning (*thos pa*), knowledge (*yon tan*), and the arts and sciences (*rig gnas),* particularly the language arts of grammar, prosody, poetics, and synonymy. A quotation from Tsongkhapa, the forefather of the Geluk school, reinforces the importance of literary attainments for Buddhist monks:

> Discernment that opens the narrow path of reasoning
> Practice that manifests as the scriptures' pith instructions
> And skill in composition, the hero of speech:
> These appear as three gems in this world.[74]

Lest he be accused of falling under the sway of mere words' vanity, Jamyang Zhepa insists that "if words that are composed for a good purpose are also very elegantly made, then the words and the meaning reflect each other's beauty: for example, when the moonlight strikes a palace or a white mountain, each makes the other more beautifully

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73. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 26b.4-5. A quotation from the *Sutra for Fully Repaying the Kindness of the Buddha,* (Tibetan *drin lan bsab ba'i mdo*). Tib. gal te byang chub sems dpa' rig pa'i dngos po lnga la ma bslab na ni/ nam du yang bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub tu thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes thob par mi nus so.
74. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 27a.6-7. Tib. rigs lam phra mo phyed pa'i rnam dpyod dang/ gzhung lugs gdams par shar ba'i nyams len dang/ tshig sbyor tshul la mkhas pa'i ngag gi dpa'/ sa steng 'di na rin chen rnam gsum snang. From Tsongkhapa's "Story of the Three Gems."

white."[75] Elegant language not only constitutes part of the scholar's path toward full omniscience and enlightenment, but it also beautifies the content of the teachings, an expedient means to draw its reader toward the dharma. In Buddhist terms, skill in poetics accomplishes the two-fold benefit of self and other.

In this defense of the soteriological value of ornate poetics, Jamyang Zhepa makes a passionate plea for letter writers to abandon provincialisms (*grong tshig,* literally "village words") that do not conform to the elite, international status of *kavya.* He recounts the *Mirror of Poetics'* comments on provincialisms, that "the words of cowherds and the like are but corrupted poetry."[76] He goes on to further compare provincial speech to the idle chatter of shepherds and to warn that a single vulgar word makes an entire book wretched. Jamyang Zhepa spares no insult: "Here in Tibet, writing compound words or local dialect words that do not accord with previous decrees indicates [that one is merely] a bull with large upper teeth."[77] In his eyes, the writings of a Buddhist scholar should be thoroughly distinct from the language of common herders, who constitute the bulk of Tibetan society. While his argument is undemocratic to say the least, the intense regionalism of the Tibetan Plateau described briefly above and the transnational status of *kavya,* not to mention the power of aesthetics for communicating the dharma and the precedent of a lineage of poets within his own Geluk school, all serve to reinforce

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75. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence,* folio 28b.4-5. Tib. don bzang la tshig sbyor yang shin tu legs par byas na tshig don gnyis phan tshun gcig gis gcig mdzes pas yid 'phrog pa'i dpe/ dkar pa'i ri'am khang bzang la zla 'od phog pas phan tshun chas cher dkar ba lta bur mdzes te.
76. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 29b.1-2. Tib. ba lang rdzi la sogs pa'i tshig snyan ngag la zur chag ces gnas.
77. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Presentation on Correspondence*, folio 29b.2-4. Tib. grong tshig blun po'i tha snyad khyu 'khrigs pas/ 'jig rten long gtam bris pa'i rnam pa mtshon/ sdeb legs tshig sbyor snyan ngag lus mdzes la/ rgyan mang mdangs kyis rnam par bkra na yang/ grong tshig gcig gis nyan ngag skal ngan byed/ rgyan mang na chung sna bcad ji bzhin no/ zhes gsungs pa ltar bod 'dir snga gyi bkas bcad dang mi mthun pa'i yul skad bris nas tshig sdud sogs byed khul byas yang ya so can gyi ba lang gi mtshon byed.

Jamyang Zhepa's perspective that the future flourishing of Buddhism in a multinational Qing context will require letter writers well versed in ornate poetics. *Kavya* is the cornerstone of Jamyang Zhepa's epistolary Buddhism.

The Legacy of Letter Writing at Labrang Monastery

Jamyang Zhepa's vision of the role of elegant language and letters in the spread of Buddhism bore fruit in Labrang Monastery's subsequent history. The second Jamyang Zhepa, Könchok Jikmé Wangpo, became heavily involved in correspondence with the Qing and with Mongol patrons; the fifty-nine folios of *kavya* letters preserved in his *Collected Works* include correspondence with Mongol kings and queens across Amdo, with Mongol lamas, and with Mongol lay officials in the Qing government.[78] The second Jamyang Zhepa also composed at least twelve ornate *kavya* letters to the third Changkya lama, Rölpé Dorjé, who resided at the Qing Court in Beijing and served as personal Buddhist chaplain to the Qianlong Emperor, a major patron of Tibetan Buddhism.

The epistolary compositions of other prominent Labrang lamas also attest to the ongoing importance of letters for patron-priest relations and the Buddhist mission in Amdo. The *Collected Works* of the third Gungtang lama Tenpé Drönmé include several works composed as responses to letters sent by the Queen Tshako Somang of Gyelrong.[79] Later Labrang luminaries Welmang Pandita and Alak Sha composed letter-writing formularies of their own, following in the tradition of Jamyang Zhepa's manual. Welmang Pandita even used letters in the Labrang archives to compose his *History of*

78. dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *Series of Letters in* Kavya: *The Song of the Intoxicated Bee ('phrin yig snyan ngag gi rim pa bung ba myos pa'i glu dbyangs)*. In the author's *Collected Works* (bla brang edition). TBRC W1KG9560. 10: 11-129. Delhi: Ngawang gelek demo, 1971.
79. This letters appear in the *Collected Works* of gung thang dkon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me. TBRC work W22112. Volume 5, pp. 409-416.

China, Tibet, Mongolia, and Monguor Lands.[80] As Labrang's history unfolded, more and more letters were included in the publication of its leading lamas' *Collected Works.* At Labrang, letters connected a Geluk network of priests and patrons over vast distances and were increasingly recognized as essential to the Buddhist missionary enterprise.

In terms of the first Jamyang Zhepa's own letters, original manuscripts do not appear to survive.[81] Only fourteen official letters were published in his *Collected Works* (this may have been because many of his letters were archived at Drepung Monastery and not available to his editors at Labrang). Stripped of their historical marginalia, most of the letters in Jamyang Zhepa's *Collected Works* were published for their poetic content, which has been highlighted in the names of these letter collections: *Letters in Ornate Poetry,* the title of Jamyang Zhepa's collection of official letters, is a common designation for *epistolaria*. One of these letters stems from the single most pivotal moment in Jamyang Zhepa's legacy: the founding of Labrang Monastery, which would become one of the largest and most powerful monasteries in Amdo and in greater Tibet.

A Letter to a Patron

We see Jamyang Zhepa's epistolary Buddhism in action in a letter to his patron, the benefactor of Labrang Monastery.[82] In this letter, we witness the contours of

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80. dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan. *rgya bod hor sog gi lo rgyus nyung ngur brjod pa byis pa 'jug pa'i bab stegs (A Briefly Uttered History of China, Tibet, Mongolia, and Hor: A Step for Children to Enter*). In the author's *Collected Works.* Woodblock edition published at Amchok (a mchog) Monastery. TBRC work W1KG1132. Volume 4 (pagination corrupt).

81. Access to manuscript archives at Labrang Monastery is, at present, totally restricted. Original materials from Labrang's founding may exist, and one hopes that in the future the archives will be opened.

82. Found in 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Cycles of Political Letters in Ornate Poetry (chab shog snyan dngags kyi skor).* In the author's *Collected Works.* TRBC work W21503. Volume 1, folios 6a.1-6b.3.

Jamyang Zhepa's letter-writing relationship with the Mongol king Erdeni Jinong[83] of the contemporary Sokdzong region in southern Amdo. Erdeni Jinong was the local ruler of what had become, by the time of Labrang's founding in 1709, a sizable population of Mongols in southern Amdo. The Qing government granted the Erdeni the title of *qinwang,* "imperial prince," in order to help manage their western frontier after the uprising led by a Khoshud Mongol named Lubsang Danzin in 1723.[84] Erdeni Jinong and his wife, the queen Namgyel Drölma, invited Jamyang Zhepa twice (in 1704 and in 1706) to establish a new Geluk monastery in Amdo following the Drepung tradition. They served as Labrang's chief patrons by donating wealth and land for the monastery's construction close to Jamyang Zhepa's birthplace in the Genkya region of southern Gansu.[85] In fact, it was the Queen herself who had sponsored Jamyang Zhepa's education in central Tibet and who played the role of patron-mother to several young lamas from the Labrang region.[86] These connections, formed in Jamyang Zhepa's youth in Amdo, were sustained over the decades by letters; later, the founding and administration of Labrang Monastery were made possible by because of Jamyang Zhepa's continued epistolary relationship with the Mongol rulers.

The salutation of the letter to Erdeni Jinong employs rich poetic language to praise the king by comparing him to the mighty god Indra of Indian Buddhist mythology,

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83. Also known as Chaghan Danzin or Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin, d. 1735. Roche, Gerald. "The Tibetanization of Henan's Mongols: An Ethnohistory of Resilience in the Grasslands of the Northeastern Tibetan Plateau." Unpublished paper, delivered at the XIII seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies on July 25, 2013 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

84. Roche, Gerald. "The Tibetanization of Henan's Mongols," page 1. Also see Sullivan, Brenton. "The Mother of All Monasteries." Ph.D. dissertation: University of Virginia, 2013. Page 321ff.

85. rgan gya. Located in Chinese *gan nan* 甘南, Tibetan *gan lho.*

86. See Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery,* Page 120. For example, Queen Namgyel Dolma also sponsored the sixth Labrang throne-holder Lozang Dondrup (blo bzang don grub, 1696-1756) and acted as his mother after he was orphaned.

as well as to the first Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo, who was credited with bringing Buddhism to Tibet and ruling justly according to both human and divine law:

> An entreaty, [offered] before the feet of the great Indra of this world, the Lord of Men who righteously protects this vast realm with the arm of virtue: may the mountain of your body, whose virtuous actions rise from the oceans of the two accumulations [of merit and wisdom], be stable and without the fluctuations of illness, and may you protect the laws of religion like Songtsen Gampo![87]

Expertly weaving together praise of Erdeni Jinong's virtues of merit and wisdom with an image of Mount Meru, the center of the Buddhist cosmos, Jamyang Zhepa symbolically places his patron at the center of the world while reminding him in no unclear terms that it's a *Buddhist* world. His appeals later in the letter to the Erdeni's "religious government" further enforce Jamyang Zhepa's rhetorical strategy of elevating the Geluk cause within the secular administration of this Mongol king and Qing representative.

As befits a letter from priest to patron, the text proceeds in less symbolic language to update his benefactor on the practical goings-on at Labrang Monastery: which rituals they are performing and how well the new monastery is integrating with the local community. The main entreaty presented in Jamyang Zhepa's letter is an appeal for more monks and more money for the newly founded Labrang Monastery. The letter refers several recent pieces of previous correspondence between the lama and his patron as well as messages conveyed by emissaries:

> My main entreaty: last year's epistle and this year's letter and orders have reached my ears, and I feel loyal pride toward the enlightened activities of the royal father and son who are perfected in wisdom and might, and toward their religious government.[88]

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87. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Cycles of Political Letters in Ornate Poetry (chab shog snyan dngags kyi skor)*, folios 6a.1 ff.
88. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *Cycles of Political Letters in Ornate Poetry (chab shog snyan dngags kyi skor)*, folios 6a.3 ff.

Thus, we know that written as well as oral messages maintained their relationship across distances. The letter is rich with material data: the mention of donations received and rituals performed in return, as well as a description of gifts enclosed with the current letter. In the monastic economy of Tibetan Buddhism, letters, gifts, and rituals circulated together, the lifeblood of the Qing-Geluk alliance. This letter illustrates the several aspects of a successful Tibetan patron-priest (*yon mchod*) relationship: affection, praise, and records of material and ritual exchanges.

A Letter to a Friend

The second letter that I offer as a case study is a letter that Jamyang Zhepa wrote to his friend and fellow Amdo lama, the second Changkya incarnation Lozang Chönden. In this remarkable letter, after relating his joy at having recently received a letter from Changkya, Jamyang Zhepa sets up an imaginary scene in which, just as he is thinking of a reply to send Changkya, a divine bird visits him. The body of the letter consists of an acrostic poem, the "Elegant Advice of a Dialogue with a Kalantaka Bird."[89] The form of the acrostic is one among many "ornaments of sound" as described in the *Mirror of Poetics,* the main source of Indian ornate poetic theory transmitted in Tibet. In addition to this letter's playful cycle through the letters of the Tibetan alphabet, a feat that at times requires Jamyang Zhepa to employ archaic terms or unusual syntax, the verses are consistently metered in nine-syllable lines. The form is highly constrictive, a fact to

89. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *bya ka lan ta ka'i dris lan legs par bshad pa.* In the author's *Collected Works.* Labrang Monastery block print edition, published 1997?. TBRC work W21503. Volume 1: 24-28.

which Jamyang Zhepa alludes in his epilogue where he writes that "A, B, C, affixing and prefixing and suffixing, leaving grammar aside, I merely arranged these words."

Within the framework of this acrostic, Jamyang Zhepa appeals to a different literary form: the "elegant advice" genre exhibited in the epistles in the Buddhist canon. This genre does not employ the heavily ornate language typical of *kavya,* even though it is presented within the acrostic framework recognized in *kavya* theory. Instead, the language is more folksy and direct, and its metaphors are easy to comprehend without a specialized lexicon of ornamental phrases. The letter appeals to Indian imagery in its naming of the bird (*kalantaka* is a Sanskrit loanword) and in its mention of the palmyra tree (Sanskrit *tāla)* and lotus, which are common images in Indian Buddhist scriptures but flora not indigenous to Tibet. The letter displays an erudite knowledge of several forms of poetic composition, as well as a familiarity with Indic imagery and the high culture associated with it.

As a self-conscious literary performance, constraining as his chosen form may have been, the letter is indicative of the extent to which literary skill in Tibet was displayed and developed through letters exchanged among scholars. Both Jamyang Zhepa and Changkya Lama had studied Indian poetics at Drepung Monastery near Lhasa, like other higher-ranking monastics of their time. Their choice to communicate in highly literary language was evidence of their elite educations as well as of their poetic sensibilities and desire to express their affection for each other in beautiful, uncommon language. In Jamyang Zhepa's closing, one almost hears a call for a literary contest: "If that bird flies your way too, and a conversation happens, please send those words to me as well." Traditional letter-writing etiquette in Tibet and China includes a request for a

reply, and in Jamyang Zhepa's request we read not only a request for a letter of news, but a request for a poetic work to echo his own.

Another of this poem's literary features is its bird interlocutor, which recalls Tibetan cultural associations with birds as bringers of omens, as mediators between the human and divine, and as speakers of a lovely but secret language unintelligible to humans. In another of Jamyang Zhepa's letters in his *Collected Works*, his epilogue asks that his letter be carried by a pegasus (*bya ma rta*), effectively merging the imagery of the Tibetan postal system and its horseback couriers with the imagery of the skies, where birds both have special access to the language of the gods and have the freedom in flight to carry letters quickly across long distances. In Chinese tradition as well, letter-couriers and letters themselves are often imagined as birds: usually swallows or wild geese.[90] The imaginative frame in which Jamyang Zhepa composes this letter to his friend and fellow lama illustrates a different kind of epistolary relationship than that he shared with his patron Erdeni Jinong, one that delights in the complexities of the written word and sees poetry as a secret language among a select few.

Replete with its marks of literary elitism, this letter is first and foremost a work of epistolary friendship and affection. Although Jamyang Zhepa uses honorific language to address the Changkya Lama, and in his autobiography refers to Changkya as his teacher,

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90. Richter, Antje. *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China.* Page 36. Interestingly, another animal commonly associated with letters and letter-delivery in the Chinese tradition is fish, usually carp. In Tibet, the word for "courier" or "messenger" is *pho nya*, which etymologically reduces to male-fish. This word does not appear to derive from an Indian translation because it appears in Tibetan materials as early as the first translation period: the Sanskrit word dūtā, which was translated as "pho nya" in the first imperial translation period, is etymologically related to birds as well as to female attendants or messengers. I am not equipped to offer a full linguistic history of these terms, but there is a compelling consistency in the Tibetan, Chinese, and Indian imaginations of the birds and fish associated with swift letter conveyance that deserves future study. Interestingly, this poem also includes reference to a fish, "glinting away" with speed before its message has been fully communicated.

the two lamas were only six years apart in age: Changkya was born in 1642 and Jamyang Zhepa in 1648. Thus the hierarchical distance between them due to age, though significant in Tibetan society even today, need not be read in contradistinction to the genuine intimacy that emerges from these pages. The distance of hierarchy can be mediated by friendship, just as friendships between equals can be marked by the use of honorific and humilific language for other and self respectively. Jamyang Zhepa begs the bird for "words of friendship" (*mdza ba'i gtam*) and "warm and heartfelt counsel" (*sha tsha'i snying gtam*), and repeats a refrain of longing (*'phrang ba*) once the bird has departed. Theirs is a romantic friendship, one of deep emotions, refined aesthetics, and the intimacy of a secret language and vision of a divine bird that only the two share. The romantic, literary aspect of monastic friendships is one not often emphasized, but the close connection between Jamyang Zhepa and Changkya Lama, which appears to have persisted throughout their lives, would have important consequences for the history of the Geluk in Amdo.

Epistolary Friendship and Institution Building in Amdo

Jamyang Zhepa's epistolary friendship with Changkya Lama, illustrated vividly in this letter of the dialogue with a kalantaka bird, directly served the institution building that Jamyang Zhepa would later undertake far from Drepung. In his early sixties, when the accomplished Jamyang Zhepa made his long journey back to Amdo to found Labrang Monastery, he made many stops along the way to greet patrons and believers, to give teachings, to be fêted by the local nobles, and to collect donations for his new monastery. These gifts and donations included gold and silver, religious implements, fine silks, pack

animals, horsemen to escort his party, the services of artisans to help with construction, and the oblation of monks to fill his new halls of study and meditation. Amassing the human and material capital required to establish Labrang Monastery was an enormous task. Another form of capital was also necessary for creating Tibet's next greatest Geluk institution: the symbolic legitimacy of blessings and initiations conferred by other respected lamas.

In Jamyang Zhepa 's biography, we read that one of the most important stops he made on his journey was Gönlung Monastery, the abbatial seat of his long-time friend Changkya Lama. The two friends had not spent much time together for some years. In 1683, Changkya had left Lhasa for Amdo to engage in a year of retreat and then make a circuit of several famous monasteries in the region. At the emperor's request, he then made two trips to Beijing: one stay in 1687, and a longer stay from 1693-1697. Between those trips he was appointed abbot of Gönlung. He returned to Lhasa for the enthronement of the Sixth Dalai Lama in 1697, and the following year returned to Beijing where he resided for the rest of his life, with the exception of one last trip to Amdo and Mongolia in 1710-1711. It was on this trip that he was reunited with Jamyang Zhepa at Gönlung Monastery. The two had not seen each other for thirteen years, and not lived together in Drepung for twenty-seven years. Their meeting in Amdo, with plans for Jamyang Zhepa 's newly conceived Labrang Monastery underway, must have been a happy occasion. From Jamyang Zhepa 's biography, we read of their meeting:

> An invitation envoy arrived from Gönlung; they offered a report. "We are from the villa of Changkya Rinpoché," they said, and [Jamyang Zhepa's] mind was extremely glad. "Since I need to greet my lama, of course I'll come."[91]

91. dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *mkhas shing grub pa'i dbang phyugs kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar skal bzang 'jugs ngogs (A Port for Entering Wondrous Fortune: The Life Story of the All-Knowing Jamyang Zhepa, the Almighty Who is Learned and Accomplished).*

> Then, on the day when [Jamyang Zhepa] arrived at Gönlung, a horseback welcome party and a procession of monks — a neatly arranged garland of saffron robes — led the way bearing incense, and he arrived at that holy place. He came into the presence of the great King of the Dharma, whose garlands of speech upon the heads of the various princes and accomplished practitioners bring them refreshment, the Changkya Lama Dorjé Chang Ngakwang Lozang Chönden Pel Zangpo, and had an audience. [The two lamas] expressed the kind of loving affection that comes from being reunited after a long time, and between them an abundance of great joy and conversation arose.[92]

The Tibetan words for loving affection (*mdza' gcugs*) and joy (*dgyes tshor*) used here imply not formal respect and politeness, but authentic friendship and happiness in meeting, the same language of friendship that we read in the "Dialogue with a Kalantaka Bird." Because of this friendship, maintained largely through the art of correspondence, Jamyang Zhepa sought Changkya's support in establishing a new monastery. During this meeting, Changkya gave Jamyang Zhepa many gifts and blessings and encouraged him in his founding of Labrang.[93]

Yet Changkya Lama also had work for Jamyang Zhepa to do on his behalf. Changkya requested several tantric initiations from Jamyang Zhepa and invited him, along with several other high-ranking lamas, to consecrate a new assembly hall for the Tantric College at Gönlung. This was a project conceived by none other than Jamyang Zhepa himself years before, when through letters, he had exhorted Changkya to found a

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Folios 106a.5-6. Tib. dgon lung nas gdan 'dren gyi bang chen pa 'byor te snyan gsan phul/ lcang skya rin po che pho brang nas phebs rgyu yin zhus pas thugs shin tu dgyes nas nga rang gi bla ma la mjal dgos pas yong chog gsungs nas zhal bzhes mdzad.

92. dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *mkhas shing grub pa'i dbang phyugs kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar skal bzang 'jugs ngogs (A Port for Entering Wondrous Fortune: The Life Story of the All-Knowing Jamyang Zhepa, the Almighty Who is Learned and Accomplished).* Folio 107a.3-5. Tib. de nas dgon lung du 'byor pa'i nyin chibs bsu dang/ ngur smrig 'dzin pa'i phreng ba tshar du dngar ba'i ser sbreng gis sngun bsus te dgon gnas der phyag phebs/ mkhas grub rgyal phran bye ba'i mgo bor gang gi bka' yi phreng ba ngal gso bhyid pa'i chos kyi rgyal po chen po lcang skya rdo rje 'chang ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan dpal bzan po'i zhal snga nas dang mjal 'phrad mdzad/ ring nas 'brel ba'i mdza' gcugs kyi snang ba mngon du gyur te/ phan tshun dgyes tshor chen po dang gsung gleng shin tu 'phel par gyur.

93. dkon mchog 'jigs med dbang po. *A Port for Entering Wondrous Fortune,* folios 107a.6-108a.3.

tantric college like the Lower Tantric College in Lhasa at his own flourishing center at Gönlung in Amdo.[94] By this time, Jamyang Zhepa had gained prestige and experience, and it was his knowledge and personal capital that facilitated the long-awaited establishment of Gönlung's Tantric College, which would be a large and influential institution in Amdo. Aside from the college's establishment, ritual consecration, and appointment of officers such as a head and cantor, in which Jamyang Zhepa was directly involved, Jamyang Zhepa also transmitted to the Tantric College a lineage of ritual monastic dance (*cham*) that spread to other Geluk institutions in Amdo as well.[95] Jamyang Zhepa's influence on the Tantric College at Gönlung was so strong that for years to come, the monks were even required to memorize the disciplinary sermon (*tshogs gtam*) composed by Jamyang Zhepa for the college's founding, according to the 1865 *Oceanic Annals*.[96] When we consider that Gönlung was not only a mega-monastery of its own, but also a mother monastery to about fifty branch monasteries and an affiliate to about twenty-five monasteries founded by Gönlung incarnate lamas, it is easy to envision the impact that a single partnership could have in the spread and development of Geluk institutional life in Amdo.[97]

Thus, an epistolary relationship between two young lamas far from home grew into a foundational institutional partnership between Gönlung Monastery and Labrang Monastery. The next generation of Jamyang Zhepa and Changkya reincarnations inherited these ties of friendship: the second Jamyang Zhepa Könchok Jikmé Wangpo was ordained at Gönlung as a youth and served as abbot of Gönlung for two years before

94. Sullivan, Brenton. "Mother of All Monasteries," pp. 124-125. He refers to Shes rab dar rgyas, *Rje ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan (Biography of Changkya),* folios 76b.5-77b.3.
95. Sullivan, Brenton. "Mother of All Monasteries," pp. 125-126.
96. Sullivan, Brenton. "Mother of All Monasteries," page 229.
97. Sullivan, Brenton. "Mother of All Monasteries." See page 37 for an explanation of the difference between a branch monastery and a monastery affiliated with the villa of a reincarnate lama.

commencing further institution building at his main seat, Labrang Monastery. He considered the third Changkya Rölpé Dorjé as his primary teacher and maintained active correspondence with him throughout his life. Könchok Jikmé Wangpo even composed a series of lineage biographies of the Changkya incarnations,[98] a commentary on a *Stages of the Path* treatise by the second Changkya,[99] a commentary on a rain-making ritual composed by the second Changkya,[100] and a commentary on a poetic work by the third Changkya.[101]

The two institutions of Labrang and Gönlung traded abbots back and forth and educated each other's reincarnate lamas for short-term periods of study. Gönlung would gradually decline and Labrang would grow to become the largest and most powerful monastic institution in Amdo. Yet before the sun had set on Gönlung, an extraordinary scholar named Sumpa Khenpo Yeshé Penjor would follow Jamyang Zhepa's example and compose a letter-writing manual of his own to serve the growth of the Geluk north of the Yellow River among a different branch of powerful Mongolian patrons. The following chapter investigates the historical circumstances surrounding Sumpa Khenpo's composition of another letter-writing treatise, one that drew upon but sought to outshine the manual composed by Jamyang Zhepa. I will examine the "epistolary Buddhism" that Sumpa Khenpo articulates anew in his voluminous manual, as well as the impact and influence of his letter-writing networks at Gönlung and beyond. Sumpa's manual represents the second generation of letter writing in the early modern growth of the Geluk

98. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Published at Labrang Monastery (bla brang bkra shis 'khyil), 1999. TBRC work W2122. Volume 2: 325-566.
99. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Published at Labrang Monastery (bla brang bkra shis 'khyil), 1999. TBRC work W2122. Volume 8: 255-300.
100. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Published at Labrang Monastery (bla brang bkra shis 'khyil), 1999. TBRC work W2122. Volume 9: 815-834.
101. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Published at Labrang Monastery (bla brang bkra shis 'khyil), 1999. TBRC work W2122. Volume 7: 591-612.

school and the expansion of a Geluk epistolary network as Sumpa Khenpo and his scholastic peers used the medium of letters to forge political relationships and to debate questions of astronomy, medicine, ritual, and Buddhist doctrine.

Chapter Three:

Buddhist Networks and Sumpa Khenpo's Manual

Sumpa Khenpo (sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal ‘byor, 1704-1788), the next author of a theoretical treatise on Buddhist letters, represents a subsequent generation of Geluk development in Amdo. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Geluk had won over many of the regional Mongol kings of Amdo as well as major principalities in Khalkha Mongolia, so that Geluk Buddhism now was a multi-ethnic religion encompassing Tibetan and Mongolic peoples, as well as enjoying fuller patronage of the Manchu emperors of Qing China. This chapter will highlight the theme of network formation in Sumpa Khenpo’s epistolary compositions as the Geluk school's Qing and Mongolian outreach rapidly expanded. We will first examine Sumpa Khenpo's life and historical context, then move to the letter-writing manual and letters he composed to identify his contributions to the development of Geluk epistolary networks in his day. In particular, we will focus on Sumpa Khenpo’s political network and on his Buddhist intellectual community, both made possible through letters.

Sumpa Khenpo’s Life, Times, and Networks

Qing Power in Eighteenth-Century Amdo

The Qing dynasty was established by Manchu warriors from the northeastern outskirts of China in 1644. As a house of foreign rulers, the Qing adopted a dual ideology to cement its authority and secure its “mandate of heaven” over China. First, it espoused

Neo-Confucian values in order to demonstrate its moral continuity with the previous ruling houses of China, for the sake of the Han majority; second, the Qing patronized Tibetan Buddhism in order to relate to the border peoples — Tibetans, Mongolians, Monguors,[1] and several smaller ethnic groups in China's southwest — whose territory it planned to incorporate into the new empire. Qing patronage of Geluk Buddhism was on the rise during Sumpa Khenpo's lifetime.

The Emperors Kangxi (ruled 1661-1722) and Qianlong (ruled 1735-1796), the long-reigning monarchs of a High Qing period of economic and cultural vitality in China proper, were the most dedicated patrons of Buddhism among the Qing rulers. They supplied money and materials to monasteries in Amdo, supported a large number of Tibetan lamas and ritual activity at court, sponsored the publication of Buddhist texts in Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu languages, and maintained personal chaplains from among the multi-lingual Geluk lamas of Amdo. Along with patronage, however, comes a vested interest in control; not unlike other administrations in China's long history, the Qing government was just as concerned with supervising and containing Buddhism as it was with courting its allegiance and securing its ritual protection. Qing influence in Amdo grew both directly through the involvement of Kangxi and Qianlong in Tibetan Buddhist institutions and also indirectly through the Qing entitlement of Mongolian nobles in southern Mongolia and Amdo. As the Qing continued to appoint Mongol royals as imperial officials, granting them titles and seals, the Mongols came to represent an extension of the Qing bureaucracy and Qing authority structures on Amdo's soil. When I

1. The Monguors are a distinct culture group of Mongoloid descent known in contemporary China as the *tu zu* (土族). See Schram, Louis. *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier.* Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1954.

speak of the "Qing" as an agent in history, I refer to the Mongol officials across Amdo who represented Qing authority (albeit in inconsistent and multivalent ways) just as much as the center of Qing power in Beijing.

Gönlung Monastery in northern Amdo was an imperially sponsored monastery. Gönlung was the monastic seat of Sumpa Khenpo as well as four other influential incarnation lines: the Changkya (*lcang skya*), Tukwan (*thu'u bkwan*), Wang (*wang*), and Chuzang (*chu bzang*). The Third Changkya incarnation, Rölpé Dorjé, served as Emperor Qianlong's personal chaplain and spent most of his life at court in Beijing while maintaining strong ties to Gönlung. The monastery had been founded in 1604 north of the Yellow River in present-day Huzhu County in Qinghai Province, in a Monguor farming valley and near a devoutly Buddhist Yugur (or Yellow Uighur) population.[2] Adding those groups to the Tibetan and Mongolian oblates and patrons of the monastery, Gönlung had a remarkably multiethnic identity even from its origins. Regent Sangyé Gyatso, in his 1698 history of Geluk monasteries called *The Yellow Beryl*, lists Gönlung Monastery as the largest monastery in Amdo at the time and the fourth-largest in all of Tibet with 1500 monks.[3] Gönlung's scholastic curriculum and vibrant ritual life, not to mention its imperial affiliation, placed it among the foremost of Geluk monasteries on the Tibetan Plateau.

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2. Unlike their relatives the Uighurs of Xinjiang (Chinese *wei wu er,* 维吾尔), who adopted Islam, the Yellow Uighurs or Yugurs (Chinese *yu gu zu,* 裕固族) of Gansu province adopted Tibetan Buddhism. Sullivan points out a reference to the Yugurs' generous patronage of Gönlung Monastery in Sumpa Khenpo's autobiography. Sullivan, Brenton. "The Mother of All Monasteries." Ph.D. dissertation: University of Virginia, 2013. Page 88.
3. Sullivan, Brenton. "The Mother of All Monasteries," page 9.

Sumpa Khenpo's Background and Education

Sumpa Khenpo was born in 1704 on the banks of the Yellow River, in the predominantly Mongolian region of Kokonor in southwest Amdo. According to his autobiography, his parents were an Oirat Mongol father who knew the Tibetan language and was a devoted chanter of Buddhist prayers, and a Zünghar Mongolian mother who was kind to all and "an expert in the ways of the world."[4] Thus, even in Sumpa Khenpo's description of his parentage, he sees both religious and worldly systems as essential to his identity. His Mongol heritage linked him ethnically and linguistically to the Mongolian nobility who ruled over many areas of Amdo and whose governing authority was sanctioned by titles and seals conferred by the Qing. The Mongol royal family of Kökenuur, descendants of Güüshi Khan, were Sumpa's chief patrons, and it was for them that he composed his famous work of regional history, *The Annals of Kökenuur.*[5] Sumpa's identity as a Mongol within the Tibetan Buddhist institutional system would enable him to act as an intermediary among Mongolian, Tibetan, and Manchu power centers and knit together diverse stakeholders under the banner of Geluk Buddhism.

Jamyang Zhepa himself, whom we now know well, recognized the young boy as the reincarnate lama of the Sumpa lineage. The young Sumpa thus inherited a sizeable monastic estate along with the income generated from the cultivation of its lands. His common appellation "Sumpa Khenpo" is his reincarnation lineage title along with the

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4. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *paN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len (Expressing the Conduct of the Supreme Pandita Sumpa Yeshé Penjor: Alchemy for the Ear*). In volume 8 (nya) of the author's *Collected Works.* Pp. 373-960. TBRC W25006. Beijing: Tibetan Civilization Publishing House of China (krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang), 2001. Page 389.3-4.
5. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus sogs bkod pa'i tshangs glu gsar snyan (The Annals of Kökenuur: A New Melodious Song of Brahma).* In volume 2 (kha) of the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum).* TBRC work W29227. Pp. 975-1012. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975.

Tibetan title for abbot, "khenpo" (*mkhan po*).[6] He received ordination in 1710 and was escorted to Gönlung Monastery to reside at the villa of the Sumpa Estate. His education at Gönlung would have been among the best in Amdo — Gönlung was at its peak in terms of size and influence, and its authority as a scholastic center anchored it as a "mother monastery" for some fifty branch monasteries. Still, as was customary, Sumpa strongly desired to travel to central Tibet to continue his Geluk education. He did not gain the opportunity to do so until a wave of violence washed over Kökenuur and compelled him to flee.

The defining historical event of Sumpa Khenpo's life took place in 1723, when an uprising against the Qing in Amdo, led by a Mongol named Lubsang Danzin and the monks at Serkhok Monastery near Gönlung, swelled out of control. The uprising met with swift retribution from Qing forces as thousands of people, both lay and ordained, were massacred and several monasteries were razed to the ground. Sumpa Khenpo's own Gönlung Monastery was destroyed by the Qing army in an aggressive effort to ferret out political dissent among the ranks of the religious.[7] Following this period of destruction,

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6. It appears that there were, in fact, two Sumpa incarnation lines. The first Sumpa lama (dam chos rgya mtsho) had served two terms as abbot of Gönlung in the early years of its founding (the early 1600s); his later reincarnation was Gönlung's twenty-seventh abbot, Sumpa Puntsok Namgyel (sum pa phun tshogs rnam rgyal). Sumpa Khenpo refers to him as Sumpa Chöjé. Pütsok Namgyel may be a later rebirth of the first abbot, Sumpa Damchö Gyatso, aka Sumpa Chöjé. The more illustrious Sumpa Khenpo is a later rebirth of the first abbot's younger brother, Sumpa the Younger, Damchö Gyeltsen. Thus, this latter lineage is better documented. See Sum-pa Mkhan-po Ye-śes-dpal-'byor. *The Chronology of Tibet according to the Re'u-Mig of Sum-Pa Mkhan-Po*. Patna: Bihar Research Society, 1991. Page 108. Then there was the younger brother of the first Sumpa, called "Sumpa the Younger" (sum pa slob dpon pa chung ba dam chos rgyal mtshan), who served as Gönlung's seventh abbot. Sullivan notes that "He is referred to by the title of "Khalitsawa" (kha li tsha ba) in the *Yellow Beryl* (sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Dga' ldan chos 'byung baiDUrya ser po* , 340). See Sullivan, "Mother of All Monasteries," Tables of Gönlung Abbatial Succession on page 392. While I have not researched the extent of the Sumpa estate during Sumpa Khenpo's time, now it includes seven branch monasteries under its jurisdiction.

7. The Qing had been suspicious of religious holdouts of dissent for some time, as evidenced by a 1711 edict against the establishment and proliferation of new monasteries.

the Qianlong Emperor in Beijing and the Panchen Lama in Tsang[8] both made efforts to rebuild monasteries and restore imperial order in Amdo. After the rebuilding, Gönlung Monastery was directly supported by the imperial court and displayed a Chinese name plaque of *Youning Si,* meaning "Temple for Protecting the Peace," representing the Qing government's determination to pacify and control the Buddhist monasteries of its borderlands even as it supported them materially.[9]

This historical moment of dramatic destruction and restoration marked the beginning of Sumpa Khenpo's scholarly and administrative career and affected him deeply; his letter-writing life reveals his zeal for healing the fractures in his religion and his homeland. By expanding and deepening networks among Tibetan, Mongol, and Qing Buddhists, he would spend his life seeking to safeguard Geluk Buddhism from the kind of destruction he had witnessed as a young man.

While northern Amdo was in chaos, Sumpa Khenpo matriculated in Drepung Gomang College in central Tibet and completed the exoteric curriculum there. His esoteric studies at the Lower Tantric College were delayed because, of all things, his cook took ill.[10] That delay provided him the occasion to travel throughout central Tibet, studying with various teachers and earning the epithet *pandita*, a title for one who has mastered the five major arts and sciences. According to his autobiography, it was during this time of itinerant study that he gained expertise in the Sanskrit language arts, the astrological sciences, and ritual arts of tangka and stupa craftsmanship. He also had an audience at Tashi Lhünpo Monastery in Tsang with the Panchen Lama, who granted him

8. pan chen blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes, 1663-1737.
9. Chinese 佑宁寺.
10. See Sullivan, "Mother of All Monasteries," page 355. He quotes from the autobiography: sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor, *PaN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len*, page 267. The following account of Sumpa Khenpo's denial of this initial request to serve as abbot derives from pp. 267-70.

full ordination and a dharma name: Yeshé Penjor, meaning "Rich in Primordial Wisdom." As tradition tells it, Sumpa Khenpo maintained a special connection to the Panchen Lama for much of his life. As early as age three, he is said to have memorized a prayer to the Panchen Lama;[11] later, he would exchange letters with the Panchen Lama, as we shall examine in closer detail below. His relationship with the Panchen Lama, and his lack of an abiding connection to the seventh Dalai Lama, whom he also met while in central Tibet, situates him alongside Jamyang Zhepa in a pro-Qing contingent of Geluk Buddhists.

In 1731, having finished his study tour in central Tibet, Sumpa Khenpo returned to Amdo and to a Gönlung Monastery in the full sway of rebuilding its physical structures and its scholastic reputation. Sumpa Khenpo's ensuing scholarly and administrative career anchored him to Amdo but took him on long journeys to southern Mongolia, to the Chinese Buddhist pilgrimage site of Wutai Shan, and twice to the Qing court at the Qianlong Emperor's invitation. In 1746, he was enthroned as the abbot of Gönlung Monastery. He served a first term as abbot from 1746-49, a second term from 1756-61, and a final term from 1781-85.[12] He passed away in 1788.

His Scholarly Works

Sumpa Khenpo's rich and productive life as a Buddhist scholar is evident from a brief overview of the range of works he produced. His *Collected Works,* edited and printed at Gönlung sometime after his passing, run nine volumes long at three hundred to

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11. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *paN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len (Expressing the Conduct of the Supreme Pandita Sumpa Yeshé Penjor: Alchemy for the Ear*). In volume 8 (nya) of the author's *Collected Works.* Pp. 373-960. TBRC W25006. Beijing: Tibetan Civilization Publishing House of China (krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang), 2001. Page 391.7.
12. Sullivan, Brenton. "Mother of All Monasteries," Appendix I: Gönlung Abbots, page 391 ff.

six hundred folios per volume.[13] Sumpa Khenpo was a keen scientific mind; in addition to the expected corpus of writings on Buddhist epistemology, meditation, and ritual, he published treatises on Tibetan medicine, hippology, geomancy, divination, and the astrological sciences. Sumpa developed calendric tables for a self-proclaimed "new astrology," aiming to rectify the calendar in the Geluk liturgical cycle based on new calculations of celestial events.[14] He wrote several historical and geographical works, including *The Wish-Fulfilling Tree: A History of the Faith in the Holy Land (India), Greater China, Tibet, and Mongolia*[15] as well as *Wondrous Speech: A General Explanation of the World.*[16] He was, finally, an artist in the broadest sense; he was a talented *tangka* painter and composed texts on the craftsmanship of Buddhist ritual objects, as well as on grammar, poetics, oratory, and letter writing.

Sumpa Khenpo's *Collected Works* include several distinct epistolary works. His voluminous letter-writing manual, at seventy-one folios, comprises the largest known Tibetan letter-writing manual composed prior to the twentieth century. Additionally, there are two letter collections within Sumpa Khenpo's corpus: one of official correspondence, *The Melodious Lute,*[17] and one of replies-to-questions correspondence

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13. The edition I use appears to be the only extant edition. Unfortunately, the print is of poor quality in many places. A modern edition based on the Gönlung print was published in Beijing in 2001, but the editors appear to merely skip difficult or unclear passages.
14. For an in-depth work on the astrological works of Sumpa Khenpo, see the forthcoming dissertation by Sokhyo Jo, Harvard University.
15. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *'phags yul rgya nag chen po bod dang sog yul du dam pa'i chos byung tshul dpag bsam ljon bzang (The Wish-Fulfilling Tree: A History of the Faith in the Holy Land (India), Greater China, Tibet, and Mongolia)*. In volume 1 (ka) of the *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. TBRC work W29227. Pp. 3-640. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975.
16. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *'dzam gling spyi bshad ngo mtshar gtam snyan* (*Wondrous Sweet Speech: A General Explanation of the World)*. In volume 2 (kha) of the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. TBRC work W29227. Pp. 947-974. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975.
17. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *The Melodious Lute: Official Correspondence Sent to Several Lamas and Ministers (bla dpon 'ga' zhig la bskur ba'i chab shog gtam snyan pi wang*). In volume 7 (ja) of the *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. TBRC work W29227. Volume 7, pp. 959-1000. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975.

with monastic colleagues and students, *The Glittering White Venus*.[18] The replies-to-question compilation is the longer of the two collections at over one hundred folios and includes some lengthy examples: one letter alone is twenty-six folios long and divided into twenty-two discrete questions. Sumpa Khenpo's bibliographical record indicates that his epistolary life was quite substantial and included engagement in both political affairs and Buddhist intellectual discourse.

His Epistolary Life

Sumpa Khenpo was keenly aware that letters played a pivotal role in the rebuilding of Gönlung and the other damaged monasteries in Amdo in the early eighteenth century. Sumpa Khenpo writes in his autobiography that

> The Precious Panchen Lama Lozang Yeshé, a further emanation of the limitless manifestations of the Buddha, commissioned an envoy of sublime gifts and a letter about the need to newly restore Gönlung and the others, since they are the great foundations for the Teaching in Amdo […]. When [the envoy] arrived in Beijing, Changkya Lama summoned his courage and approached the thrones of other lamas, and together they offered the letter [to the Yongzheng Emperor...]. Later, monks who had come from Amdo said that a Golden Letter (*gser yig)* had come down twice [from the emperor] pronouncing, "The monasteries that were destroyed are to be restored."[19]

Through letters, and especially through the official authority that letters embody, the Panchen Lama and the Yongzheng Emperor made their petitions and commands, respectively, for the restoration of Gönlung Monastery and for a future for Geluk

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18. sum pa mkhan po, *Glittering White Venus: A Recorded Collection of Replies to Several Questions on Points of Doubt in the Texts of the Religious and Secular Fields of Knowledge* (nang don tha snyad rig gnas kyi gzhung gi ngogs gnas 'ga' zhig dris pa'i lan phyogs gcig tu bris pa rab dkar pa sangs). In volume 4 (nya) of the author's *Collected Works*.

19. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *paN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len (Expressing the Conduct of the Supreme Pandita Sumpa Yeshé Penjor: Alchemy for the Ear)*. In volume 8 (nya) of the author's *Collected Works*. Pp. 373-960. TBRC W25006. Beijing: Tibetan Civilization Publishing House of China (krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang), 2001. Page 484.1 ff.

Buddhism in northern Amdo. This moment in Sumpa Khenpo's autobiographical memory exemplifies the power of letters to heal and restore.

Sumpa's career as abbot was also shaped importantly by two letters. The first was a recommendation for his appointment sent from Beijing by the second Tukwan Lama in 1746; this letter came in spite of the fact that, as we read above, Sumpa had never had the opportunity to study at the Lower Tantric College in Lhasa as he had hoped.[20] This gap in his studies was a serious strike against Sumpa Khenpo as candidate for the Gönlung abbacy, but Tukwan's letter tipped the scales in his favor. A second letter that shaped the tenure of Sumpa Khenpo's first term as abbot was a letter from the third Changkya lama Rölpé Dorjé. Changkya sent Sumpa a letter arguing that it was "insufficient for Gönlung Monastery to only offer the study of philosophy," but that a full curriculum of the arts and sciences was important and should be established at the monastery.[21] Sumpa Khenpo agreed, and instigated the study of Sanskrit and Tibetan grammar, poetics, astrology, and medicine at Gönlung. Just as Jamyang Zhepa's manual advocated the importance of the "common" or secular fields of learning for effective Buddhist leadership, Sumpa Khenpo integrated both religious and secular studies within the curriculum at Gönlung, all in the service of Geluk Buddhism's growth.

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20. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *paN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len (Expressing the Conduct of the Supreme Pandita Sumpa Yeshé Penjor: Alchemy for the Ear)*. In volume 8 (nya) of the author's *Collected Works*. Pp. 373-960. TBRC W25006. Beijing: Tibetan Civilization Publishing House of China (krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang), 2001. Page 574.6. Unfortunately, I have found no full-text record of that letter.

21. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *paN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len (Expressing the Conduct of the Supreme Pandita Sumpa Yeshé Penjor: Alchemy for the Ear)*. In volume 8 (nya) of the author's *Collected Works*. Pp. 373-960. TBRC W25006. Beijing: Tibetan Civilization Publishing House of China (krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang), 2001. Page 582.4-5.

The Manual

Sumpa Khenpo composed his epistolary magnum opus, his *Opening the Door to a Feast for Young Minds: A Presentation on Correspondence, Etc.*,[22] in the water sheep year (1763-64) at Gönlung Monastery. His scribe for the text was a novice monk of the Ordos Mongol tribe. The colophon to the text states, with a bit of false modesty, that he composed the lengthy seventy-folio text "haphazardly." Sumpa Khenpo identifies two individuals who requested that he produce this manual: one holding the Tibetan title of Zhabdrung,[23] which can refer to an ordained or lay government servant; and the second, a Mongolian entitled Biligtu Chöjé whom Sumpa Khenpo also calls "Chief."[24] The opening of his manual introduces the work broadly as one that "makes a brief beginning presentation on correspondence *desiderata* for young minds wielding the pen,"[25] with no direct reference to the monastic context. From the identity of the manual's requestors and from the presentation of the manual's contents, then, it appears that Sumpa Khenpo expects the manual to be useful primarily for non-monastics in the Geluk Buddhist network, and among them members of the noble Mongol families of Amdo.

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22. sum pa mkhan po. *Opening the Door to a Feast for Young Minds: A Presentation on Correspondence, Etc.* (*Yig skur sogs kyi rnam bzhag blo gsar dga' ston sgo 'byed*). In the *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)* of ye shes dpal 'byor. TBRC work W29227. Volume 7: 819-958. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975.
23. dpyod ldan bzang skor zhabs drung dpal ldan 'od zer.
24. Tibetan *pi lig thu chos rje blo bzang dge legs.* The word *dpon po* is almost indistinguishable in this print edition from the word *dbon po*, which means nephew or grandson. While it is indeed possible that Sumpa had patrons and students among his relatives, and that a nephew requested the manual, the usage of the same term in the colophon reads like a title of a superior rather than a younger relative's designation.
25. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door to a Feast for Young Minds.* See page 818.2-3.

OUTLINE OF SUMPA KHENPO'S MANUAL

I. The Manual Proper
  1. The Necessity [for letters] (folio 1b.3)
  2. The Origins [of letters] (1b.6)
  3. The Faults and Merits [of letters] (3b.7)
  4. How to Write Letters (4b.4)
  — (4.1) How to create appropriate metaphors (4b.4)
  — (4.2) How to send the letters (7b.5)
    4.2.a. How superiors confer edicts (*bka' shog)* (7b.5)
    4.2.b. How those of middling rank send messages (*'phrin yig)* to each other (9b.3)
    4.2.c. How inferiors submit petitions (*zhu yig*) to superiors whose knowledge or training or clan is much higher than their own, as well as to their lamas and parents (19b.6)
  5. The Fruits of Letter Writing[26]
II. Ancillary *Desiderata* (55a.4-69a.6)

Letters as Refreshing Rains

Sumpa opens his section on the "Necessity for Letters" with a lovely apologetic for the value of correspondence, which he extracts from a verse about the epistolary friendship of King Udrāyana and King Bimbisara in the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine.*[27] As an extended commentary on the verse, Sumpa writes:

> For scholars and authorities, lamas and students, kings and ministers, friends and family, high-ranking, middling, and low — for any of like mind, between whom the distance is great — letters along with gifts are the means to join them as if they were very near. It is how, for example, the sun and moon and rainclouds, even from far away, are connected to the lotus garden and *kumuda* flowers and orchards by means of their sunbeams and moonbeams and rain showers, and in so doing, they create benefit.[28]

26. This short section appears to fall within a span of corrupted print in the only edition to which I have access. Thus, I am unable to address it here.
27. The verse from the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* reads "Although they lived far apart, it was just how the sun is the source of the lotus." sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door*, page 818 or folio 1b.3-4.
28. Tib. mkhas dbang bla slob rgyal blon mdza' bshes bar ma sogs che phra yid mthun pa phan tshun yul gyis bskal ba tshungs chad kyang shin tu nye bar ltar 'brel byed ni spring yig skyes bzang dang bcas pa yin te/ dper na nyi ma pad+ma'i tshal dang zla ba ku mu da dang char sprin rtsi shing lo tog dang rgyang ring

I draw your attention to the organic metaphor, especially its element of rain, and to its emphasis on benefit and flourishing. Sumpa Khenpo was known as a talented rain-maker; it is illuminating to read his explanation of the necessity of correspondence, compared to the benefit of rain, in light of the most famous story of his rain-making. His autobiography reminisces,

> While I was traveling on the road with my retinue, we arrived at Tashi Chöling, and all the monks and monastic serfs there said, "We need rain urgently," for there had been a great drought that year, and everyone — clergy and laity, Tibetans and Mongols and Chinese — had all employed their various systems for bringing rain; and yet it hadn't rained. So immediately, at a spring, I laid out medicinal preparations [for a *torma* ritual] and rain-making substances, and recited a rain-making ritual to my secretary Ngakwang Tenzin, and after only a single cycle of chanting, a fierce rain drove in, and for the following three days and nights a gentle rain fell, and so an abundant harvest occurred that year. […] And making rain fall on China, Tibet, and Mongolia, the three regions alike, wherever I went, […] it was said in every direction, "Sumpa Khenpo is good at rain-making," and it was said that wherever I arrived, the rains came.[29]

For Sumpa Khenpo, rain manifested well-being and unity across Tibet, Mongolia, and China without distinction. This is the same language he uses to speak about letters: they join together what is fractured by distance, and they bring benefit and new life, like sun upon the garden and showers upon the harvest. In Sumpa Khenpo's mind, "most endeavors of mutual benefit across long distances are accomplished by means of sending letters."[30] I present this as Sumpa's overarching view on letters as instruments for uniting

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yang rim par tsha zer bsil zer char rgyun gyis 'brel bar byas shing phan par byed pa dang mtshung pa'o. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door*, folio 1b.4 ff.

29. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *paN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len (Expressing the Conduct of the Supreme Pandita Sumpa Yeshé Penjor: Alchemy for the Ear)*. In volume 8 (nya) of the author's Collected Works. Pp. 373-960. TBRC W25006. Beijing: Tibetan Civilization Publishing House of China (krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang), 2001. Page 519.7-520.4.

30. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door,* page 820.5. Tib. yul 'grang yod phan tshun gyi don phal cher yi ge bskur ba la brten nas bsgrub pa.

China, Tibet, and Mongolia and securing health and life and flourishing for the Geluk teachings.

Echoes of Jamyang Zhepa's Manual

In his sections on the "Origins of Letters" and the "Faults and Merits of Letters," it is clear that Sumpa Khenpo is following Jamyang Zhepa's manual closely, even though he does not name it as a source. He also quotes often from Pakpa's formulary, emphasizing its role as the authoritative precedent for his work. Sumpa Khenpo speeds through the Buddhist history of letters, a history much like Jamyang Zhepa's, gleaned from the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* and from the canonical epistles, again emphasizing the important contributions of Pakpa at the Mongol court. Sumpa Khenpo continues with several examples of letters from the Mongolian context, such as the handwritten letter that Köten Khan wrote to Sakya Pandita inviting him to the Mongol court, deliberately bringing the reader's focus away from ancient India and toward Tibeto-Mongolian relations.

Sumpa Khenpo follows Jamyang Zhepa's outline as he gives a brief introduction to the need for seals and to their various shapes and materials. He describes how kings often gift monks with seals made of precious metals like gold, silver, crystal, or jade, along with the *jasaq* title. Like Jamyang Zhepa, he makes a scriptural justification for why monks can hold seals and titles without violating the *vinaya* prohibition against owning precious materials. Next, again in the spirit of Jamyang Zhepa's manual, Sumpa Khenpo uses scriptural quotations to argue why poetic language— in contrast to provincial language — is so important in Buddhist correspondence. Even if the meaning

is good, he argues, without elegant language one's letter is like a youth with a fine body appearing naked, without clothing or jewelry. "How to Write Letters" further describes a variety of proper ways to praise one's recipient with elegant language.

The Parts of a Letter

From his section on "How to Send Letters," we can extract a fuller understanding of the standard parts of a letter in Sumpa Khenpo's view. Here I align Sumpa's schematic with the parts of a letter inherited from the Ciceronian tradition in Europe:

Sumpa Khenpo's outline of the parts of a letter	**Latin equivalent in *ars dictaminis***
Line of address	*Salutatio*
Humble submission	*Captatio benevolentiae*
Regards	
One's own situation	*Narratio*
Main request	*Petitio*
Closing blessing	*Conclusio*
Register of gifts	
Date and place of dispatch	

Sumpa instructs that one should address one's lama with metaphors and praises that accord with the particular qualities of his training in Buddhism. To this end, Sumpa provides several well-known Buddhist lists of accomplishments — such as the triads of explication, debate, and composition (*'chad rtsod rtsom gsum*) and intellect, love, and ability (*mkhyen brtse nus gsum)* — for use in constructing addresses of veneration for religious superiors. In contrast, for a king, minister, or general, praises should be composed according to the sixteen rules of worldly conduct (*mi chos bcu drug*), the

divisions of the common arts and sciences, the eight auspicious symbols that signify secular leadership, and so on. In short, the line of address serves to identify the letter's recipient within a canonical Buddhist world populated by various regular and secular actors, each with a prescribed role to play in supporting a flourishing Buddhist society.

The Social World of Sumpa Khenpo's Manual

In addition, Sumpa Khenpo provides a more specialized division of the recipients of Buddhist letters according to their skills in the various arts and sciences, derived from the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras:*[31]

1. Scholars of Buddhism
2. Grammarians
3. Logicians
4. Artisans of sacred supports for worship
5. Artisans of Tibetan writing
6. Medical experts
7. Experts in black and white astrology
8. Those who learned in poetics, synonymy, and prosody

Sumpa Khenpo's schematic of Buddhist letter recipients paints a picture of his imagined Buddhist intellectual community: a network of experts in the various fields of Buddhist knowledge and the common arts and sciences that contribute to the Buddhist ritual and intellectual economy. We will see this picture come to life in the examination of Sumpa Khenpo's epistolary network of Buddhist intellectuals below.

This schematic also indicates that Sumpa Khenpo was not satisfied for experts in the literary arts to reside at the bottom of the traditional Buddhist stratification of knowledge according to the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras.* Indeed, he positions "grammarians" second only to "scholars of Buddhism," esteeming them as foundational

31. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door,* folio 16a.3 ff.

to the study of Buddhism itself and among the more lofty fields of study. He also makes a specialization within "artisans" for those who are experts in Tibetan writing (*bzo rig gi nang tshan bod yig la mkhas*): perhaps here he refers to calligraphers or engravers.[32] This scheme highlights literary and book-making skills within the arts and sciences, reflecting the way in which the literary arts span both religious and secular spheres and also encompass professionals of higher (scholars and secretaries) and lower (engravers and artisans) social status.

Sumpa Khenpo divides astrologers into both “white” and “black” varieties. The term for “white” astrology (*dkar rtsis*) is roughly homophonic with the general term for astrology (*skar rtsis*) and refers to the study of the stars and heavenly bodies in order to determine the calendar, predict eclipses, and so forth; “black astrologers” (*nag rtsis*) are practitioners of divination and work with the elements instead of the heavenly bodies.[33] Ritual services from both types of astrological professionals were, and still are, in demand in Tibetan communities. What is unusual here is that a Geluk monk includes divination specialists in his imagining of the epistolary world of his monastic peers. Since Sumpa Khenpo's *Collected Works* also include a rare work on dice divination, it is clear that he was willing to integrate what were primarily considered as folk practices into the scholarly purview of the Geluk monastic system.

Next, Sumpa Khenpo provides voluminous instructions on letter writing in all kinds of occasions and to all variety of people. In his instructions for letters to monks and to kings, Sumpa Khenpo offers a rich feast of names of kingdoms and principalities. This

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32. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door,* folio 17a.6.
33. Black astrology typically refers to folk astrology and divination, while white astrology refers to institutionally sanctioned astrological or astronomical sciences. See the definitions for *dkar rtsis* and *nag rtsis* in Zhang, Yisun. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo = zang han da ci dian (Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary)*. Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1985.

part of the manual reads like a political geography lesson for aspiring Mongol lords, a "mirror for princes" in a Buddhist world. Sumpa Khenpo also surprises us with some of the unexpected characters he envisions in his epistolary world. Here I will introduce two of the most compelling examples that set Sumpa Khenpo's manual apart from Jamyang Zhepa's.

Women as Letter Recipients

First, we notice that Sumpa Khenpo gives directions for writing to lay women: queens, princesses, mothers, and sisters. Sumpa assumes unequivocally that women are part of Buddhist epistolary culture across Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese spheres. As royals who support Buddhism financially and engage Buddhist chaplains for their personal instruction, and as relatives of monks, lay women are engaged in correspondence alongside male monastics and officials. It is not clear to me to what extent the royal patronesses of Sumpa Khenpo's day were literate themselves, or whether they hired scribes to pen dictated letters for them. Recalling the foundational narrative of the Singhalese princess Muktālatā from the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine,* Sumpa Khenpo has good canonical precedent for elaborating in more detail the various women letter writers who serve the cause of Buddhism in various ways.

Importantly, Sumpa Khenpo does not address nuns as letter writers or letter recipients at all. Many of the nunneries in Tibet, and especially the Geluk institutions of Amdo, have suffered from a chronic shortage of donations in comparison to the male monasteries because women are not considered to be as effective fields of merit as their male counterparts. As a result, female monastics in the Geluk tradition have generally

received lower levels of education and wielded less influence than monks. The phenomenon of prejudice against nuns is attributable not only to sexist hierarchies within Tibetan culture, but also to misogynist sources within traditional Buddhism that portray women as unable to attain Buddhahood in their female bodies and as obstacles to the propagation of the dharma. Any or all of these reasons may have contributed to the fact that female monastics are not recognized as epistolary partners in Sumpa's letter-writing manual. This fact by no means indicates, however, that female monastics in early modern Amdo did not write letters. We have so little secondary research on the status of Geluk nunneries in Amdo in the eighteenth century that at present, it is not easy to construct an epistolary history of female Tibetan monastics from the period.

Deities as Letter Recipients

Sumpa Khenpo also includes nonhuman agents in his letter-writing manual, another clear departure from the manual by Jamyang Zhepa. He spends four full folios giving instructions for how to write to gods, demons, dharma protectors, oracles, and local deities of the water, trees, and rocks. Sumpa gives instructions for sending letters to these local deities in order to remind them of their moral obligations and ask them not to harm the humans and animals in their territory. He writes,

> Also, those such as lamas and great yogis have methods for sending letters and requests for protection to the eight classes [of gods and demons] who reside in this world — and all the types [of spirits] included therein, the local gods and earth gods and territorial gods, and whatever demons there may be — so that they may not afflict others. [Here is] an illustration of such [a letter]:
>
> The word of the yogi so-and-so, who holds the mantras of the gods and tutelary deities […]:

> You eight classes of local gods and territorial spirits, in the world at large and in particular, here in the place of so-and-so, may you make the teachings of the Buddha increase and, with a mind of love toward beings and creatures, make religion and merit flourish!
>
> Many of the ordinary sentient beings of this particular region, by force of the Age of Degeneration, are acting with vile behavior and some renunciants are not protecting the purity of the law. Many householders, too, are performing the ten non-virtuous actions and, especially, are digging where the rock spirits live, and agitating the water spirits, and filling [the water] with impurities, and damaging the tree spirits, and so forth — and by so doing, have crossed your intentions. Even so, recollect the commands established by the Thus Gone Ones and the holy lamas, and keep in mind how the monks and the mantra-holders have always made offerings to you with worship and *torma* and burnt offerings.
>
> Therefore, may you pacify the rough, unpleasant clouds out of season, and hail, and the descent of inauspicious lightning, and destructive lightning [that strikes] with a fierce sound, and the harm of thunderbolts, and the harm of fierce winds, and drought, and so forth — calm these [destructive forces]; and may snow and rain fall in accord with the seasons, and may the thunder sound gently and give way to the flowing of soft, smooth breezes; and may the lakes and ponds, streams and brooks, brim fully without causing harm, and may the harvests of the orchards and crops all increase, and may beings delight in a feast of well-being; and in all districts, may fortune and virtue and goodness pervade![34]

Sumpa Khenpo was highly cognizant of the role of nonhuman spiritual beings as potential competitors and obstacles to the Geluk mission. Indeed, without cooperation from the spiritual agents who control the weather, the harvests, the spread of disease, and the construction of buildings (by virtue of their reign over the underground realm where foundations are laid), Geluk institutional expansion would be impossible. Sumpa Khenpo takes a commanding and aggressive posture against these nonhuman letter recipients, foregoing opening lines of flattery in favor of a narrative negotiation with the spirits. Evident here is the reciprocal yet uneasy relationship between Buddhist monks and worldly spirits. Buddhist monks appeal to the power of oaths that bind the deities to the Buddhist cause; monks also must make apologies for human activity that damages the

34. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *Opening the Door*, folio 59b.3 ff.

gods' habitats. Monks exert command over the local gods even as they strive to placate their anger. By directly engaging these potentially hostile others, Sumpa Khenpo demonstrates confidence that Geluk monastic authority supersedes the worldly powers of these spirits.

In China, letters have served as vehicles for communication with the spirit world since as early as the Shang Dynasty (second millennium B.C.E.), when the imperial ancestors were entreated through messages engraved on shells and bones to accept sacrifices and to grant blessings.[35] During ancient China's Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046-256 B.C.E.), when writing surfaces expanded to include stone tablets, bronze vessels, and tablets of bamboo and wood, letters were buried as a form of delivery to the spirit world.[36] After the invention of paper in the second century C.E., paper messages were commonly buried with the dead as a cheaper alternative to silk. Tsien argues that in the Chinese context, "the extensive use of written messages instead of oral prayer to communicate with spiritual beings (who were supposed to be able to read) was an important factor in contributing greatly to the number of written records we have discovered from ancient times."[37]

While the development of a writing system and literary culture in Tibet was much later than in China, it is unclear whether the use of ritual letters that Sumpa Khenpo describes was adapted from Chinese practice. Since Sumpa Khenpo was involved with a variety of ethnic communities, perhaps he modeled his ritual letters to deities after Chinese, Mongol, Monguor, or Yugur practices. More work remains to be conducted on

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35. Tsien, Tsuen-hsuin. *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. Page 4.
36. For example, in the case of treaties. See Tsien, Tsuen-hsuin. *Written on Bamboo and Silk,* page 5.
37. Tsien, Tsuen-hsuin. *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, page 5.

this phenomenon. Still, in analogous rather than homologous fashion, the Chinese evidence offers many possible examples of how ritual letters were "delivered" to their spirit recipients and what functions ritual letters served that can spur a wide range of future inquiries into the Tibetan context.

Letters, Donations, and Inscriptions

In some ways, the "Ancillary *Desiderata*" section of Sumpa Khenpo's manual acts as an appendix. Although it is labeled as “part two from the root outline,” it reads as a miscellaneous collection of addenda that overlap thematically with previous sections of the manual. My hypothesis for this section of the manual is that Sumpa Khenpo first composed part one, and then asked his requestor to review the text and see if it was relevant to the requestor’s needs. Then he probably added a second section to cover whatever occasions or topics the requestor found missing from the first section.

Indeed, the ancillary *desiderata* is geared more specifically toward high-ranking rulers. It includes further lists of kingdoms, lists of official titles for secular and religious offices, instructions for composing open circulars to monastic communities, then further explanations of sealing and especially composing the register of gifts at the close of a letter. Some of Sumpa Khenpo's examples illustrate letters accompanying the donation of worship supports,[38] funds (usually measured in silver) for establishing monastic endowments,[39] and donations of tea, food, and offering substances.[40]

38. sum pa mkhan po. *Opening the Door,* page 932.6.
39. sum pa mkhan po. *Opening the Door,* page 936.1.
40. sum pa mkhan po. *Opening the Door,* page 938.6.

Finally, Sumpa Khenpo lists instructions for inscribing religious objects of all kinds with words of prayer or blessing.[41] He addresses inscriptions for tangka paintings and deity statues, books, banners, mandalas, reliquaries, rugs, thrones, ceiling ornaments, frescoes, stupas, and bronze tea cauldrons. Each holy object is worthy of poetic lines of dedication or description, with a place, a date, and a person's name. In this section Sumpa Khenpo extolls the virtues of generosity and reminds his reader of the essential role that images and holy objects play in generating faith for Buddhists. This ending to Sumpa Khenpo's manual is not accidental, for what better exhortation with which to complete his text than that of reminding his readers to give generously to the monastery, and that their donated items will marked by name with words of blessing?

Sumpa Khenpo's closing instructions on donations reflects his opening metaphor of a verdant garden nourished by the sunbeams, moonbeams, and rain showers. Patronage is the organic nourishment for the garden of the Buddhist teachings, and letters make possible the distribution of resources necessary for the propagation of the religion. Just as the Qianlong Emperor and the Panchen Lama brought material benefit to the monasteries of Amdo through letters, Sumpa Khenpo hopes that his network of Mongolian noble patrons will use letters to facilitate their distribution of goods to Geluk monasteries across the region. In this sense, epistolary networks also constitute economic and ritual networks.

Sumpa Khenpo's Epistolary Politics

Sumpa Khenpo's *Collected Works*, compiled and edited by his successors at Gönlung Monastery after his death, include two letter collections. The first is a collection

41. sum pa mkhan po. *Opening the Door,* page 940.7.

of official letters exchanged with noble patrons, esteemed lamas, and other high personages. The majority of these letters are written in verse, and the title of the collection — *The Melodious Lute: Official Correspondence Sent to Several Lamas and Ministers*[42] appeals to the Indian poetic tradition in which they participate. Sumpa Khenpo's collection of official letters reveals his vision of the relationship between politics and religion. He is deeply engaged with political life, and in particular with maintaining relationships with Mongolian rulers in Amdo and with lamas at the Qing court, because he has witnessed the consequences for religion that follow from political conflict. In his autobiography, we read his explanation of why politics matters:

> In any and every world system, the good and evil that befall people, both collectively and individually, is indeed the fruition of their karma that is shared or unshared; but, conventionally speaking, in any place, the waxing and waning of the Buddha's teachings, and the respective happiness or misery of beings, all follow as a consequence of the words and actions of the kings and ministers of that land and, furthermore, depend upon those few lamas and leaders and nobles who are endowed with great merit […].
>
> For example, the religious kings of Tibet and India in the past, by means of auspicious words, invited [Buddhist masters], and so directly upheld the activity of Buddhism; and in those lands, virtue and welfare were allowed to spread. In contrast, when the roots and branches of evil — evil kings and evil ministers, impudent and abusive — with the sharp thorns of their own minds, and on the grounds of much degeneration and a hundred evils, practiced a crooked law, in those kingdoms, each had a history that followed as the consequence of their inauspicious [words and actions].
>
> Therefore, […] merit and non-merit and happiness and misery, whatever befalls [the people], follows as a consequence of the powerful rulers of that place — and there is no place where that isn't the case.[43]

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42. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor, *The Melodious Lute: Official Correspondence Sent to Several Lamas and Ministers* (bla dpon 'ga' zhig la bskur ba'i chab shog gtam snyan pi wang). In volume 7 (ja) of the author's *Collected Works.*

43. sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor. *paN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra 'dzin bcud len (Expressing the Conduct of the Supreme Pandita Sumpa Yeshé Penjor: Alchemy for the Ear*). TBRC W25006: 15 - 776. Beijing: Tibetan Civilization Publishing House of China (krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang), 2001. Page 471.4 ff.

While Sumpa Khenpo asserts a traditional Buddhist view of karma, he also argues that political leaders wield disproportionate influence over the karmic fate of the people and religious institutions under their rule. A few exceptional leaders "endowed with great merit" have the power to bring blessing and welfare to a large number of people, and likewise, a few corrupt leaders have the power to bring misery and suffering upon numberless subjects.

As we recall, this view was probably shaped early in his life when Sumpa Khenpo witnessed the violence of the Lubsang Danzin rebellion and the utter destruction in Amdo accompanying its suppression. He also had witnessed civil war in central Tibet while studying at Drepung. After Qing troops withdrew from Lhasa following a conflict with the Zünghar Mongols, the Ganden Government ordered the monks of Sera and Drepung monasteries to join the forces of Ü who were protecting the city against an invasion by Tsang. Sumpa Khenpo, torn between his *vinaya* vows and the order of the Dalai Lama to take up arms, finally agreed to help lead the monastic army as long as the ordination of the Drepung monks would not be voided by their actions. Sumpa Khenpo's insistence that Buddhist monks must engage politics on a practical level stems from the contingencies of his own life and his understanding that karmic outcomes for the many follow disproportionately from the behavior of the few.

Scattered throughout Sumpa Khenpo's manual, we see a well-developed lexicon of official positions and titles that showcases his familiarity with the political landscape of Amdo and the Qing at large. These terms include Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan-derived titles: in Tibetan, he lists magistrates (*mdun na 'dun*), cabinet ministers (*nang blon*), household overseers (*gsol dpon*), bursars (*phyag mdzod*), and stewards (*gnyer ba*)

of kings; domestic watchmen (*nang so*), military camp heads (*sgar ba*), petty ministers (*bka' blon phran*), district officers (*sde ba*), and military officers (*zhal ngo*). The Mongolian titles he lists include *tupagji* (transliterated in Tibetan as *thu phag chi*), *pili* (*pi li*), *beise* (*bi se*), and *jasaq* (*ja sag*); and the Chinese titles he mentions include *tai ji* and *wang*. In order to write letters effectively, one has to know one's own place in the sociopolitical landscape, and everyone else's, too. Further study of the offices and titles in Sumpa Khenpo's work, especially with the benefit of expertise in Mongolian language and history, would improve our understanding of the extent to which Tibetan and Mongolian networks overlapped in the Geluk growth of the eighteenth century.

There are twenty-eight letters in Sumpa's official letter collection. Among the letters whose recipients' names are listed, roughly half are sent to reincarnate lamas and half to Mongolian nobles and patrons. Political engagement, for Sumpa Khenpo, served not only the end of securing goodwill toward Geluk Buddhism but also the end of securing funds. Both favor and finances were indispensable to the flourishing of Geluk Buddhism, and Sumpa Khenpo's letters reveal a well-formed network of political allies and economic supporters across Tibet, Mongolia, and China.

An Epistolary Community of Buddhist Scientists

The second collection of Sumpa Khenpo's letters is an anthology of unofficial letters that answer questions about Buddhist ritual, meditation, and the arts and sciences. The title of this collection, *Glittering White Venus: A Recorded Collection of Replies to Several Questions on Points of Doubt in the Texts of the Religious and Secular Fields of*

Knowledge, employs a metaphor from Sumpa Khenpo's astrological expertise.[44] Many of the questions his peers raise in correspondence with Sumpa Khenpo deal with matters of Buddhist science. By "Buddhist science," I mean studies of the material world that serve particular functions for Buddhist ritual and social life: in particular, the astrological and geographical sciences that served to fix the calendar of events in the historical Buddha's life, to identify one's time and place within the universe depicted by Buddhist cosmology, and to map the world in order to verify the place descriptions in Buddhist scriptures and to locate the sacred Buddhist kingdom of Shambala. I do not intend to conflate Sumpa Khenpo's "Buddhist science" with the late nineteenth and twentieth-century Buddhist modernist agenda from the Asian colonial context.[45]

Buddhist science was flourishing during Sumpa Khenpo's life thanks not only to the encyclopedic scholarship of Tibetan monks who had preceded him but also to the intermingling of Tibetan, Chinese, Mongolian, Russian, and European Jesuit thinkers at the Qing Court in Beijing (in the manual, Sumpa Khenpo offers an example of a letter to "a Chinese astrologer").[46] As Europeans during the eighteenth century were making strong headway in circumscribing their known world of space and time, so were Tibetan Buddhists. Sumpa Khenpo not only composed a world geography, but he was also one of three Geluk scholars during the eighteenth century who composed presentations on world

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44. sum pa mkhan po. *Glittering White Venus: A Recorded Collection of Replies to Several Questions on Points of Doubt in the Texts of the Religious and Secular Fields of Knowledge* (nang don tha snyad rig gnas kyi gzhung gi dogs gnas 'ga' zhig dris pa'i lan phyogs gcig tu bris pa rab dkar pa sangs). In volume 8 (nya) of the author's *Collected Works.*
45. Gyatso, Janet. *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. See page 17, where Gyatso makes a similar disambiguation of early modern Tibetan intellectual pursuits and the Buddhist modernism of colonial south and southeast Asia.
46. sum pa mkhan po. *Opening the Door*, folio 18a.1.

religions that included treatment of Christianity.[47] At this moment in history, Buddhist scientific work among the Geluk, quasi-modern in temperament as it relied on both empirical observation and on faith in the scriptures, was increasingly engaging the findings of European astronomers and geographers. This scientific development would culminate in a Tibetan *World Geography,* an 1820 work anchored in Geluk Buddhist scholasticism whose purview stretched all the way to the Louisiana Purchase territory.[48]

Sumpa Khenpo was active in an intellectual community of Buddhist scholars who consulted each other with questions on points of Buddhist ritual or meditation but also on these compelling developments in Buddhist science. The *Glittering White Venus* letter collection is labeled "replies to questions." As is typical of the genre, some of these written replies indicate that the original questions were posed in a face-to-face encounter and only later recorded in writing. For example, in the first text in this collection, a group of students approaches Sumpa Khenpo with a series of questions about Buddhist cosmology. Although he gives an oral reply on the spot, they ask him to set his reply in writing, presumably so that they can study the material more closely and even use his text as a pedagogical aid; his reply includes a labeled diagram of the Buddhist cosmos.[49] Indeed, interlinear notes throughout the whole collection of replies-to-questions letters may indicate that these texts were used for study and teaching long after the original

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47. Sweet, Michael Jay. "Jesus the World Protector: Eighteenth-Century Gelukpa Historians View Christianity." *Buddhist-Christian Studies.* Volume 26, no. 1 (2006): 173–78.
48. btsan po no min han 'jam dpal chos kyi bstan 'dzin 'phrin las. *An Extensive Explanation of the Vast World: A Mirror that Fully Illuminates the Vessel and Its Contents* ('dzam gling chen po'i rgyas bshad snod bcud kun gsal me long). Available at TBRC work W00KG03991. See Lobsang Yongdan. "Tibet Charts the World: Btsan po No mon han's Detailed Description of the World, An Early Major Scientific Work in Tibet." In Tuttle, Gray, ed. *Mapping the Modern in Tibet: PIATS 2006: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter 2006*. Andiast, Switzerland: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2011. Also see the forthcoming dissertation of Lobsang Yongdan, Cambridge University.
49. sum pa mkhan po. *Glittering White Venus,* page 172.3.

recipients received their replies, that they were combed over and marked with explanations by future generations of students.

While some of these replies originated as oral events, we know that many of these texts were true letters — composed and sent, rather than answered orally and recorded later — because of phrasings in the text such as "having written it, I sent it" (*bris nas bskur ba'o)*. The editors treated this content quite differently from the letters in the formal correspondence collections. Each text is introduced with a brief contextual explanation, but the proper form of the letter (the line of address, the offering of regards, and the closing with names, dates, places of dispatch, and gift registers) has usually been stripped away. Only the questions and answers are included, and none of the niceties of formal letter writing. As such, this collection is a pastiche of letter excerpts; the emphasis in the editor's mind was on the Buddhist content of the material and not its epistolary form and features.

This collection of "replies to questions" embodies the traditional vertical paradigm of Buddhist disciples asking questions of their teachers, but also reveals the horizontal relationships among scholastic peers who are researching similar topics, reviewing and editing each other's work, and measuring new ideas against the rule of Geluk orthodoxy. We see a glimpse of this intellectual community of minds, forged through letter writing, in the makeup of this letter collection. One outstanding letter from the Panchen Lama discusses in detail some of the claims Sumpa Khenpo makes in his astrological text that seeks to establish a new calendric system whereby Geluk

monasteries should regulate their ritual calendar.[50] Here is a translation of the beginning of that letter, opening with a contextual explanation by the editor:

> In the Fire Bird Year (1777/8), the Emanation Body, the Panchen Lama, crown ornament of all the fortunate beings of the Land of Snow, Lozang Penden Yeshé Pel Zangpo, raised several points of doubt, and the ambrosial reply [by Sumpa Khenpo] was bestowed in the Earth Dog year (1778/9). Subsequently, the books of [Sumpa Khenpo's] dharma history and his new astrology having previously arrived in hand, [the Panchen Lama] carefully examined them even down to the marginalia, and he wrote:
>
> "Now, I wish to ask you about several of my understandings: the sources for both your astrological work and your religious history are quite sound, and because they do service to the enlightened activity of the second Buddha (Tsongkhapa) along with his heirs, they will be an excellent blessing. However, as for doubts that have arisen:"
>
> And included among those were several cunning questions meant to clear away whatever internal stains were in those [texts], as well as several direct questions conferred as a benefit, and by way of repaying that [benefit], [Sumpa Khenpo] raised up a host of offerings (replies).[51]

Following is the Panchen Lama's letter of questions about calculations for comets and eclipses, and so forth. Then the editors give Sumpa Khenpo's reply, which includes discussion of the elements and aggregates, measurements of time, comparisons of Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese astrological approaches, deliberations over whether China or Russia or Patan (Nepal) could be the center of the world, and debates about the location of Shambala, Russia, the Kazakh land, and various kingdoms of Asia. For several folios, Sumpa Khenpo lays out technical explanations of his methods for constructing his new astrology and his religious history of the world. His lexicon is so highly technical that I am unequipped to offer translations of his arguments here.[52] This letter brings to life the epistolary community of scientific inquiry in which Sumpa

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50. sum pa mkhan po. *Glittering White Venus,* page 179.1 ff.
51. sum pa mkhan po. *Glittering White Venus,* page 180.3 ff.
52. For a well-researched technical treatment of Sumpa Khenpo's contributions to the astrological sciences, see the forthcoming dissertation by Sokyo Jo, Harvard University.

Khenpo participated and the role of letters in proposing, debating, editing, and publishing new works.

This passage represents only one of several exchanges between Sumpa Khenpo and the Fifth Panchen Lama preserved in this letter collection of replies to questions. Similar questions relating to Sumpa Khenpo's scientific, historical, and geographical works are also raised by one Dungnak Zhapdrung,[53] a Buddhist monastic official familiar to the Panchen Lama who served as a secretary to Changkya Rölpé Dorjé. Dungnak Zhapdrung even served as a kind of peer reviewer of Sumpa Khenpo's religious history, the *Wish-Fulfilling Tree.* According to one letter, Sumpa Khenpo wrote the seed-text of his religious history while he was in Mongolia and then sent the manuscript to his home in Amdo. As soon as his relatives started having the woodblocks cut, Dungnak Zhapdrung raised objections to some of the points in the history; so, the next year, Sumpa Khenpo conducted extensive editing and corrected many pages with errors.[54] The production of knowledge and particularly of texts happened within networks of intellectual discourse facilitated by letter exchanges; these letters illuminate a significant period of scientific innovation in Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history.

53. mdung nag zhabs drung, who is likely the same figure listed as a "pandita of the arts and sciences" in another work by the Fifth Panchen Lama. He is also mentioned in the colophons of two texts in the Panchen Lama's collected works. He was the attendant of Changkya Rinpoché, according to page 340 of *sa skya'i lam 'bras*. rdzong sar lnga rig slob gling, sde dge rdzong sar, 2007. Available at TBRC work W2MS23007. No independent TBRC record for this figure exists at present.
54. sum pa mkhan po. *Glittering White Venus,* page 188.1-2.

Chapter Four:

Buddhist Ritual and Institutional Life and Mipam Dawa's Manual

The third and final letter-writing treatise of our study continues to be reprinted and studied in Tibetan-language public schools in Amdo today, more than two hundred years after its composition. Mipam Dawa's 1806 *Beautiful Garland of White Lotuses* remains a popular manual because, in addition to its lucid writing style, it offers elegant illustrations of different types of Tibetan Buddhist letters for a variety of occasions.[1] Additionally, the Repkong district where Mipam Dawa lived and wrote has been home to several generations of Amdo's most famous writers, and perhaps the literary reputation of his locale has helped cement the manual's status as the epitome of traditional letter-writing elegance for the modern day. This manual, which presents itself as a treatise and formulary adjoined, offers several unusual elements in its presentation of letter writing that will illuminate for us a changing epistolary Buddhism at the dawn of the nineteenth century in southern Amdo, a landscape where letters suffuse the full array of Geluk institutional life and where ritual relationships are deeply intertwined with epistolary relationships.

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1. mi pham zla ba. *phrin yig gi rnam bzhag dper brjod dang bcas pa padma dkar po'i phreng mdzes (A Presentation on Correspondence, Along with a Formulary: A Beautiful Garland of White Lotuses).* Xining: mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang (Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House), 1986. TBRC work W20450.

Mipam Dawa's Life, Times and Networks

His Early Background

Bipa Ngakwang Mipam Dawa (bis pa ngag dbang mi pham zla ba, 1767-1807), the author of the *Beautiful Garland of White Lotuses,* does not have an extant book-length biography or autobiography. Such materials, if they existed, were probably lost during the Cultural Revolution, when most of Rongwo Monastery's libraries, printing houses, and archives were destroyed by fire.[2] Still, sources such as the *Oceanic Annals: A Religious History of Amdo* and several abbatial lineage histories and local gazetteers of Rongwo Monastery provide enough information for us to sketch the life of Mipam Dawa as well as the epistolary community in which he and his letter-writing manual gained influence.

According to modern gazetteers, Mipam Dawa was born in 1767 in Bitang Jamo village in present-day Xunhua County.[3] His personal name is often preceded by the toponym for his home village: Bipa means "the one from Bi(tang)." Mipam Dawa was born to Tibetan parents; we do not know anything of his early background except that he was identified as the reincarnation of a locally born scholar and Geshé, the highest academic degree in the Buddhist monastic system, who had passed away the previous year. Mipam Dawa must have exhibited remarkable talent from a young age because, while neither his family nor his incarnation line seems to have been particularly exalted,

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2. chu skyes dge 'dun dpal bzang. *Repkong Travel Notes (reb gong yul skor zin tho).* Lanzhou: Gansu Nationalities Publishing House (kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang), 2007. See page 203 ff.
3. Tib. *bis thang 'ja' mo*. Notice that this village also contains the word *jamo*, a calque of the Mongolian term for the postal relay station. The Tibetans of Xunhua (Chinese 循化) were under the jurisdiction of Rongwo Monastery.

the best of educational opportunities and support from high-ranking teachers were lavished upon him from his youth.

Around age seven or eight, young Mipam Dawa became a novice monk at Giteng Monastery, a branch monastery of Rongwo, where he learned to read and to write in both headed and headless (print and cursive) styles of Tibetan script.[4] At the age of thirteen, Mipam Dawa transferred to the Tösam Ling Philosophical College[5] at the larger and more prestigious Rongwo Monastery in the golden valley of Repkong, where he began intensive education in the literary arts. At Rongwo, he studied orthography, ornate poetics, and grammar from several respected teachers. The *Oceanic Annals* recount that as a teenager, he composed many replies-to-questions texts that explicated difficult points in the monastic curriculum in use at Rongwo.[6]

His Network of Teachers

The *Oceanic Annals* also tell us that Mipam Dawa frequently met with high-ranking incarnate lamas and scholars at Rongwo Monastery and beyond. At Rongwo, for example, he maintained close contact with Trigen Trülku, who served as the fifteenth abbot of Rongwo as well as the twelfth abbot of Labrang Monastery.[7] At Gönlung Monastery to the north of the Yellow River, Mipam Dawa studied with the Wang lama[8]

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4. chu skyes dge ’dun dpal bzang. *Repkong Travel Notes,* page 206.
5. Tib. thos bsam gling
6. The curricular textbooks used at Rongwo Monastery were composed by rje btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1469-1546). Jamyang Zhepa's textbooks were used at Labrang Monastery and Drepung Gomang.
7. khri rgan sprul sku ngag dbang ‘jam dbyangs bkra shis. See dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas. *Religious History of Amdo (mdo smad chos 'byung).* Lanzhou: Gansu Nationalities Publishing House (kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang), 1987. See page 319.
8. Tib. skal bzang ye shes dar rgyas. TBRC person ID P3682.

and with one Zhangba Gomchen Lozang Dawa,[9] hearing "all variety of dharma teachings" from them.

> And especially, again and again, he sat at the feet of Tukwan Rinpoché,[10] and adorned with the pith instructions called the Oral Teachings of the Path of Bliss and with the profound instructions of the Great Seal of the secret mantra tradition, he blew the conch among the assembly of the dharma practitioners, and a rain of flower petals fell upon each of the five or six classes of beings, covering the ground; and as for his spontaneous establishment of auspicious omens, it gave even the high lamas a feeling of delight and excitement; and from Tukwan Rinpoché's own words [from a letter] to Gungtang Rinpoché, "These days, rare are those who are experts in all the sutras, tantras, and arts and sciences, like this one (Mipam Dawa), and you, Gungtang!"[11]

We have already seen in Jamyang Zhepa's relationship with Changkya at Gönlung the ways in which institutional partnerships enabled exchanges of legitimacy and symbolic authority as new schools and practices were established at the growing monasteries. With Mipam Dawa's network of teachers and mentors representing Rongwo, Labrang, and Gönlung, it is clear that by the turn of the nineteenth century, these three major Geluk institutions in Amdo were even more deeply intertwined. Leaders rotated among these abbatial seats, and lamas of one monastery sponsored and tutored the most promising students of another. Tukwan, whose estate was at Gönlung but who also served as the abbot of the illustrious Kumbum Monastery, wrote a letter to his friend Gungtang lama at Labrang bragging about the merits of young Mipam Dawa. Correspondence enabled the circulation of leaders and, just as importantly, circulation of their opinions and strategies, among what were by now large and powerful monasteries with land holdings, endowments, and reputations to maintain. Mipam Dawa exemplifies the potential of one bright youth to capture the attention of several of the most influential

9. zhang ba sgom chen blo bzang zla ba, TBRC person ID P3683.
10. thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802).
11. dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas. *Religious History of Amdo,* page 316.

leaders in the region, and as a result to enjoy steady promotions to positions of leadership.

His Rise to Institutional Prominence

In 1787, when Mipam Dawa was but twenty years old, he was asked to establish a monastery on the foundations of some retreat huts in nearby Kasar[12] village in Repkong district. One modern gazetteer compiled by a Rongwo monk relates the story that eight hermits had set up meditation cells in Kasar village where they would chant *mani* prayers and carve woodblocks for the *Mani Kabum,* a ritual cycle focused on Tibet's patron saint and the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara.[13] These Geluk *mani*-chanters, with their leader Trashi Tsering and the village head Lozang Rabten, presented an appeal to Mipam Dawa to establish a monastery on the site of this retreat space. Mipam Dawa installed an image of the Buddha Maitreya in the meditation cell of Trashi Tsering; the shrine was soon expanded to include images of Shakyamuni Buddha and Tsongkhapa. Mipam Dawa's installation of the Maitreya statue constituted the founding of Kasar Monastery, a small Geluk institution about fifteen kilometers north of today's Repkong town. Subsequent lamas in the Bipa incarnation line maintained a close connection to Kasar Monastery, and the third Bipa incarnation successfully saw the fruition of a full monastic schedule there, with the "three grounds" of the confession ritual, rains retreat, and closing ceremonies of the rains retreat. By the time of the fourth Bipa incarnation in 1883, Kasar Monastery boasted a new assembly hall, a printing house, and two monastic

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12. Tib. rka sar
13. chu skyes dge 'dun dpal bzang. *Repkong Travel Notes*. Page 203 ff. Geluk *mani*-chanters are well-known in the Repkong district, and the lead hermit named Tashi Tsering is remembered as a famous Geluk *mani*-chanter. (The *Mani Kabum* is Tib. *ma Ni bka' 'bum,* TBRC work W19225).

estates (one for the Bipa lineage). By the time of the monastery's destruction in 1951 by the People's Liberation Army, there were 80 monastic apartments and about 150 monks at Kasar.

Thus, Mipam Dawa assumed his first role of institutional significance, founding a new monastery, at the young age of twenty years old while studying at Rongwo's philosophical college. At the age of twenty-three, he became a personal student of the Third Shar Lama Trinley Rabgey (dge 'dun 'phrin las rab rgyas, 1740-1794), the most high-ranking of reincarnate lamas in Repkong, and took full ordination vows from him. Having completed the required meditation retreat, Mipam Dawa was installed as the fourth abbot of the Kalachakra College at Rongwo Monastery.[14] The Kalachakra College had been founded in 1773 by the Third Shar himself. According to a contemporary monk historian, "The main subjects of these courses were: the general arts and sciences, plus the Stages of the Path and Mind Training, and outer — the practice of astrological illustrations; inner — commentaries that present the winds and channels practices; and chanting."[15] Thus, we can see from the main educational activities of the Kalachakra College that Mipam Dawa would have been immersed in an artistic environment of painting, astrology, poetry, music, and contemplative practice.[16]

For one year, Mipam Dawa also served as the throne holder of the Rongwo Monastery Tantric College.[17] Finally, in the year 1806, he ascended the Golden Throne

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14. The college's full name is rong bo dus 'khor grwa tshang gsang sngags dar ryas gling.
15. chu skyes dge 'dun dpal bzang. *Repkong Travel Notes,* pp. 125-126.
16. The Kalachakra College and its religious images and implements were totally destroyed in 1958 by the People's Liberation Army. The college was then converted into a teacher training college. It was in this same teacher training college that one of my Tibetan contacts studied Mipam Dawa's letter-writing manual in the 1970s; Mipam Dawa's legacy came full circle.
17. The college's full name is rgyud pa grwa tshang gsang chen chos kyi bang mdzod gling. chu skyes dge 'dun dpal bzang. From chu skyes dge 'dun dpal bzang. *Repkong Travel Notes*, pp. 103-105. The exact year during which Mipam Dawa presided as abbot is unknown.

as abbot of all of Rongwo Monastery, and it was during his tenure as abbot that he composed his famous letter-writing manual, *The Beautiful Garland of White Lotuses*. The composition came to fruition after many earlier requests by two monks and later, by the secretary of his beloved teacher Tukwan.[18] According to the manual's colophon, the secretary had beseeched him many times with offerings of various religious objects, and Mipam Dawa humbly acceded to his requests "so that they might not be in vain."[19]

Within the year of taking the throne at Rongwo, Mipam Dawa passed away at the young age of forty. It is likely that soon after Mipam Dawa's death, his compositions were edited, woodblocks were carved, and the anthology of his collected works published at the printing house of Rongwo Monastery. The preservation of a Buddhist lama's works served to extend the blessing of his holy speech (*gsung*) into the world after his bodily passing, as well as to create a rich scholastic record for the benefit of future students; thus, the publication of the *Collected Works* of a lama was common practice within the Geluk school by the Qing period. A three-volume *Collected Works* is attributed to Mipam Dawa in the *Oceanic Annals* of 1865, although we appear to have no surviving woodblocks of Mipam Dawa's works from the early nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, a well-known Geluk monk named Marnang Jikmé Damchö Gyatso[20] collected whatever print witnesses to Mipam Dawa's compositions were available at the time and oversaw the new carving of woodblocks of Mipam Dawa's works in three volumes. In 2014, local efforts were underway in Amdo under the leadership of Kunga Wangchuk, a professor at Qinghai Nationalities University and native of the Kasar

18. The two monks were named sngags rams pa dge 'dun rgya mtsho and dge slong bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho. Tukwan's secretary was named dpyod ldan ngag dbang phun tshog. See mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* page 105.
19. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* page 105.
20. mar nang 'jigs med dam chos rgya mtsho.

village, to reassemble Marnang Jikmé Damchö Gyatso's edition and publish Mipam Dawa's *Collected Works* in three volumes once again.

Mipam Dawa never studied in central Tibet, and he never forged the far-ranging connections among Mongolian and Qing representatives that lamas like Jamyang Zhepa and Sumpa Khenpo did. Instead, Mipam Dawa spent his life deeply immersed in Geluk administration and literary production at the local level. As one of our luminaries of Buddhist letter writing, he models not the vast reach of letters, but rather the depth to which epistolary culture and its symbolic authority had come to permeate everyday affairs within Rongwo Monastery's social orbit. Furthermore, he articulates with singular clarity the ritual relationships embodied in the epistolary form, reminding us that epistolary networks also constitute ritual networks.

Mipam Dawa's Manual(s)

Among Mipam Dawa's surviving compositions are a biography of the third Shar lama, who served as one of his teachers; treatises on grammar and poetics; advice texts; praise poems; spiritual songs; and not one, but in fact *two* letter-writing manuals. The heretofore unknown letter-writing manual of Mipam Dawa, entitled *A Presentation on Letters: The Magical Key of Elegant Advice that Opens the Hundred Doors to Understanding*,[21] appears to have been written earlier than the *Beautiful Garland of White Lotuses.* The only witness of this text that I have located is housed at the Cultural Palace of Nationalities Library in Beijing. Composed in verse — even his recounting of

21. mi pham zla ba. *'phrin yig gi rnam par bzhag pa blo gros sgo brgya 'byed pa'i legs bshad 'phrul gyi lde mig (A Presentation on Correspondence: The Magical Key of Elegant Advice that Opens the Hundred Doors of Understanding)*. Undated manuscript. Publication information unknown. Held at Minzu Wenhua Gong (Cultural Palace of Nationalities), Beijing.

the history of Buddhist letters in the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* and the Buddhist canon are narrated in meter — the work is a clever display of Mipam Dawa's compositional skill and cultural erudition. The title of the work invokes the genre of "elegant advice" *(legs bshad),* commonly used for didactic poetry like the advice letters in the Buddhist canon. The colophon indicates that Mipam Dawa drew upon his previous scholarship on the language arts as well as on the elegant advice literature of other masters in composing the work. At thirty-eight folios long, the text is a highly-stylized formulary for how to praise one's recipient using different ornaments from *kavya* theory, how to name the month, day, and phases of the moon, and so forth, drawing on ornate poetics as well as on advice literature styles of poetic composition.

The 1806 *Beautiful Garland of White Lotuses* takes a social rather than literary approach to letter-writing practice. The *Beautiful Garland* reads as a true reference tool; one can imagine a young monastic scribe browsing its pages, searching for the particular personage or occasion demanding a letter, and copying or adapting Mipam Dawa's illustrations to suit his immediate purposes. With its detailed portrayal of the epistolary world of Rongwo Monastery, this is the manual I analyze below as we seek to further understand the social mechanics of epistolary culture for Geluk institutional growth in Amdo.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess how widespread the use of Mipam Dawa’s manual was in his own day because we have so few witnesses of the text. How many copies of his manual, with tattered pages stained with tea and the smoke of butter lamps, were used by monastic scholars and scribes in the cultural orbit of Rongwo Monastery? We will likely never know, but the survival and even popularity of his manual in the

common era — the text has been reprinted in modern China at least six times — attests to its rediscovered utility and cultural value.[22]

Mipam Dawa's Epistolary Periodization

Mipam Dawa's manual opens with a brief historiography of letter writing that presents a distinct epistolary periodization. After the Mongol Yuan dynasty came to power, Mipam Dawa sees a new epoch of Tibetan letter-writing practice beginning:

> In later times, when the haughty kings of China and Mongolia came to power in the Snowland of Tibet, "By the king's own decree" (*rgyal po nged kyi lung*) began to be written [at the beginning of a royal edict], and under it was inserted a large drop-down space. Then the names of whoever the recipients were — kings or vassals or ministers or subjects — were written along with "To this one and this one: a summons," and so because of their obviously high level of conceit and arrogance due to their might, letters of official decree (*bka' lung gi yi ge*) emerged. Thus, when writing letters to superiors, the name of that recipient is written above, connected with words of praise, and beneath that, a large drop-down space, and then, with words conveying one's own great respect in gentle and euphonic phrasing, the inquiry about the recipient's health, and so on — this method spread.[23]

Mipam Dawa offers our first analysis of the changing Tibetan epistolary form and a hypothesis for when and why it occurred: during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, under the influence of imperial court practices that strike him as exceedingly arrogant, the hierarchy space was instituted. His description of the phrasing of decrees matches the official edict phrasing prescribed in Pakpa's manual, which form is also reflected in extant government documents from the Yuan dynasty preserved in the Lhasa archives.[24] Even though we have seen a possible precedent for the drop-down space in the personal

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22. The 1994 edition of the text is labeled as *par theng drug,* or "sixth printing."
23. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, page 3.
24. See *Collection of Historical Archives of Tibet (bod kyi lo rgyus yig tshags gces btus*). Compiled by the Archives of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (bod rang skyong ljongs yig tshags khang). 文物出版社, Beijing : Cultural Relics Publishing House (rig dṅos dpe skrun khan nas dpe bskrun byas), 1995.

courtesy letters from Dunhuang, a precedent of which Mipam Dawa is unaware, his analysis of Yuan period official letters is exactly correct.

Next, to illustrate the effects of this shift in epistolary style, Mipam Dawa includes the full Tibetan text of two letters: the first, when "King Köten of the Heavenly Lineage of the Emperor Chinggis, when he came to power over the Tibetan lands, dispatched a Golden Letter to invite Sakya Pandita as his chaplain," and the second, the letter of Geluk founder Tsongkhapa in reply to the Ming Emperor Yongle's invitation to court in Beijing. The poetic address of Köten Khan's invitation letter is elegant and, in its praise of Sakya Pandita and its declaration of the Khan's aspiration to follow the Buddha's teaching and to benefit many beings, it is a model letter following in the idealized tradition of the religious kings of Tibet inviting Buddhist masters to their realms. The major fault of the letter, in Mipam Dawa's eyes, is in the Khan's several opening lines of self-praise preceding "by the king's own decree," which is followed by the large drop-down space to show his high status, all of which betray his vanity as a monarch. Even sin and virtue, it would seem, are visible in epistolary form.

In contrast to the vanity of the letter of Köten Khan, Mipam Dawa declares Tsongkhapa's letter to be "stainless speech." Indeed, Tsongkhapa's letter to the Ming Emperor opens not with self-praise and "by my own decree" but with the prayer "OM: May it be well!" Mipam Dawa, without needing to offer an explicit comparison, conveys the moral superiority of the letters of Tibetan Buddhist monks over the letters of their imperial patrons. Perhaps he also offers an implicit apologetic for the fact that when Buddhist monks are writing to emperors, they adopt a more humilific and respectful tone than do the emperors. In Mipam Dawa's mind, we should not infer that these Tibetan

monks saw themselves as inferior to kings; on the contrary, the same level of moral cultivation that elevates Tibetan Buddhist monks above any worldly king also leads them to embrace a less conceited approach to engaging others through the written word. Mipam Dawa asks us to interpret the styling of letters as manifestations of the extent of moral refinement of their writers, not as direct indications of status and worth.

Still, as he knows all too well, Buddhist society requires both ordained monks and royal patrons in order to function properly, and so in the concluding verses to this chapter Mipam Dawa appeals to "all those who desire to study religious and secular [systems]" to emulate the models presented in his first chapter. If Buddhism needs kings, and kings are inherently arrogant, at least he can hope that they follow the prescribed conventions so that their elegant words of respect toward Buddhist teachers, as well as their copious gifts to the sangha, will atone for their haughtiness.

Two Ways of Measuring Worth

Like Jamyang Zhepa and Sumpa Khenpo, Mipam Dawa makes a distinction between the "way of religious communities" (*lha chos*) and the "way of lay society" (*mi chos*) in how to properly assess a person's rank in the context of letter writing. As we recall, in the Tibetan lay sphere, rank is determined by clan, family lineage, and title, whereas in the religious world, hierarchy should ideally be determined by the level of one's training and realization in the Buddhist teachings. Mipam Dawa's critique of employing worldly systems of rank within the monastic community only underscores the reality that class and clan often wielded great influence within monasteries. Prominent families with substantial land holdings served as major donors for monastic communities,

and they dedicated their sons and serfs to the service of the monasteries. It is no surprise that the promotion of monastic candidates to administrative office and the identification of new reincarnations of high lamas often favored local families of prominence.

While Tibetan Buddhist tradition was well equipped with ritual resources for balancing the risks of favoritism, such as the ritual drawing of lots, suspicions of nepotism were not unknown. In 1792, only fifteen years before Mipam Dawa penned this manual, the Qing Emperor Qianlong had instituted the so-called Golden Urn policy for the selection of high-ranking incarnations in order to prevent corruption.[25] The Golden Urn consisted of a drawing of lots among a pool of candidates whose names were inscribed on wooden slips and placed inside an urn, which was shaken in front of the holiest Buddhist statue in Tibet until one candidate's slip fell out. According to Tibetan biographical sources, this procedure was easily rigged and appears to have pertained mainly to lama identification within the Geluk school.[26] While the recent controversies over corruption within the Geluk monastic system would have been fresh in Mipam Dawa's mind, it is also true that corruption has always been a problem in Buddhist institutional life; the quotation that Mipam cites about the importance of honoring monks for their training and realization, not for their family background, is a line attributed to the Buddha Shakyamuni himself.

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25. Mipam Dawa's manual is dated 1806/7, while Qianlong instituted the Golden Urn policy in 1792 following Nepal's invasion of Tibet and the Qing army's expulsion of the Nepali army from Lhasa.
26. One analysis of portrayals of the Golden Urn in Tibetan biographies by Alex Gardner describes this phenomenon. Gardner, Alexander. "Treasury of Lives: The Controversy of the Golden Urn | Tricycle," April 2, 2013. http://www.tricycle.com/blog/treasury-lives-controversy-golden-urn. Accessed on August 8, 2014.

The Social World of Mipam Dawa's Manual

The formulary section of the *Beautiful Garland* is where Mipam Dawa constructs an epistolary vision that innovates beyond the precedents he inherited from Pakpa, Jamyang Zhepa, and Sumpa Khenpo. Mipam Dawa presents a rich list of people and occasions within Buddhist life, inside and outside the monastery, for whom he imagines sending letters. Here we gain a glimpse into the social world in which Mipam Dawa and his peers found themselves immersed: we see the cast of characters they envisioned populating their Buddhist epistolary world. The presence of many of these characters in the epistolary imagination of Mipam Dawa in Repkong will surprise us. We also see the spectrum of letter-writing occasions that Mipam Dawa finds most compelling, many of which are moments of social or ritual importance within monastic life never related before in a Tibetan letter-writing manual, the precious minutia of monastic culture that are so difficult to recover from the pages of history. Finally, we see the flourish of Mipam Dawa's poetic pen as he imagines ideal phrasings tuned to these particular persons and situations.

In this treatise, Mipam Dawa makes an intentional turn from an idealized Buddhist letter-writing tradition to the reflection of epistolary practices in his experienced world. While the ideals of tradition and the letter-writing legacies of previous masters never leave Mipam Dawa's mind, the particularities which with he relates letter writing in his day read almost autobiographically. I read his manual as the most socially descriptive among the three studied in this work.

Mipam Dawa's manual presents a social hierarchy of actors in no unclear terms. He lists letter recipients from high to low, always privileging members of the sangha

above their correlates in the lay world. Thus, the manual maps the social hierarchies of Mipam Dawa's religious world, the formal and informal bonds that relate people of higher, middling, and lower ranks. He begins with illustrations for writing first to members of the monastic order, "the supreme field of merit, the community who studies and practices the sutras and tantras"; then to one's parents, political leaders, a lama's stewards or regents, a king's ministers, and officials who serve a monastery.[27] This is Mipam Dawa's overarching view of a monk's social obligations: sangha first, parents second, and political leaders third.

Next, Mipam Dawa focuses his lens more closely on the monastic world to detail the variety of members within the Buddhist community to whom one might write letters. He frames this hierarchy with an unabashed bias toward the Geluk over other Buddhist groups, and also with a bias toward scholarly expertise over skills in ritual service and meditation.[28] His hierarchy of the sangha reads:[29]

1. Writing to a Geshé of philosophy
2. Writing to practitioners of secret mantra
3. Writing to scholars of the early translations of the great secret vehicle
4. Writing to those who are expert at manifesting skill in secret mantra
5. Writing to retreatants

Within the sangha, those who have completed the highest Buddhist training in philosophy, the Geshé degree, are privileged as first, followed by "practitioners of secret mantra." This reflects the division within Geluk monasteries of the philosophical college, where monks study complex texts on logic and epistemology, and the tantric college,

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27. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, page 66.
28. In this, he follows the distinction between clerical and shamanic posited by Samuel in his portrayal of the competition between clerical monastics and shamanic ritual specialists in the Tibetan Buddhist communities of Nepal. Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993.
29. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, pp. 75-79.

where monks train in ritual and liturgy. Next, Mipam Dawa offers instructions for "writing to scholars of the early translations of the great secret vehicle." The "early translations" refer to the set of scriptures redacted during the Tibetan imperial period and used by the Nyingma school (the name *rnying ma,* meaning "Ancient Ones," appeals to their use of the older translations; the Geluk are *gsar ma,* part of the "New" translation school). Listed below Nyingma scholars of the early translation textual corpus are those manifesting meditative and ritual powers. Finally, Mipam Dawa lists "retreatants" who, in this context, could range from monks residing at smaller monastic institutions in the mountains to meditating hermits without direct institutional affiliation.[30] Letters to retreatants, for example, can open with reference to their "abiding in contentment with few desires in remote mountain caves,"[31] or more generally to their "firm abiding which accomplishes the essence of [meditative] realization."[32]

If we pause to probe the social vision Mipam Dawa has offered thus far, we notice something striking: despite a predictable Geluk bias, Mipam Dawa openly includes the Nyingma school within his imagining of the Buddhist monastic community. Our previous letter-writing manuals do not mention the presence of non-Geluk Buddhists in their contemporary epistolary worlds. Why does Mipam Dawa make specific reference to the Nyingma school here, but not to others like the Kagyü or Sakya? We might attribute Mipam Dawa's literary inclusions and exclusions to two likely factors. First, his teacher Tukwan was known as ecumenical in outlook and, in particular, openly engaged with the Nyingma teachings; recall that Tukwan had even composed a treatise defending Nyingma

30. For example, sha rdzong ri khrod. Though called a "retreat," it is a well-developed institution with several chapels and many monastic residents.
31. Tib. dben pa'i ri sul du 'dod chung chog shes la gnas. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* page 79.
32. Tib. sgrub pa snying por mdzad pa'i gnas brtan. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, page 79.

traditions against the critique of Sumpa Khenpo. Secondly, the Nyingma presence within Mipam Dawa's own Repkong district was large and influential. Nyingma adherents were (and still are) the most apparent Buddhist others in Repkong; effective administration at Rongwo Monastery likely demanded working relationships with these local Nyingma leaders.[33]

Mipam Dawa instructs his readers to address Nyingma recipients with any of the following phrases:

> "Before the Feet of the Sublime Vajra Master, the Sovereign of the Profound Essence of the Mind of Padmakara, the King of all Awareness-holders of the World"; or, "To that Great Awareness-holder who has mastered the profound Pith of the Nine Vehicles of the Definitive Secret"; or, "Into the Hand of that Holy Lineage-holder of the Dharma of the Profound Scriptures and Treasures."[34]

Mipam Dawa uses the honorific terms for "feet," "mind," "hand," and "scriptures." His flowery language, replete with titles that evoke particular characteristics of the Nyingma tradition, conveys elegance and respect. He makes reference to Padmakara (Padmasambhava), the founder of the Nyingma teachings in Tibet; to the nine-vehicle path toward enlightenment articulated in the Nyingma school; to the classical division of Nyingma teachings into orally-transmitted scriptures (*bka' ma*) and revealed treasures (*gter ma*)*;* and to the role of the Nyingma practitioner as an awareness-holder (Sanskrit *vidyādhara*), a master of esoteric practice with wizardly powers. Each of these lines of address articulates what makes the Nyingma tradition distinct within the diversity of Tibetan Buddhist traditions while at the same time subsuming Nyingma

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33. The collected letters of the famous nineteenth-century Nyingma yogi Zhapkar (zhabs dkar ba tshogs drug rang grol) also include correspondence between Zhapkar and Geluk students and acquaintances. We can see that by the time of Mipam Dawa's flourishing, it was not beyond the purview of Geluk monks to correspond with Nyingma teachers whose spiritual realization or social influence might have inspired intersectarian relationships. Further investigation into Geluk-Nyingma relations in early modern Tibet will likely reveal far more interaction between the two groups than the official histories may indicate.
34. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* page 78.

recipients within a larger vision of the sangha, a vision in which Geluk scholars of philosophy take hierarchical precedence and in which institutional status trumps individual meditative attainment.

Geluk and Nyingma, scholars and siddhas, all fall within Mipam Dawa's characterization of those who practice the Inner Science, Buddhism, which is foremost among the traditionally delineated five major and five minor arts and sciences, even though it is listed last in the *locus classicus,*[35] the *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras.*

Five Major Fields of Knowledge	**Five Minor Fields of Knowledge**
5. Arts and Crafts	6. Poetics
4. Medicine	7. Synonymy
3. Grammar	8. Prosody
2. Logic & Epistemology	9. Drama
1. Buddhism	10. Astrology

Next, Mipam Dawa outlines practitioners of the other nine fields of knowledge, practitioners who may or may not be bound by religious vows. His instructions for writing to scholars in the common arts and sciences proceed as follows:[36]

1. Writing to experts in several of the fields of knowledge
2. Writing to experts in grammar
3. Writing to poets
4. Writing to experts in medicine
5. Writing to "white" astrologers
6. Writing to "black" astrologers
7. Writing to religious artisans

By comparing the classical presentation of the arts and sciences to Mipam's, we notice that Mipam Dawa skips "logicians," presumably because they are already included

35. See van der Kuijp, Leonard, "Tibetan *Belles Lettres*: The Influence of Dandin and Ksemendra." In Cabezón, José Ignacio and Roger R. Jackson, Ed. *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre.* Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996. Page 393.
36. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, pp. 80-84.

in the category of "Géshé of philosophy" above. He also elevates poets next to grammarians, omits the other categories of the language arts (who are Synonymists or Prosodists, after all?), and omits the field of drama entirely. Like Sumpa Khenpo, he divides astrologers into both "white" and "black" varieties. In his selective presentation of members of the "arts and sciences" community, we see a more transparent expression of who constituted the epistolary landscape in which Mipam Dawa lived and wrote.

Finally, Mipam Dawa closes with a list of members of the broader community to whom a monk might write letters:[37]

1. Writing to scribes
2. Writing to close friends
3. Writing to village mantrins
4. Writing to Bön adherents
5. Writing to those skilled in the speech of worldly advice
6. Writing to the wealthy
7. Writing to a powerful assembly of lamas, officials, and monastic officials of a great monastery
8. Writing to such a group (lamas, officials, and monastic officials) of a town
9. Writing directly to those inferior to you

Mipam Dawa's orbit has gradually moved from the upper echelons of the Buddhist sangha down into the population of worldly inhabitants, such as scribes and those "skilled in the speech of worldly advice." Here, Mipam Dawa interestingly includes followers of the Bön tradition, an indigenous Tibetan religion whose institutional features came to closely resemble those of the major Buddhist schools. Bön influence in the Repkong area remains viable today. To address Bön adherents, Mipam Dawa advises the following:

> "Before the Earlobe of the Supreme Awareness-holder who Raises the Victory Banner of the Scriptural Tradition of Shenrab"; or, "Into the Hand of You who Hold the Discipline of the Unchanging Bön Teachings"; or, "To that Powerful Bön Practitioner who Decisively Fells Enemies and Demons with the Wheel of Swords of Fierce Mantras."[38]

37. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, pp. 84-89.
38. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, page 86.

Once again, Mipam Dawa employs a formal register of respect and displays a basic familiarity with the Bön school and its legendary founder Shenrab. As in his Nyingma addresses, here he appeals to an attribute of Bön practice that does not directly challenge Geluk governance: the exercise of magical esoteric powers. His emphasis on yogic power, rather than book knowledge or official titles, evokes the division between clerical and shamanic forms of Buddhism that Geoffrey Samuel articulates.[39] Within this schematic, Geluk Buddhism is positioned as a clerical institution whose authority is grounded in texts, titles, and a complex administrative apparatus. Mipam Dawa's manual indicates that competitors who offer magical rites for healing, exorcism, rain-making, and mundane success are not threatening to Geluk institutional growth as long as they are only local in influence. We can read Mipam Dawa's broad inclusivism in the manual as a method of exerting clerical oversight over non-clerical groups in order to bring them under Rongwo Monastery's influence.

The most valuable contribution of Mipam Dawa's manual is its social vision of the Tibetan religious community in Repkong, a vision that includes professionals other than monks and religious practitioners other than Geluk Buddhists. This imagined community tells us much about the diffusion of literary activity in the local political landscape as various groups found ways to exist side by side, despite strong sectarian and territorial competition. Relations among Geluk, Nyingma, and Bön, and among monastic leaders, village mantrins, and local headmen, were often tense and violent in the Repkong area as elsewhere on the Tibetan Plateau.

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39. Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993.

Still, the poetic elegance and respect with which he constructs terms of address, even to Bön adherents, betrays a certain respectful familiarity with the different charisms and philosophical tenets of alternative religious groups within Mipam Dawa's world, and an optimistic engagement with them across sectarian differences. Whether this hope of respectful correspondence beyond sectarian divides was often manifested in his community, we do not fully know. To be sure, Mipam Dawa's employment of high poetic language to address these religious others does as much to elevate his own prestige as it does to convey respect to his addressees. Nonetheless, knowing the strong influence his teacher Tukwan exerted upon his worldview, and given Tukwan's familiarity and engagement with religious others, I read Mipam's manual as a vision, at times descriptive and at times prescriptive, of the Buddhist community he wished to see come to fruition in his own time.

Occasions for Letter Writing in Mipam's World

Mipam's extensive list of illustrations for letters to be sent on various occasions paints a portrait of the life of the monastic scholar as he sees it. Of course, his illustrations include several models for political letters — letters to kings, chiefs, or lay patrons — that we have seen and discussed in the previous letter-writing manuals. The most valuable material in these illustrations, however, is how letters work to bind together networks of monks, high and low, in the common concerns and milestones of their institutional life.

SUMMARY OF OCCASIONS FOR LETTER WRITING:[40]

1. Replying to an edict you have received [from a lama]
2. When someone is newly established upon the throne of a great monastic seat
3. When you are offering a letter on the occasion of [a lama] giving an extensive dharma teaching
4. For a Losar feast
5. Respectfully offering a *khatak* on Losar
6. When you are sending a letter along with gifts for a monk's enthronement
7. When you are writing to a great king
8. When you are offering a reply to an edict [from a king]
9. [To a king] on Losar
10. Writing to those who are great leaders
11. To the patrons and main patron of a monastery
12. When a holy one in a lama's retinue is invited to a dharma throne by another high lama, and [you] entrust him with a [letter] of oblation
13. Writing to one of the workers within your retinue
14. Writing to somebody who gave you great hospitality on the road
15. Writing when entrusting someone to a monastic assembly
16. Offering long-life requests for a holy person
17. Writing in times of conflict among monastic leaders
18. Writing to console a great person if someone in his retinue who was very important passes away
19. Requesting a clarification about a new reincarnation
20. Announcing a newly found reincarnation
21. Requesting to meet a lama face to face
22. A request for a dharma teaching
23. When issuing an invitation to a lama's enthronement at a monastery, great or small
24. When exhorting a great scholar toward a purpose on behalf of the teachings and the beings
25. To travellers to Ü
26. To military leaders going to war
27. When someone wins a war or is being enthroned
28. To a high official with whom you want to improve your friendly relations

When asking for dharma transmissions, or requesting to meet a lama in person, a letter could serve as the initial prostration of respect to form the new relationship. When a monastic hierarch is installed on a new throne and in a new position of authority, we see letters of invitation for the enthronement and letters of congratulations. When a new

40. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* drawn from pp. 30-101.

religious image is erected, letters of congratulations and auspicious wishes might be sent. When a reincarnate lama has passed away and his next incarnation is being identified, we see letters asking for clarification from higher authorities as well as letters of blessing when the incarnation is found. Losar, the celebration of the lunar new year, was also celebrated among Geluk monks with feasts, letters of auspicious greetings, and gifts such as offering scarves.

The travelling life of Geluk scholars during this period is likewise highlighted in the illustrations Mipam Dawa pens. He gives examples of letters written to fellow monks studying in central Tibet. When a monk leaves his own monastery's territory and needs to accept the hospitality and help of a benefactor on the road, we have examples for letters of thanks for kindnesses received. Indeed, while Mipam Dawa himself never ventured to central Tibet to study at one of the three great Geluk seats, it was a common practice among the most promising scholars to do so. The journey from Lhasa to Amdo is about two thousand kilometers long and, judging from the account of this journey from the biography of Jamyang Zhepa, it was a massive undertaking that served as a networking circuit where a monk could befriend donors, give teachings, collect gifts, and map his monastery's friendships along a path of safe haven. Jamyang Zhepa corresponded with his main patrons through letters before and after his journey to Amdo, for which he relied on their support.

Several of Mipam Dawa's illustrations deal with military conflict: writing to military leaders who are going to war, writing to one's monastic peers during a time of civil strife, and writing to a political leader or conqueror who is being enthroned over a territory. During Mipam Dawa's lifetime, central Tibet had been invaded by the Gorkha

armies of Nepal and Qing forces had stepped in to push them back to the Nepali border. In Amdo, Gönlung Monastery — the seat of his root teacher, Tukwan — suffered physical destruction and administrative disintegration; one letter from Tukwan to his friend Gungtang lama at Labrang mentions how the courtyard of his great monastery had been reduced to a wild grove for birds to roost. Further back in history, we remember the famous letter of Sakya Pandita to the religious leaders of Tibet during the Mongol take-over. In his long cyclical, he urged Tibetan religious leaders to submit and cooperate with the Mongol Khan, relating his military exploits among other people groups but promising his sincerity in protecting Tibetans and their dharma. In each of these contexts of conflict, letters served to relate military news and also to aspire toward resolution and peaceful conditions for the spread of the dharma.

Lamas often remembered each other's birthdays, writing letters of auspicious wishes and long life requests when their lama friends reached landmark decades. Tukwan's letters include several of these congratulatory birthday letters, for example, to Changkya Lama when he turned seventy. Tukwan's letter collection also includes a letter to a young incarnate lama for his seventh birthday.

Monastic retinues were intimate cliques, and the loss of a member, either to death or to assuming a new position at another monastery, was recognized and marked through letters. Mipam Dawa includes letter illustrations for "writing to console a great person if someone in his retinue that he cherished passes away."[41] It also appears to have been a matter of course for a monk to "entrust" someone among his retinue to another lama or another monastery, whether by the leading monk's initiative or at the request of another monk wishing to appoint him to a new position.

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41. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* page 96.

Letters served as a medium for the exchange of gifts — including books. Although Mipam Dawa doesn't list textual exchange as a discrete epistolary occasion in his manual, from Tukwan's letters we see several examples of letters written to request texts be composed, to send one's own compositions as gifts, and to send books acquired elsewhere as gifts. Among scholars and friends, the exchange of books enabled scholarly communication, the dissemination of texts to a wider array of libraries and audiences, and the preservation of rare texts. Exhortations to write books often traveled by letter and helped to fuel the economy of textual production. If one were to write a history of the book in Tibet, she would benefit from the information embedded within letters about the circulation of texts, production of texts, and debates about texts.

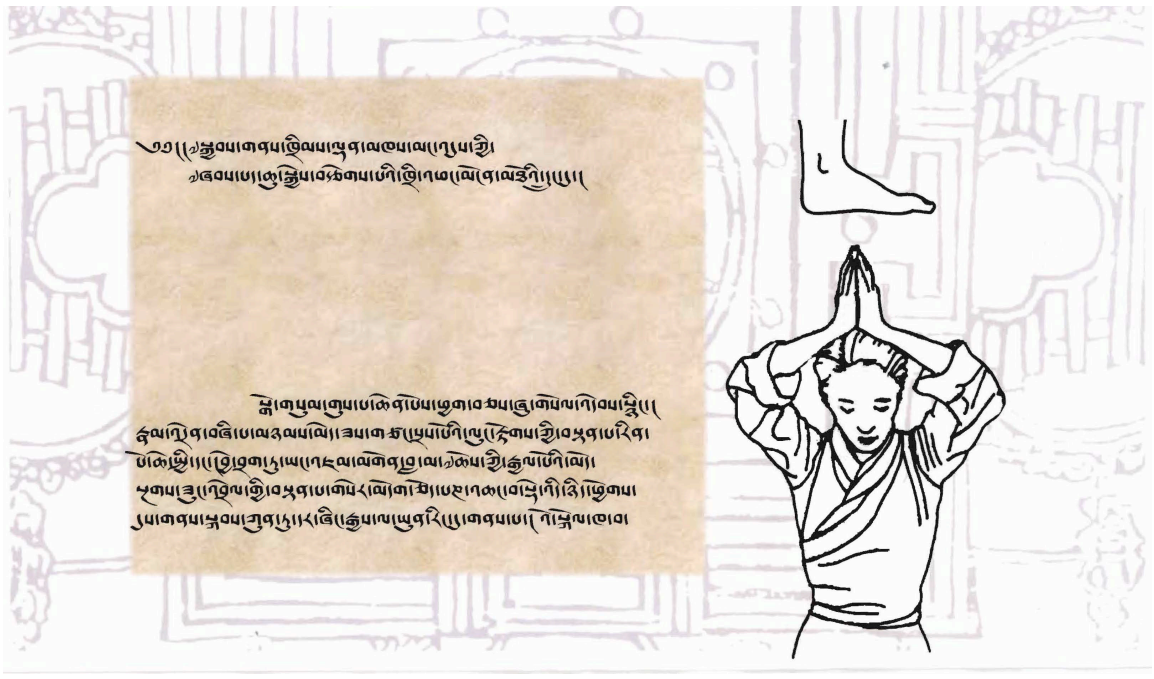
The Ritual Embodiment of Letters

In the epistolary tradition we have seen develop over the course of three manuals, letters are embodied extensions of the personhood of the sender and the recipient. The size of the script represents the status of the writer — higher-ranking writers introduce themselves with large letters, and lower-ranking writers with small, humble letters. The size of the drop-down space represents the hierarchical distance between sender and recipient and is tightly prescribed, ranging from one finger-width of space to ten or twelve, depending on the distance of social stratification at work in the letter. Mipam Dawa's instructions on the line of address further reflect his conception of the embodiment of letters, adding an important ritual element to our understanding of the Tibetan Buddhist epistolary form:

> When exemplifying your timidity and shy respect, as you do when prostrating before [a great person's] actual body, you speak from the lower-most part of his

> body, and so write "before the feet of" or "before the lotus feet of"; and leave the rest of that line blank. Following, really planting yourself under the feet of the superior, a finger span or more below [his name], write something like "offered with great respect," and transition into the inquiry after his health, or the sending of regards […].[42]

Mipam Dawa's references to the superior's "actual body" and to "really planting yourself" show that he is not merely invoking a bodily metaphor here, but is appealing to the extension of bodily postures into the form of the letter. He quotes Pakpa's manual by reiterating that "whoever to whom you yourself would prostrate, you should write 'petitioned before the feet of.' "[43] The social obligations for showing respect and hierarchy that inform bodily expressions apply directly to the context of letters because letters are prostrations made of words. With the hands of the letter writer (in other words, the drop-down space measured in finger-widths) extended toward the feet of the recipient, exemplified in the line of address "before the feet of so-and-so," a letter from an inferior to a superior literally maps a prostration in motion.



42. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland*, page 14.
43. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* page 13.

It is interesting to notice that the letter-folding patterns described in these Geluk manuals differ from the standardized letter folding of the Ganden government. In her analysis of the Ganden government's official letters, Schneider offers visual presentations of their letter-folding style.[44] The letter is first folded along a central vertical axis and then folded many times horizontally into a thick rectangular stack that can be wrapped near the open ends. This method ensures more security and privacy of the letter, a concern more central to the official correspondence of the Ganden government.

Mipam Dawa's folding instructions indicate fewer folds and a lack of a fold along the horizontal axis: the final result is a letter easier to open and read, with a wider profile that can be loosely secured with a katak rather than bound with tight secrecy as were Ganden government documents. An interview with a contemporary Tibetan from Amdo also reveals a compelling oral tradition about the embodied aspects of Buddhist letters, like those Mipam Dawa describes. According to contemporary practice, the folding of the letter should mimic the way in which a person bows. While it may have been as simple as a device for helping students remember how to fold letters properly, the bodily imagery within epistolary instruction again beckons a ritualized interpretation of the form of the letter.

Not only the form, but the rhetorical structure of Tibetan Buddhist letters also evokes ritual action. The standard parts of a letter, as they have been articulated by Jamyang Zhepa, Sumpa Khenpo, and Mipam Dawa, mirror the structure of the seven-limbed prayer, the well-known ritual framework derived from the *Guide to the*

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44. Schneider, Hanna. "Tibetan Epistolary Style." In *The Dalai Lamas: a Visual History*. 1st English ed. Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2005. Pages 258-261. See page 259.

Bodhisattva's Way of Life.[45] Letters and prayers both begin with prostration, then make an offering, engage in a narrative sequence describing the relationship of oneself with another, request a dharma teaching, make a supplication for the teacher's long life, and offer a closing blessing or dedication of merit.

Parts of a Tibetan Offering Letter	**Seven-Limbed Prayer**
Prostration to recipient (line of address)	Prostration
Offering of the letter (line identifying sender)	Offering
Narrative: inquiry after health, sending of regards, and relating one's circumstances	Narrative: confession of one's sins and rejoicing in others' virtue
Relating the purpose for writing (traditionally, requesting a teaching)	Request for a dharma teaching
Prayer for recipient's long life	Request for teacher's long life
Concluding blessing	Concluding dedication

In a society as permeated by religious symbols and as structured by vertical hierarchies as Tibet is, it is easy to venture an analysis of letters through the lens of ritual. Ritual invokes religious meaning on the one hand, and on the other, as Catherine Bell has articulated in such detail, ritual creates social formations.[46] Letters, like rituals, symbolically craft a relationship between the self and another, employing words as well as bodily gestures to express hierarchy and proceeding through a prescribed manner of relating to one superior to oneself. Letters accompany gifted offerings, and the

45. Sanskrit title *Bodhisattvacharyāvatāra.* My thanks to José I. Cabezón for his observation that a Tibetan letter of respect by Sumpa Khenpo closely resembles the seven-limbed prayer.
46. Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice.* New York: Oxford, 1992.

quintessential token of ritual offering in Tibet is the presentation of a white offering scarf, in which letters are wrapped for presentation. Epistolary networks, then, can be read as ritual networks that reinforce and replicate hierarchical relationships, both within and across institutions, whether at the local or international level. Indeed, the symbolic power of letters as ritual objects is what spurred several high-ranking Geluk lamas to consider with such fastidious detail how Buddhist letters should be written, and by whom, and in what contexts. If letters were merely "cultural" products in early modern Tibet, top Geluk scholastics and administrators would not have invested such time and study in the making of epistolary manuals.

This study of letters in the early modern growth of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism not only illuminates a particular epistolary context in a far corner of the globe, adding to our global repository of knowledge about epistolary form and function, but also reveals something more fundamental about the epistolary form itself. The Tibetan case offers us a model for how letters can function as the material embodiment of ritual relationships, a point that has not been emphasized in the study of epistolary materials in other geographic contexts.

Conclusio

Chapter Five:

Epistolary Buddhism Through the Lens of Social Network Theory

The field of social network theory, whose primary applications have been until recently in the study of business organizations and information systems, is increasingly finding new purchase across the humanities. Social network theory conceives of agency in terms of networks composed of nodes and ties, where nodes represent individuals within a network and ties represent the relationships among them. Within this schematic, the agency of an individual is attributed more to her positioning within the network than to her personal qualities or individual resources. Understanding Geluk Buddhism in Amdo as a network of epistolary relationships, it is not difficult to recognize the potential for social network theory to aid our elaboration of the Geluk school's growth during the early modern period.

Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of social networks conceived within social network theory. The first is the ego-centric network, which revolves around a particular individual; Thomas Jefferson's network of acquaintances would fit this designation. A second network type is the socio-centric network, or "network in a box," such as a network of all the students in a single classroom.[1] Third are open system networks, in which the borders of the network are not clearly defined. The early modern Geluk epistolary community most closely aligns with this characterization. Membership in its network is broad enough to include individuals, like the merchant who requested letter-writing instructions from his lama so that he could conduct trade more effectively, who

1. Kadushin, Charles. *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Page 4.

may only loosely qualify as "Geluk Buddhist letter writers." The boundaries of the group are fluid, shifting, and highly subjective in definition. One theorist notes that "these are the most interesting networks. They are also the most difficult to study."[2]

If we were to generate a complete map of the early modern Geluk epistolary network, it would stretch from Lhasa to the Himalayas to Amdo to Beijing to Mongolia to Russia. Thousands of ties would connect a variety of actors: local lamas, yogis, officials, disciples, and patrons all the way up to the Dalai Lamas, Panchen Lamas, and Qing Emperors. We would notice distinct patterns of communication: not everyone has the privilege of writing a letter directly to the Dalai Lama, for example, so he has fewer ties than middle-ranking lamas engaged in regional administration and outreach. At the same time, we know that for an individual to be represented on the epistolary map at all indicates a certain level of literacy, influence, and privilege; for that reason, nodes representing farmers, herders, women, children, and tradesmen would only be sparsely represented. Watching the map dynamically shift over time, we would see the number of ties to Amdo and to Mongolian regions steadily increase concurrently with the rapid growth of clerical institutions in those areas. We would also notice a growing polarization during the eighteenth century between the Lhasa branch of the network and the Amdo branch of the network. The shape of the network across regions and over time, as well as its overall size and density, would tell us much about the role of official epistolary relationships in serving the growth of Geluk Buddhism.

Producing such a map would require an investment of data collection representing the regions of Kham, central Tibet, western Tibet, the Himalayan kingdoms, and

2. Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. Page 4.

Mongolia proper that lies beyond the scope of the current work; it is a project that well may be worth undertaking in the future in collaboration with experts in the literary production of these various regions. Until that time when a dynamic digital map of Geluk epistolary Buddhism comes to fruition, allowing us to make firmer macro-social claims about these letter-writing networks, we can meanwhile apply the insights of social network theory more anecdotally to several of the historical examples I have introduced in the preceding chapters. Such an application will suggest explanations for why certain letter writers in the early modern Geluk community emerged as influential.

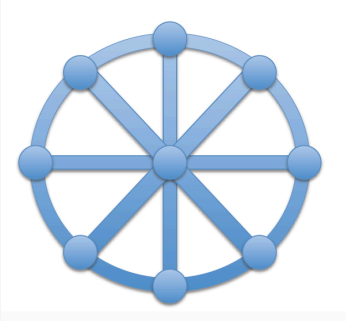
Centrality

Centrality can refer to a person within the network or to the character of the network as a whole. In the former sense, we can ask "how central is this person within the network?" and compare that individual's centrality with that of another individual. This perspective is helpful for identifying the power actors within a complex scheme of relationships. In the latter sense — of the centralization of the network as a whole — we can ask questions like "how centralized is this network compared to other networks?" In other words, having identified a particular node as "central," we can ask how many links separate that center from the peripheral nodes of the network. The fewer the links between the center and the periphery, the more control the center can exert over the periphery, and the more centralized the network is said to be. I begin with the former sense: analyzing the centrality of a given node or person in a network. There are three distinct ways of assessing the centrality of a node, and each will offer particular insights

into what roles centrality may have served in the expansion of early modern Geluk Buddhist power.

Degree and Betweenness

First, the centrality of a person can be imagined as a function of his or her "degree," or the sum of the number of other points to which a given point is connected. In the image of a Buddhist dharma wheel with a hub and eight spokes connected at the rim, the hub has a degree of eight and each node on the rim of the wheel has a degree of three. In this simplified schematic, the hub is clearly the most central point on the wheel.



The node in the network with the highest degree also has another characteristic: it falls on the shortest routes (geodesics) between the largest number of other points. This means that the hub of the wheel is the most efficient route between more pairs of nodes than any other single node is. Thus, centrality can also be measured in terms of a point's "betweenness."

One major theorist of centrality notes that "scholars who define [centrality] in terms of degree are responding to the visibility or the potential for activity in the communication of such points."[3] A person who is central in this sense is a "major channel of information" and "is likely to develop a sense of being in the mainstream of

3. Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*, page 219.

information flow in the network."[4] In our application of the concept to Geluk epistolary Buddhism, this means that individuals with the highest degree — or letter exchanges with the largest number of other people — are the most central letter writers, the primary agents of epistolary communication. Scholars who define centrality in terms of betweenness are more interested in the control of, rather than exposure to, communication. "A point that falls on the communication paths between other points exhibits a potential for *control of their communication*. It is this potential for control that defines the centrality of these points."[5] Individuals with high betweenness are positioned not only to know more of what is being communicated within the network, but also to influence the transmission of that information: to monitor, censor, augment, or translate the message.

In my reading of Geluk Buddhism in early modern Amdo, a certain type of letter writer meets the criteria for centrality in terms of degree and betweenness. This type is the high-ranking lama with strong Mongolian ties, exemplified best by figures like Sumpa Khenpo, Changkya Rölpé Dorjé, and Tukwan Lozang Chökyi Nyima. These three lamas boasted some of the largest official letter collections from the period,[6] and by virtue of their Mongol ethnic heritage, they also served as key intermediaries among Tibetan, Mongolian, and Qing contingents of the Geluk network. Their high degree and betweenness as letter writers are evident both in the sheer volume of their epistolary production and in their position at the intersection of three diverse stakeholder groups in the Geluk enterprise. Social network theory suggests that these leading figures were

4. Freeman, Linton C. "Centrality in Social Networks Conceptual Clarification." *Social Networks* 1, no. 3 (1979): 215–39. Pp. 219-220.
5. Freeman, Linton C. "Centrality in Social Networks Conceptual Clarification," page 221.
6. For example, Rölpé Dorjé's *Collected Works* contain 460 folio sides of letters, Tukwan's *Collected Works* contain 165 modern pages of letters, and Sumpa Khenpo's *Collected Works* contain 124 folio sides of letters. These are some of the largest Geluk *epistolaria* from the period.

positioned well for both exposure to and control of the information circulating among these groups.

We know that these figures were deeply involved in mediating between Qing imperial interests and Geluk institutional needs in principalities far from Beijing. Elverskog has elucidated how, during the eighteenth century, the Mongols employed Buddhism as a rhetoric of belonging within a Qing state ruled by bodhisattva emperors, eventually claiming the Qing as their own rather than as an unwelcome suzerain.[7] This transformation of the Mongol national narrative, in which independent tribes were imaginatively subsumed within a multiethnic Buddhist Qing, mirrors the increasingly trans-regional and multicultural rhetoric at work in the writings of lamas like Sumpa Khenpo. Did Amdo's Mongolian Geluk letter writers help translate the emerging Mongolian narrative of a Buddhist Qing into the Tibetan context? A careful investigation of their biographies and textual production may reveal the extent to which lamas such as these three were responsible for both exposure to and control of a rhetoric of Qing support for Geluk Buddhism that could diplomatically unite Tibetan, Mongol, and Qing interests.

Closeness

A third measure of individual centrality sheds a different light on our analysis of Geluk epistolary Buddhism. Centrality can be identified in terms of degree, betweenness, or "closeness." Closeness means that a point requires a fewer total number of

7. Elverskog, Johan. *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006. Page 93: "By the eighteenth century the Mongols were thus not simply a part of the Qing, or loyal subjects of the emperor; it was their Great Qing. They had in fact become Mongols-of-the-Qing."

intermediary nodes to reach each of the other nodes on the graph; the hub of a wheel is extremely "close" because it can reach each of its outlying nodes directly. The measurement of centrality in terms of closeness indicates that the agent is both independent (not needing to rely on others to convey one's information) and efficient (since one's messages can quickly pervade one's surroundings).[8] Closeness also relates to the idea of the centralization of the network as a whole, for the closer the center to the periphery, the more centralized the network itself is said to be.

The three letter-writing manuals that serve as the basis for this study reveal the closeness of the Geluk letter writer to his monastic, political, and economic communities. The sheer variety and quantity of official letter-writing relationships the manuals prescribe, and the particularity of the occasions for which letters are recommended, indicate just how close, and therefore central, those letter writers or aspired to be to the political and social life around them. Mipam Dawa's manual, for example, prescribes writing letters not only to monks and officials, but also to such unexpected figures as scribes, village mantrins, Nyingma followers, and Bön adherents; his instructions for writing "directly to those inferior to you" further indicate that his scheme aims to minimize intermediaries as it lays out many forms for directly engaging an impressive variety of people of varying social stations and ranks, from kings to humble artisans.[9]

Monks like Mipam Dawa — deeply involved in local and regional religious affairs, even if they were not intercultural emissaries like the Mongolian Geluk lamas

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8. Freeman, Linton C. "Centrality in Social Networks Conceptual Clarification." Page 226. "Thus, the centrality of a point may be determined by reference to any of three different structural attributes of that point: its degree, its betweenness, or its closeness. The choice of a particular structural attribute and its associated measure depends upon the context of the substantive application intended. Concern with communication activity suggests a degree-based measure. Interest in control of communication requires a measure based upon betweenness. And concern with either independence or efficiency leads to the choice of a measured based upon closeness."

9. mi pham zla ba. *Beautiful Garland,* page 89.

mentioned above — were also central to the Geluk network, albeit in a different way. To what extent Mipam Dawa as a letter writer was truly "close" enough to influence his local community is, of course, difficult to assess without deeper knowledge of Mipam Dawa's life and more robust research on the social and legal history of Repkong around the turn of the nineteenth century. Oidtmann's study of Qing-Geluk relations in Xunhua, based on extensive archival research, exemplifies well the closeness of Geluk monastic officials to the political and social changes in their immediate environment by means of letters. The definition of centrality as "closeness" holds much promise for future studies of Tibetan local history, especially as archival holdings become available that can further illuminate the scope of monastic institutional involvement in localized issues like trade, conflict resolution, and leadership transitions.

Strong Ties

In network analysis, ties between individuals can be categorized as either “strong” or “weak.” The relative strength or weakness of a tie can be measured in a number of different ways: in terms of “the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.”[10] Indeed, the complexity of determining tie strength is a fundamental part of the concept’s application and leads us into the “social” side of social network theory. We can measure strong ties in Geluk epistolary Buddhism in the number of letters exchanged, the length of time an epistolary relationship persisted, and the (highly subjective) perceived level of emotion, intimacy, and reciprocity communicated through letters.

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10. Granovetter 1973, quoted in Krackhardt, David. “The Strength of Strong Ties: The Importance of Philos in Organizations.” *Networks and Organizations: Structure, Form, and Action* (1992): 216-239. Page 216.

Strong ties between individuals are usually affective in nature; they represent feelings of mutuality, trust, or friendship. David Krackhardt, one prominent theorist of strong ties, chooses to use the Greek word *philos* to characterize strong ties and analyzes the importance of friendship in the success of businesses. Krackhardt found that "the pattern of friendship ties within an organization will be critical to an organization's ability to deal with crises. [...] An organization characterized by friendship ties that cut across departmental boundaries is better suited to adapting to environmental changes and uncertainty."[11]

The special power of strong ties — or friendships — emerges during times of uncertainty, insecurity, or change. When external factors threaten the position of an individual within the network, or indeed threaten the network as a whole, strong ties provide stability and security.[12] They enable the network to persist in its basic configuration despite fluctuations. To relate this theory to early modern Geluk Buddhism, we can recall the epistolary friendship that developed over many years between Jamyang Zhepa and the second Changkya lama. True to the characterization of strong ties, their friendship demonstrated persistence over time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services. Their strong tie allowed each to support one another's institutional ambitions during a time of profound change and upheaval in Amdo as monasteries were rebuilt, new monastic colleges were founded, and Qing influence in the region was rapidly expanding.

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11. Krackhardt, David. "The Strength of Strong Ties: The Importance of Philos in Organizations." *Networks and Organizations: Structure, Form, and Action* (1992): 216-239. Page 218.
12. Krackhardt, David. "The Strength of Strong Ties," Page 219.

Weak Ties

Strong ties are usually assumed to be the more important ties in creating social networks. Indeed, they form the skeletal structure of the network and, especially in open system networks, allow us to visibly identify poles or clusters on which to focus our attention. Weak ties, however, also play a vital part in the health of network systems. In 1973, network theorist Mark Granovetter made a highly influential argument that weak ties matter even more than strong ties do.[13] His premise is that strong ties connect similar individuals who already share common pathways of information, and so the exchanges across strong ties are often redundant and inefficient; weak ties, linking nodes that share few common pathways and connections, connect disparate parts of the system to each other. These weak ties, or "bridges," enable the inflow of new information or capital into a group. They make possible both innovation and a more sensitive attunement and response system to conditions outside the group. Weak ties, it turns out, have a strength of their own.

One compelling example of the power of weak ties in early modern Geluk Buddhism returns us to the field of Buddhist science. Because of weak ties linking several Geluk scholars (especially Sumpa Khenpo and a lama named Tsenpo Nominhan) to the scientific community at the Qing court, Geluk scholars encountered new Jesuit contributions to astronomy and world geography.[14] These lamas served as bridges linking traditional Geluk Buddhism to foreign forms of knowledge and led the production of new world geographies, doxographies of world religions, and creative syntheses of Tibetan,

13. Granovetter, Mark S. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology*, 1973, 1360–80.
14. See Yongdan, Lobsang. "Tibet Charts the World: The Btsan po No mon han's *Detailed Description of the World*, an early major scientific work in Tibet." In Gray Tuttle, *Mapping the Modern in Tibet.* Andiast, Switzerland: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2011. See also Sweet, Michael J. (Michael Jay). "Jesus the World Protector: Eighteenth-Century Gelukpa Historians View Christianity;" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26, no. 1 (2006): 173–78.

Chinese, and European calendric systems. The official Geluk histories do not emphasize the weak ties that sparked such innovation; in fact, it is often quite difficult to retrace the relationships that linked Amdo Geluk scholars to the Jesuits.[15] The reluctance of Geluk institutional narratives to acknowledge foreign influence and innovation makes analysis of weak ties challenging, despite the fact that such ties often enable important social or intellectual shifts. Future research on weak ties, perhaps by challenging the official histories with archival research and other social historical methods, might improve our understanding of how innovation occurs within Tibetan Buddhism, a tradition in which the idea of innovation is often rhetorically denigrated.

Letters as Cultural Capital

Social network theory grants us more precise insights into the power dynamics at work within the early modern Geluk epistolary network. Where social network theory currently falls short in humanistic applications like the present one is in its ability to describe the complexities and contingencies of links themselves as culturally constructed products, or even as agents in their own right.[16] The myriad and ever-changing ways in which humans relate to each other are not as simple as identical black lines; they involve social hierarchies, cultural conditions, economic limitations, and creative constructions that take on a livelihood beyond the intention of their creators. Links or ties themselves are not static position-holders, but rather dynamic pathways along which social capital —

15. Lobsang Yongdan has made fruitful efforts in this regard. See his forthcoming dissertation from Cambridge University.

16. In contrast to social network theory, which is focused on human agents, actor-network theory includes material objects and environmental characteristics as social agents within network systems. See Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

status, prestige, influence — is transferred or even transformed.[17] Network theorist Nan Lin recognized the important link between social network theory and the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu and the cultural theorists toward understanding the complex nature of social capital flowing through networks.[18] Following Lin's suggestion, here I connect social network theory to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, a move that leaves more space for the complex negotiations of power and identity at stake in the forging of social networks.

Bourdieu outlines a vision of capital (economic, political, cultural, religious, social, and symbolic) situated within a field or interplay of fields. Drawing on game theory and the metaphor of the wager, Bourdieu describes social actors competing for capital and for the means to convert certain types of capital into others. "Cultural capital" is one of his best-developed categories. It includes all manner of acquired knowledge that gives an individual access to the lifestyle of the dominant class: linguistic competencies (even the subtleties of dialect or pronunciation), manners, body language, tastes, knowledge, and tacit knowledge. For Bourdieu, cultural capital translates directly to social capital, or the status, prestige, or influence that interest network theorists.

Bourdieu specifies three ways in which cultural capital takes form. First, cultural capital is *embodied* in persons through education, especially the education one receives at home. It takes form through memory practices and bodily conditioning. Second, cultural capital is *objectified* in cultural products that require cultural knowledge for their use: books, works of art, and specialized tools. Third, cultural capital is *institutionalized*

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17. Michael Mann has articulated how various forms of capital (ideological, economic, military, and political) are converted as they pass through social networks. See his four-volume *Sources of Social Power.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 (second edition).
18. Lin, Nan. "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital." *Connections* 22, no. 1 (1999): 28–51.

through education systems, governments, and other credential-granting bodies that authorize certain individuals to be stewards and shapers of culture.

In Geluk letter writing, cultural capital is *embodied* through the literary training of a Geluk monk.[19] Through the memorization practices that mark a monk's education in grammar, orthography, poetics, and the rules of classical composition, through his internalized knowledge of the broader corpus of Tibetan Buddhist literature, and through his manual skill in the calligraphic arts, we can see that letters are products of capital embodied in a monastic scholar over the course of many years. Bourdieu notes that embodied cultural capital is most prevalent in non-literate societies, but Tibetan Buddhism makes for an interesting case because of its highly literate institutional culture that nonetheless prescribes a physical embodiment of Buddhist knowledge through monastic education and comportment.

The *objectified* capital of Geluk epistolary Buddhism is the letter itself as a material object. We might add to the letter its accompanying seal impressions, silk *khatak* wrapping, gifts, and the *accoutrements* of the literary person, such as writing utensils, seals, ink, and paper. These objects, when given as gifts or wielded as credentials, enable access to socially dominant circles. They signify elite status and official authority, a signification that is reinforced by their treatment upon receipt if they are read aloud, handled with care, duplicated, archived, or displayed. When edited and printed within collections, letters assume further prestige as products of intensive labor financed by wealthy donors and also as signs of the textual authority invoked by clerical institutions.

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19. Georges Dreyfus, in his illuminating study of Geluk monastic education, describes the bodily and memory practices that form the Geluk monk. Dreyfus, Georges B. J. *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk*. University of California Press, 2002.

In early modern Geluk Buddhism, letters were not mere instruments of network formation, but were also physical manifestations of the erudition and influence of elite Buddhist institutions. They were agents of both inclusion and exclusion; they delineated the social world of Geluk Buddhism.

Finally, the cultural capital of Buddhist letter writing is *institutionalized* as letter writing becomes increasingly embedded in the administrative structures of Geluk monastic life and standardized in the publication of epistolary manuals. In a cycle of reinforcing authority, letters come to serve as both *products* and *producers* of elite Geluk monasticism; letters become a *sine qua non* for the respectable Geluk hierarch, and letters set the conditions within Geluk institutions for literary education and administration to take place. As cultural capital with symbolic power, letters are deployed in the making of legitimacy by the dominant class. This deployment happens in the "field of power," the space where cultural fields, economic fields, and political fields collide and struggle against each other for the assertion of the value of their respective forms of capital.[20] Institutions overlay cultural, political, economic, and symbolic fields of capital production and compete at each of those layers for the privilege to set the "currency" of the capital in play. Tibetan Buddhist monastics seek to elevate the cultural capital of elite Buddhist culture that renders their institutions legitimate and earns them donations and reverence.

20. See Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996.

Geluk and Qing Epistolary Authority in Competition

Following Bourdieu, what was the competitive context in which the authors of our Geluk letter-writing manuals promoted their particular epistolary vision within the field of power? Among many possible considerations, such as intra-Tibetan regional and sectarian competition, or competition between clerical and shamanic models of Buddhist power, here I find it most critical to highlight the Qing administrative epistolary culture that served as a major competitive counterpoint to the official Buddhist letters promoted in the Geluk manuals.

The Qing government, a deep and extensive bureaucracy whose functioning relied on textual records, used correspondence with the various indigenous leaders in their outer territories to assert imperial authority. Tibetan Buddhist leaders in the Amdo region, too, were engaged in ongoing correspondence with Qing officials at various ranks. Oidtmann's investigation of Qing archives from Xunhua Prefecture has shown that Tibetan Buddhist lamas, abbots, stewards, and lay officials in the service of Buddhist monasteries engaged in ongoing correspondence with Qing subprefects, prefects, magistrates, grand-governors, and ambans.[21] Qing administrative correspondence was significant enough within the Geluk monastic sphere that institutions like Labrang Monastery maintained archives of Qing documents and quoted those documents in petitions to Qing officials.[22]

21. Oidtmann, Max. "Between Patron and Priest: Amdo Tibet Under Qing Rule 1791-1911." Ph.D. Dissertation: Harvard University, 2013.
22. Oidtmann, "Between Patron and Priest," page 489.

While nineteenth-century Geluk historians (such as Welmang Pandita[23] and Könchok Tenpa Rabgyé, the author of the *Oceanic Annals*[24]) make occasional reference to Geluk-Qing official communication, very little of this epistolary activity is documented in the printed collected works of Geluk hierarchs. Geluk collected works, like the letter-writing manuals we have studied, highlight official letters (*chab shog*) that appeal to the authority of Buddhism and the patron-priest relationships forged between Tibetan lamas and the Qing Emperors or Mongol royals. The employment of Indic literary tropes and ornate poetics within these letters further underscores the Buddhist cultural authority to which the letters appeal; Indian *kavya* serves as a courtly language, an elite register of discourse proper to heads of state and imperial chaplains. Below this elite apex of political power, however, interactions at the middle and lower levels of Qing administration are almost invisible in the Geluk letter collections and epistolary manuals published by the monasteries.

This is because, aside from the Buddhist diplomatic language used at the most elite and ceremonial levels of Qing-Geluk communication, the vast majority of Qing official letters to monastic leaders in Amdo lack any reference to the patron-priest relationship and any appeal to Buddhism as a source of authority for the relationship. Oidtmann notes that the late Qing legal archives from Xunhua prefecture are

> almost entirely free of any language concerning the notion of Qing patronage of Tibetan Buddhism. Among the documents examined in the course of this research, the subprefects never justify their involvement or interest in local matters in terms of their support for the Gelukpa or Buddhist faith. Nor is there

23. dbal mang dkon mchog rgyal mtshan. *rgya bod hor sog gi lo rgyus nyung ngur brjod pa byis pa 'jug pa'i bab stegs (A Briefly Uttered History of China, Tibet, Mongolia, and Hor: A Step for Children to Enter).* In the author's *Collected Works.* Woodblock edition published at Amchok (*a mchog)* Monastery. TBRC work W1KG1132. Volume 4 (pagination corrupt).
24. dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas. *mdo smad chos 'byung (Religious History of Amdo).* Lanzhou: Gansu Nationalities Publishing House, 1987.

> any indication that the subprefects actively patronized monastic establishments or that Tibetan litigants, either lay or monastic, expected Qing officials to act in a certain way because of religious devotion or other previous displays of piety.[25]

Furthermore, Oidtmann writes:

> In dealings with the reincarnate monks of the region, I have located no document in which the Xunhua magistrate referred to himself as a patron or disciple. Such rhetoric appears to have been limited to contact between the Xining amban or governor-general and lamas who possessed imperial titles and/or kūtuktu status such as the Jamyang Zhepa.[26]

The Buddhist language and etiquette promoted in Geluk manuals for official letter writing contrasts markedly with the everyday register of Qing administrative correspondence, which appeals to Qing legal authority rather than to the authority of Buddhism. In striving to dictate the discourse of their relationship, Geluk elites and Qing officials each promoted their own "official language" over and against the language of the other. In *Language and Symbolic Power,* Bourdieu argues that

> The official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses. It is in the process of state formation that the conditions are created for the constitution of a unified linguistic market, dominated by the official language. Obligatory on official occasions and in official places, this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured.[27]

Thus the development of Tibetan Buddhist letter-writing manuals can be read as a state-building enterprise of sorts, in competition with the Qing state-building project.

> It is necessary to distinguish between the capital necessary for the simple production of more or less legitimate ordinary speech, on the one hand, and the capital of instruments of expression (presupposing appropriation of the resources deposited in objectified form in libraries – books, and in particular in the 'classics,' grammars and dictionaries) which is needed to produce a written discourse worthy of being published, that is to say, made official, on the other. This production of instruments of production, such as rhetorical devices, genres, legitimate styles and manners and, more generally, all the formulations destined

25. Oidtmann, pp. 547-548.
26. Oidtmann, page 431.
27. Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991. Page 45.

> to be 'authoritative' and to be cited as examples of 'good usage,' confers on those who engage in it a power over language and thereby over the ordinary users of language, as well as over their capital.[28]

Language standardization is rooted in conceptions of authority, and the competition for power in Qing period Amdo even manifested on the level of epistolary discourse as two different "official languages" vied for primacy. In the early modern Geluk context, official Buddhist letters imitated the dense penetration of the Qing state into life in the outer reaches of the empire. The power of this symbolic authority spurred the authors of Geluk letter-writing manuals to promote the genre of political letters, *chab shog,* within Buddhist monastic contexts so that they could compete to control the official rhetoric that creates polities.

The Distinctive Agency of Letters

This study has underscored how letters forged ties that linked imagined communities of leaders and literati across vast distances and ethno-cultural divides; yet letters were not the only links of network formation in early modern Tibetan Buddhism. Networks of trade, study, ritual exchange, population migration, pilgrimage, governmental jurisdiction, and monastic administration all wove their varied tapestries of interaction across the Tibetan Plateau and beyond. Given the numerous types of networks operative in early modern Tibet and the many different modes of agency they can enable, what do letters and epistolary networks offer that is distinct from other modes of network formation?

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28. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power,* pp. 57-58.

Collins has argued that bodily presence is an unequalled asset in interaction ritual networks.[29] Bodily presence, however powerful, is difficult to convey through the long-distance networks that cross the wild and varied terrain of Tibet, Mongolia, the Himalayas, and China. The time and resources required to transport people (especially high-status individuals) across such distances are great, not to mention the challenges of local language diversity or the dangers of brigand attacks and foreign diseases. Circulating texts through a system of trained couriers is faster and less resource intensive than transporting a high lama on a palanquin along with his retinue of servants. While Collins would argue that letter exchanges could never match the power of bodily presence, and Tibetan history reveals an impressive record of pre-modern travel despite the hardships entailed, it is also true that epistolary exchanges can supplement bodily presence interactions by allowing for the faster pace of communication that is critical to large-scale enterprises like military activity or institutional expansion.

If texts are easier to transport than lamas, then how might letters function differently from other kinds of texts that were circulated across early modern Asia in the making of imagined communities? We have already discussed the powerful symbolic value of official letters as extensions of state authority into outlying territories. Additionally, according to the authors of our letter-writing manuals, letters extend individual personhood in ways that other genres of texts do not. Jamyang Zhepa, with his emphasis on *kavya* as a cosmopolitan Buddhist language, saw letters as extensions of a person's speech. Sumpa Khenpo saw letters as extensions of a person's mind or intentions, for example, the intentions of the Qing Emperor to rebuild Gönlung

29. Collins, Randall. *Interaction Ritual Chains.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014. See page 53 ff., "Is Bodily Presence Necessary?"

Monastery. Mipam Dawa saw letters as extensions of a person's body in a ritual prostration on the page, recalling Collins' emphasis on the importance of the body in ritual interactions. Reading the three manuals together as part of a gradual Geluk synthesis of epistolary theory, they claim that letters extend body, speech, and mind.

In the traditional Buddhist notion of individual personhood as comprising body, speech, and mind, letters symbolically convey the full agency of an individual. We see a further hint of this notion in a 1902 official edict of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, whose seals at the top and bottom of the page are accompanied by illustrations that depict the seals seated on lotus thrones carried by a *heruka* and snow lion, respectively; the Dalai Lama's seal is enthroned just as the body of the Dalai Lama himself would be.[30] Official letters, with their material, semantic, and symbolic dimensions as well as (perhaps most importantly) their seals of authority, convey extensions of personal agency in a powerful way that early modern Geluk hierarchs in Amdo recognized and sought to harness.

The closest Tibetan parallel to the extension of personal agency in letters may be the way in which Buddhist scriptures convey the material, semantic, and symbolic authority of the Buddha simultaneously. Their physical presence as material objects can purify the environment, fertilize fields, cure illnesses, or enliven religious statues; their semantic content transmits the Buddhist teachings; and their symbolic authority ornaments the walls of monastery chapels or illustrates a patron's generosity in order to assert an institution's moral legitimacy. Letters accomplish on the human plane what scriptures accomplish on the divine plane; they magnify and extend personal authority across distances and in multiple iterations at once, achieving an almost emanational

30. See the cover image of Schwieger, Peter. *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

effect. For the Geluk letter-writing manual authors we have studied, the power of official letters to extend personal agency as well as to imitate state authority proved a vital asset to the ambitious Geluk expansion underway in the long eighteenth century.

The present study has necessarily limited its scope to a particular region, time period, and sectarian network with a decidedly clerical orientation to Buddhism. This is not the only story of Tibetan letters, of course. As future studies of epistolary culture across the Tibetan language sphere emerge, we will likely see strikingly diverse understandings of letters' agency and diverse ways of applying that agency to the imagining of particular communities. In the nineteenth century, several leading intellectuals of the Non-sectarian (Rimé) movement in Kham composed letter-writing manuals for their own set of concerns and prospects.[31] During the Maoist period in the mid-twentieth century, Geluk lama Tseten Zhapdrung composed an epistolary manual that adapted classical Tibetan letter-writing conventions to the new political context in which folk culture and vernacularism were prized above elite scholastic traditions.[32] In Bhutan, where Ngalop ethnic nationalism is on the rise, several Dzongkha letter-writing

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31. See 'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas. *yig bskur rnam bzhag nye mkhor brjod pa dbyangs can rgyud mangs (Presentation on Correspondence: A Melodious Lute of Communicative Desiderata)*. In *rgya chen bka' mdzod*. New Delhi: Shechen, 2002. TBRC work W23723. Volume 9, pp. 181 - 235; 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po. *'phrin yig dper brjod ut+pala gzhon nu'i do shal (Illustrations of Letters: A Necklace of Young Utpala Flowers)*. In the author's *Collected Works* (*gsung 'bum*). TBRC W21807. Volume 18: 3-263. Gangtok: Gonpo tseten, 1977-1980; 'ju mi pham rgya mtsho. *yig bskur gyi rnam bzhag mdo tsam brjod pa me tog nor bu'i phreng ba. (Presentation on Correspondence Expressed in Brief: A Jeweled Garland of Flowers)*. In the author's *Collected Works (gsung 'bum)*. Chengdu: [gangs can rig gzhung dpe rnying myur skyobs lhan tshogs], 2007. TBRC W2DB16631. Volume 2, pp. 677 - 690.
32. tshe tan zhabs drung 'jigs med rig pa'i blo gros. *'phrin yig spel tshul lhag bsam pad mo 'dzum pa'i nyin byed (How Letters Spread: The Sun that Causes the Lotuses of Supreme Minds to Smile)*. In the author's *Collected Works* (gsung 'bum). TBRC W2DB4565. 4: 459-479. Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 2007.

manuals have emerged in recent decades.[33] The age-old art of correspondence continues to find new purchase in the imagining of communities.

33. ma Ni rdo rje. *rdzong kha'i yig skur rnam gzhag blo gsar dgyes pa'i mgul rgyan padma'i phreng ba (Dzongkha Letter-Writing Manual: A Garland of Lotuses that Ornaments the Throats of Joyous Young Minds).* Thimphu: KMT Publisher, 1995; kun bzang 'phrin las. *rdzong kha'i yig skur rnam gzhag (Dzongkha Letter-Writing Manual).* Thimphu: Ke-aem-kri dpe skrun khaṅ, 2001; rnam rgyal dbang phyug. *rdzong kha'i tshad ldan snyan zhu dang yig rigs 'bri thangs (Guide to Standard Report and Letter Writing in Dzongkha).* India: Omega Traders, 2001.

Post Scriptum

The Stewards of Epistolary Legacies

In hopes of encouraging and facilitating future work on Tibetan letters, I close with some bibliographical considerations about the transmission of epistolary material in Tibet. The letters from Tibet's past that persist into the present have been carefully tended by generations of stewards: monks and clerks who served as scribes, archivists, cataloguers, and editors, sometimes serving in each of these capacities at once. Here follow some analytical reflections on the roles these largely unknown agents have played in transmitting Tibetan Buddhist epistolary legacies, along with some words of guidance concerning our methods for reading and interpreting Tibetan letters in edited form.

Scribes

We know that scribes often transcribed letters from dictation, especially in administrative contexts, whether monastic or official. An official's handbook composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama's regent Sangyé Gyatso indicates that in the Ganden government bureaucracy, scribes also helped compose letters by either abbreviating or expanding the information dictated to them by superiors.[34] If a letter, at this time of its composition, met a certain threshold of institutional importance, the scribe would produce a duplicate of the letter (otherwise, because letters are written to be dispatched, the correspondence of a particular individual would be scattered throughout all the archives of his recipients and

34. The word for "scribe" he uses is *Yig mkhan,* which can mean scribe, secretary, clerk, copyist, etc. sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. *blang dor gsal bar ston pa'i drang thig dwangs shel me long (The Crystal Clear Mirror: A Straight Line That Clearly Reveals What to Accept and Reject)*. Composed in 1681. Dolanji, H.P., India: Sonam Drakpa, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1979. From the 20th c. Lhasa New Zhol Printery woodblocks. Pages 1-83 of TBRC work W8234. Folio 19a.6.

would be virtually impossible to reassemble should a need arise). Thus, the shaping of the Tibetan epistolary heritage begins at the very moment of composition, when the author or scribe creates the written text of a letter, editing the oral message if applicable, and duplicates the letter if it has administrative relevance.

Archivists

Most of the Tibetan letters that are extant today have been *selected* to survive. Archivists preserve letters because they meet one of several main criteria: either they are connected to important people, such as Tsongkhapa's letter to the Ming emperor; they contain valued content, like Buddhist doctrine or imperial laws; or they are products of exceptional literary or artistic skill. Most letter collections we currently have are not complete *epistolaria* (collections of all the letters a given figure ever wrote).

How were archived letters used? I have seen evidence of letters cited in the composition of histories[35] and biographies,[36] though it is not always clear whether the letters cited in such works were original documents or were letters printed in *Collected Works;* it is likely that historians and biographers had access to larger archives of original letters and documents than are represented in published *Collected Works*.

Cataloguers

Those who created catalogs of epistolary texts, whether for preservation purposes or for publication, held in their hands the power to shape epistolary concepts and

35. For example, the *Ocean Annals,* a history of Amdo composed in 1865, cites letters as sources — as in the quotation of one of Tukwan's official letters where he's praising someone else's qualities.
36. One can find letter citations in biographies ranging from Buton Rinchen Drup (bu ston rin chen grub, 1290-1364) to Sumpa Khenpo.

discourse. Since most Tibetan letters do not title themselves as "letters," the cataloguer has the privilege of transmitting cultural assumptions about what type of letter a certain text is, and as a result, influencing the growth and decline of various epistolary genre categorizations. Some Tibetan letters do appear to title themselves with a decorative title and an epistolary genre marker, in accordance with the titling conventions for other treatises and texts. I have not yet seen an example of a title on an original letter, however, so it is difficult to determine whether these titles were inscribed on original letters, added to the archived duplicate copies, or composed retroactively for printing catalogs.

The ways in which letters are categorized also influences their likelihood of preservation. For a beloved Buddhist master, replies-to-questions texts may be valued for their authoritative insights into Buddhist doctrine and practice; official letters composed by monastics, on the other hand, were not consistently valued for preservation until the early modern period. Cataloguers working during the lifetime or soon after the death of an author had more editorial power because they presumably had a wider array of personal documents at their disposal, whereas editors working long after the author's passing inherited collections of documents already heavily censored by others.

Editors

The editor charged with publishing the *Collected Works* of a Buddhist master, particularly in the Geluk school, would be responsible for editing or omitting any material that did not accord with the sectarian agenda of the institution. For example, Tukwan wrote a treatise on Nyingma practice and philosophy that was not included in his *Collected Works* because its concerns extended beyond the sanctioned purview of Geluk

scholarship (fortunately for us, it was published and preserved as a separate text). Much of the editorial and censorial work on *Collected Works* is already accomplished before the editing process even begins; given the complex prehistory of epistolary transcribing, copying, archiving, and cataloguing, the main role of the editor of a *Collected Works* publication project has been to oversee the conversion of a pre-selected group of original handwritten texts into printed form. This conversion process is a significant transformation to which we rarely attend, a transformation with serious ramifications for the interpretation of epistolary material.

First, while an original letter is typically written on a large piece of rectangular paper, taller than it is wide, the edited versions of letters we read in *Collected Works* are printed on long thin *pecha* pages whose shape imitates Buddhist palm leaf texts from India. The very shape of the paper used in edited publications of *Collected Works* invokes the authority and status of Buddhist scriptures, thereby transforming a letter into a sacred text, read not as a human artifact but as *gsung,* or "holy speech." Second, the hierarchy spacing is absent in these edited versions of letters in favor of a continuous flow of text in a consistent number of lines per folio. The sizing, style, and flourishes of the headless (*dbu med*) handwriting, all of which reveal aspects of the status of the sender relative to the recipient, are replaced by a uniform block print (*dbu can*) script that is blind to gestures of hierarchy. In many cases, the lines of address and closing have been stripped away in edited collections because the letter has been preserved primarily for the Buddhist relevance of its content; without the lines of address and closing, and without the hierarchy spacing, the embodied prostration in letters of offering is invisible. Finally, not only is the embodied prostration invisible, but the letter's historical markers — names

and titles, but also the place and date of dispatch — are often cut. The seals and stamps are missing, too, which further document the letter's life as a material object in a particular time and place. The historical moment in which the original letter was composed, sent, and received is hidden behind a veil of apparent timelessness.

These major changes that accompany a letter's conversion from an original manuscript document to a printed edition fundamentally change the experience of reading and interpreting Tibetan letters. With careful attention to these changes, enabled in no small part by the study of Tibetan letter-writing manuals that describe what original letters should look like and what social meanings are embedded in various epistolary forms, we can train our eyes to recover an original reading of the letter.

Readers (Including Us)

When reading printed editions of letter collections, we as scholars should be attentive to the history of transmission and transformation behind what we see. Of course, this history is itself valuable and interesting — edited letter collections provide valuable information about how later scholars in the tradition understood and used the epistolary legacies of their forebears — but in order to recover the meanings embedded in the original letter, as we will often want to do in the course of careful scholarship, we need to consciously make several interpretive moves:

1. We need to re-visualize the markers of hierarchy and ritual — spacing, script style, and so forth — that are absent from the edited text.

2. We need to re-historicize the letter by trying to identify the sender, recipient, and scribe as well as the place and date of dispatch. We may not be able to recover this data, but we should be aware that it is integral to the original letter as an artifact.

3. We need to re-humanize the letter. By this, I mean converting it back from a Buddhist holy text to a human document, written by a living person on the kind of (square) paper on which humans, not Buddhas, write.

4. We need to re-materialize the letter. We need to remember the life of the letter as a physical object, sealed with wax, wrapped in a *khatak,* accompanied by gifts, transported across long distances, handled by messengers. What might we discover if we consider the letter as a physical object first?

By reconstructing the original marks of meaning that are missing from the epistolary forms we receive, and attending to the new marks of meaning imposed on edited letters, our scholarship will do better justice to the rich social and historical data that Tibetan letters offer.

Appendix: Tibetan Epistolary Terminology

A. Tibetan terminology for the parts of a letter:

1. line of address:
   gang la skur yul gyi che brjod

2. hierarchy space:
   gong 'og
   'bebs
   'bebs mtshams

3. line of offering:
   'dud pa dang bcas pa'i zhe sa
   gus pas zhu ba

4. inquiry after health:
   khams bde 'dri ba
   bsnyun 'dri
   bsnyun gsol
   sku'i bde zhu

5. one's own situation:
   rang gi gnas tshul

6. main purpose for writing:
   'bul don
   ched 'bul
   skabs bab dngos don
   skabs kyi zhu don
   'tshams zhu
   zhu snying
   ched du zhu 'bras

7. closing benediction or prayer:
   slad char dge ba'i smon 'dun
   brtan bzhugs
   skyabs gsol

8. concluding information (register of gifts, place and date of dispatch):
   mjug sdud kyi rim pa
   zhu rten dang zla tshes
   lo ming zla ming gnas ming

B. Tibetan terms for "correspondence":

1. springs yig/ spring yig
2. phrin yig/ 'phrin yig
3. yi ge
4. bskur yig/ skur yig
5. yig bskur
6. mchid
7. tsa ho/ ca ho (Mongolian calque)
8. bka' shog
9. bka' yig
10. bka' glegs bu
11. bka' glegs
12. bka' mchid
13. bka' bris
14. phyag rtags
15. gsung shog
16. gsung bris
17. chab shog
18. gzhung yig
19. gser yig
20. zhu yig
21. 'bul yig
22. ri mo
23. lan
24. yig lan
25. phrin lan
26. dris lan
27. zhus lan
28. 'byor lan
29. brgal lan
30. dgag lan
31. rtsod lan
32. (so-and-so) la springs pa
33. (so-and-so) la gdams pa
34. (so-and-so) la bskur ba
35. (so-and-so) la bslabs pa
36. (so-and-so) la zhu ba
37. (so-and-so) la gsol ba
38. (so-and-so) la bstsal ba
39. (so-and-so) la brdzangs pa
40. (so-and-so) la gnang ba
41. (so-and-so) la bzlo ba

C. Terms for seals, sealings, or seal impressions:

1. rgya the
2. rtags the
3. rtags thel
4. tham ka
5. rgya
6. yig rgya
7. bka' rgya
8. phyag rgya
9. thel tshe/ thel tse/ thel rtse
10. the'u
11. the'u tshe
12. dam phrug
13. bka' tham
14. thes gdan
15. the stan
16. thes se
17. lag rtags
18. phyag rtags

Appendix: Letter Translations

Letter to a Patron

Translation of a letter from Jamyang Zhepa to his patron, the Mongol king Erdeni Jinong[1]

An entreaty, [offered] before the feet of the great Indra of this world, the Lord of Men who righteously protects this vast realm with the arm of virtue:

May the mountain of your body, whose virtuous actions rise from the oceans of the two accumulations [of merit and wisdom], be stable and without the fluctuations of illness, and may you protect the laws of religion like Songtsen Gampo!

From the great expanse, which supports the full collection of the teachings and beings in greater and greater [flourishing], here arrived [your letter] along with the gift of donations for the founding of a new monastery; and I was delighted, as if we'd met face to face, and experienced great joy that is beyond [the joy] of material things. Here, this old learned do-gooder has been distracted with the business of founding the new monastery, and his spiritual activities have been slight and on-again-off-again.

My main entreaty: last year's epistle and this year's letter and orders have reached my ears, and I feel loyal pride toward the enlightened activities of the royal father and son who are perfected in wisdom and might, and toward their religious government. Those pure ones with a mind to benefit society and to be in harmony with everyone are doing good deeds, and the people are well, and the great ones who accord with them are quite excellent; and still, whatever benefit [we can undertake] for the sake of the teachings and beings both, [we are undertaking,] primarily reciting the mantra series of Yamaraja and the long-life rituals of the Ten Wrathful Ones, and as before, the Bhairava pacification and enrichment rituals.

Just as when the ones from Zhalu established [a new monastery] at Ganden, [you have] made tea offerings for the full assembly and the dedication of sixty [*torma* offerings] to each [monk], and [in return] had so many petition rituals to Dharmaraja [made on your behalf] and have been greatly protected from obstacles. Here, since we have a plan to make this monastery for the common [benefit], [you], the great chief among benefactors, need to grant whatever monastic recruits are available, and I request, sincerely request that you consider ways of expanding this holy place and [bestowing] whatever benefit [you can]

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1. Found in Volume 1 of Jamyang Zhepa's *Collected Works* (TRBC work W21503). Pages 285-286. In the section entitled *Cycles of Political Letters in Ornate Poetry (chab shog snyan dngags kyi skor)*, folios 6a.1-6b.3.

upon this monastery, [the founding of which] you have determined with your own mind.

Gifts accompanying this letter include: an auspicious offering scarf [called the] "very fine sun of well-being," one excellent tangka painting of the Precious Lord Tsongkhapa, a fine yellow satin garment with dragon design, and a bolt of silk brocade.

Sent on the nineteenth day of the tenth month from Labrang Monastery.

Letter to a Friend

Translation of a letter from Jamyang Zhepa to his friend, the Changkya Lama[2]

"The Elegant Speech of a Dialogue with a *Kalantaka* Bird"

A request, [offered] before the feet of the Precious Reincarnate Lama:

Recently, [I sent you] a letter of praise for your Reverence the Laughing Vajra and [inquiries about] your health, and when [the reply] you sent arrived — pithy instruction to my humble self for both the short and long term, elegantly composed in verse and finely set forth — I was greatly delighted. Although I desired to offer a prompt reply to it, on account of both my intellectual capacity being feeble and [the time required to] present a composition in my own hand-writing, I was unable to offer [a reply] immediately; and so, I composed a letter of reply orally, [with] praise for Your Reverence and [news of] my situation.

It occurred to me that I should offer to you as well an entreaty of reminding and exhorting [you] toward virtue. And so, reflecting on what would be best to write about, and thinking myself to be all alone, there appeared before me a bird, as beautiful and becoming as none I'd ever seen or heard of before, with feathers and wings all arrayed with the colors of the rainbow; and from its feathers arose a light which induced stability of mind and attention, and it appeared to be searching for seeds and kernels [to eat]; then, clearing its throat, it said these words:

A moment, listen! Robes don't achieve the Way.
Bird here explains it well. Your practice: weak!
Clutching onto hope for change, are you?
Do listen! I have elegant advice!

[The bird] said, and so I thought, "How very wondrous that a bird, particularly one as noble as this, speaks in human language! If I make agreeable conversation with this [bird], it looks like we may have a discussion beneficial to the mind; and so first, I must say something so that he doesn't fly away for a little while, " and so thinking, I said,

Adorned with magical wings, you Kalantaka,
Bird of wonder with elegant speech in your mouth,
Carefree conversation make with me —
Dally here, don't fly, just for awhile!

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2. 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson 'grus. *bya ka lan ta ka'i dris lan legs par bshad pa.* In the author's *Collected Works.* Labrang Monastery block print edition, published 1997?. TBRC work W21503. Volume 1: 24-28.

And the bird said:

> Advice, heartfelt words to greet the saint
> Bearing the Victory Banner of muslin fine:
> Come away, retreat; with single-pointed mind,
> Defeat the enemy of Grasping-Self!"

[The words] pierced my body, and we looked at each other, and so on, and he seemed as if he wanted to fly away. And I thought that this bird may want to praise Your Reverence, and I was thinking the same thing. So, since the bird was upstanding and pure, I dared not give it flesh and meat, and so forth. But since there weren't any fruits or seeds to give it, I thought, "If I boil some tea, [the bird] will talk." And I said,

> Extracting profundity from jibber-jabber,
> Feathered friend, with form so beauteous —
> Glint not away like a fish, but stay and rest.
> Here I offer tea, a token of honor.

And the bird:

> Even though I sit, I never rest.
> Futile are the trappings of this life.
> Garments, tea — abandon these desires, or
> Hell-roads will you wander, naked as a fish!

[The bird] said, and in my mind, I thought, "Since this bird doesn't look as if it will stay for long, will I see it again like this?" and I said,

> Holy bird who abandoned worldly conventions
> In a grove of lush palmyra trees,
> Just like to a meadow, alight by my side now —
> Kalantaka, let us speak words of friendship!

I said, and so the bird:

> Know without doubt the ultimate and conventional,
> Listen and ponder the teachings of Him Thus Gone.
> Mundane ways of the moment, abandon forever:
> No regrets when death and sickness come.

He said, and started to fly. I thought, "Since he has no desire for food or drink, if I praise him a little, will that work?" And I said,

> Others' benefit shines in your mind white like Venus,
> Pure speech of renunciation ruffles your down.

Quester of limits, with wings of skill and means,
Remain with me: don't fly, don't fly, pray listen!

I said, and the bird:

Orderless realm of confusion, this samsara.
Passing across its torrents requires striving!
Quitting your efforts, what difference is there between
Receiving a free human form and that of a cow?

He said; and again, I spoke to the bird:

Regal fledgling with heart of beneficence,
Sunray that opens the lotus of my wild mind
Toward virtue, pray you soar not far away
Until you speak more elegant advice!

I said, and the bird:

Royal Mount Meru of a sudden will be destroyed,
Subsumed by rays of heat at the end of time.
Thanks to this wild mind attached to permanence,
Unto samsara are fools like foxes led.

It said, and sat ready to fly away, and so in my mind I thought, "In this place of retreat, food offerings that accord with the wishes of this little bird are hard [to come by]; then, might I meet it again back at Drepung when I'm staying there?" and I said,

Sacred site where the law of the Yellow Hats reigns,
Treasure-house of scriptures, the great abbey of Drepung
Urges you, wondrous bird, again and again,
Visit us and let us speak together!

I said, and the bird:

Satisfied be [to forfeit] desirables like food,
Treasures, gems, and fancy yellow robes.
Uncertain, whether we will meet again, so
Vigorously strive toward extraordinary learning and action!

It said, and so I said to the bird:

Tamed quickly but stubborn, lazy to carry its load —
Undisciplined mind of mine, dumb as an ox!
Venturing through the grounds and paths with speed,
Warm and heartfelt counsel, Bird, reveal!

I said, and the bird:

Ten-point stag of black, and wild red wolf
Unleashed upon the mountain passes and valleys, and
Vajra Protector the flesh-eater: look to these three.
Whence is found their ultimate resting place?

It said, and again, I said to the bird:

Your words, which we fortunate ones have tasted,
Zest of profound advice like immortal nectar
Poured from the holy vase of the vajra mind —
How will these words come to beings in a wicked age?

I said, and the bird:

Youngster, practice with extremely great effort:
Zenith of unborn realization is not hard to reach.
But to those o'ercome by apathy and languor,
Even this bird's apparition will be hard to summon.

We have said much, but not run out of words.
Today our conversation has been agreeable,
The pure result of the ripening of past karma.
Accordingly, have faith in cause and effect!

Don't let your mind forget these words we've spoken!
My staying long would cause much idle chatter.
But if I go, you're alone when the enemy comes!
So, this bird will hide among the plants.

And with my heart full of longing, and in the blink of an eye, it flew off into the eastern sky. A longing and sadness arose in my mind so deep that I don't know how to express it, and fearing my forgetfulness, I immediately set [this dialogue] down in writing. This "Elegant Speech of a Dialogue with a Kalantaka Bird" is ended.

These common words spoken by the winged creature
And one like me, unlearned in the system of metrics,
Will certainly not produce delight for the wise.
However, when composing this acrostic,
A, B, C, affixing and prefixing and suffixing,
Leaving grammar aside, I merely arranged these words.
So-called "humankind" is a race with ordinary abilities.
For that reason, if here there be masses of errors,

May the assembly of the wise and learned not humiliate me!

It is fitting that I felt the need to offer a proper reply to just such a wise one's recent handwritten letter. May these words of mostly question-and-answer indicate [such a reply], and may these words of the bird, wondrous as they are, be offered speedily [to you, their recipient]. If that bird also flies your way and a conversation happens, I request that you send those words here as well.

The Reincarnate Lama who was the recipient of the above letter is the Sovereign of the Teachings, The Precious Lama Changkya Ngakwang Lozang Chönden Pel Zangpo, and the sender was the All-Knowing Lama Jamyang Zhepé Dorjé. The place [of composition] was the hermitage known as Riwo Gephel (Mountain of Virtue's Increase) near Drepung [Monastery] in Central Tibet.

Letter to a Teacher

Translation of Sumpa Khenpo's letter to his teacher, the Panchen Lama[3]

To Him who is zealous for the drama of wearing the saffron robe,
Who, with an abundant lifespan and in the very form of wisdom,
Guides without exception the numberless beings of the ten directions:
Offering my head before His lotus feet, I bow.

Arraying the flowers of ten fingers across the span that separates me from that beloved pleasure grove, I offer this epistle.

From the depths of the ocean's coffers — the two stores of merit and wisdom — the storeys of His four bodies rise on high display.

Elegantly suspended above are ornaments — the sun of knowledge and moon of kindness. The Noble One glistens in the center of the four continents.

Supreme mountain, supreme guide of gods and humans, fully encircled by the golden hills of the assembly of the learned ones,

I pray that you remain, unshakable, as sustenance for the nine classes of beings of the three realms, and send down the rain of Dharma.

I, who am struggling in the ocean of *samsara*, where hundreds of waves of suffering churn strongly,

Plant a prayer that You may pull me with Your iron hook of compassion to the safe shore of liberation.

As a gift to illustrate the prayer of these earnest words, may an auspicious offering scarf beautified with patterns and with the luster of snow, like the great offering cloud of Samantabhadra, come before Your Presence of Supreme Refuge.

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3. sum pa mkhan po, *The Melodious Lute,* folios 1b.1-2a.1.

Letter to a Student and Protégé

Translation of a letter from Tukwan Rinpoché to his student, Mipam Dawa.[4]

"Drama of the Rishi's Delight: A reply to the poetic letter sent by the Zhapdrung Ngakwang Mipam Dawa, whose lotus of intelligence has blossomed well from a young age"

> To that supreme being who effortlessly delights those of wise minds,
> The marks of his holy habituations clearly set forth as upon a surface of fine white muslin, a stainless life:
>
> This old learned one, who, leaning upon the walking stick of firm sincerity [as he traverses] the path of those holy departed ones from former times, has settled into familiarity with what should be accepted and rejected, says thus:
>
> These days, your good deeds: a hundred thousands streams of beryl descending from the reservoir of pure prayers, swirl together into the ocean of your life: a watery treasury filled with the jewels of unfathomable good qualities; and from this treasury, as purifying water which quells the torments of the impure,
> a string of waves of wondrous scholarly activities overflows everywhere, and so sounds the drum-throats of great delight in the saffron assembly of the upright.
>
> That green horse (the constellation pulling the sun westward), which numbers the days of life, is pulling onward, and I have arrived at the western mountain of old age. In the twilight between red craving and white renunciation, light-rays illuminate a lotus on which I am looking back.
>
> My main subject:
>
> You spoke of the need for a newly-composed Vajrayogini ritual from me. Now, as the busyness of teaching and learning of our two great centers of religion has greatly distracted me, no free time for composition has arisen, and so here I offer you this [text] that I had composed previously.
>
> These days, there are many conceited snakes with minds intoxicated by the black poison of delusion. As they lean on but a splinter of the glorious Teachings, their hypocrisy, a poisonous vapor, has inundated us and many beings will be deceived.

---

4. thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma. "gzhon nu'i dus nas mkhyen dpyod kyi pad ma mchog tu rgyas pa zhabs drung ngag dbang mi pham zla bas snyan tshig gi 'phrin yig springs pa'i lan drang srong dga' ba'i zlos gar" ("Drama of the Rishi's Delight: A reply to the poetic letter sent by the Zhabdrung Ngakwang Mipam Dawa, whose lotus of intelligence has blossomed well from a young age"). In thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma. *thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma'i gsung mgur bslab bya dang chab shog (Tukwan Lozang Chokyi Nyima's Songs, Advice, and Official Letters).* Xining: Qinghai Nationalities Publishing House (mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang), 2013. Page 177 ff.

Though it appears that we have abundant foliage in our hands, we are deeply impoverished of the good fruits of virtuous activities. And so, the summer's green harvest of life has become the kin of the castor oil plant, blackening like a thicket.

In such times as these, from the opening of the lotus of discernment that drinks the hundred thousand hot rays of the sutras, tantras, and arts and sciences, the pistils of the blossoming of the three arts of teaching, debate, and composition erupt forth, and so, the feast for the bees of bright minds is multiplied! [That lotus is] marvelous you!

May you henceforth sound the thousand bells of golden words of wisdom, which are strung upon the bejeweled net of the three teachings, and by sounding their music in accordance with the constitutions of your disciples, may you beautify the palace of the precious Buddhadharma!

Thus ends the message of virtuous speech, the canvas on which this resplendent picture of enticing poetic words I have published and sent [to you] by the energy of my feeble mind and body, in order [to display this] spectacle for you and your vast mind's eye.

As an indication of gifts: a white divine scarf the color of the moon, along with a silken diadem. Composed on X month X day.

Glossary of Names and Terms

This glossary is organized alphabetically by the phonetic renderings of Asian names and terms used in the main text. In parentheses, I indicate the source language of the name or title: T = Tibetan, C = Chinese, M = Mongolian, S = Sanskrit. Note that the language source of the given name is not necessarily the ethnic identity of the person; for example, Sumpa Khenpo was Mongolian by blood, but the name and title by which I identify him in this work are Tibetan.

In order to facilitate cross referencing, for Tibetan personal names I offer the Wylie transcription as well as the person's identification number in the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC) database. For Tibetan place names, I include the Tibetan Himalayan Library (THL) place identification number. Mongolian entries are designed for easy referral to Christopher Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (2004).

Alak Sha Ngakwang Tendar Lharampa (T): a lag sha ngag dbang bstan dar lha rams pa, 1759-1831. TBRC person P303.

Altan Khan (M): Mongol khan of the Tümed, 1508-1582.

amban (C): an ban. Qing officials stationed in Lhasa and Xining to manage Tibetan affairs.

Amdo (T): a mdo. THL place F15348.

Bön (T): bon. An indigenous Tibetan religion. TBRC topic T247.

Chabui (M): also Chabi. Empress of Qubilai Khan, d. 1281.

Changkya Lozang Chönden (T): lcang skya blo bzang chos ldan. The second Changkya reincarnate lama, 1642-1714. TBRC person P209.

Changkya Rölpé Dorjé (T): lcang skya rol pa’i rdo rje. The third Changkya reincarnate lama and chaplain to the Qianlong Emperor, 1717-1786. TBRC person P182.

Chinggis Khan (M): also Genghis, Jenghiz, Chingiz. Founder of the Mongol Empire and national hero, 1162?-1227.

Dalai Lama (T): ta la'i bla ma, office title. "Dalai" adapted from Mongolian.

Dalai Lama Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso, the "Great Fifth" (T): ta la'i bla ma lnga ba chen po ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho. Founder of the Ganden Government, 1617-1682 (reigned 1642-1682).

Drepung Monastery (T): 'bras spungs dgon pa. THL place F15468.

Dromtön (T): 'brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas, 1004/5-1064. TBRC person P2557.

Dunhuang (C): dun huang. Silk road outpost and archaeological site in China's Gansu Province.

Erdeni Jinong (M): also known as Chaghan Danzin, or in Tibetan Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin. Mongol king of the Sokzong principality in southern Amdo, d. 1735.

Galdan Khan (M): Zünghar Mongolian ruler, b. 1644 (reigned 1678-97).

Ganden Government (T): dga' ldan pho brang. Also "Ganden Palace Government." THL place F15466.

Ganden Monastery (T): dga' ldan chos 'khor, one of the three Geluk monastic seats in central Tibet. THL place F749.

Geluk (T): dge lugs. A school of Tibetan Buddhism. TBRC topic T819.

Genkya (T): rgan gya. Nomadic region in southern Gansu Province near Labrang Monastery. No THL record.

Geshé (T): dge bshes (derived from dge ba'i bshes gnyen). Title gained when completing the full monastic philosophical curriculum.

Giteng Lozang Penden (T): Sgis steng blo bzang dpal ldan, 1880-1944. TBRC person P229.

Giteng Monastery (T): sgis steng or sge'u steng. Geluk monastery in the Repkong district. THL place F23087.

Gomang College (T): sgo mang grwa tshang, a college of Drepung Monastery.

Gönlung Monastery (T): dgon lung byams pa gling, a Geluk monastery north of the Yellow River. THL place F22639.

Gungtang Tenpé Drönmé (T): gung thang bstan pa'i sgron me, 1762-1823. TBRC person P298.

Güüshi Khan (M): also Gushri Khan. Oirat Mongolian ruler and patron of the Fifth Dalai Lama, b. 1582.

Gyelrong (T): rgyal rong, THL place F15376.

Jamyang Zhepa (or Jamyang Zhepé Dorjé) Ngakwang Tsöndrü (T): ‘jam dbyangs bzhad pa’i rdo rje ngag dbang brtson ‘grus. The first Jamyang Zhepa incarnation and founder of Labrang Monastery, 1648-1721/22. TBRC person P423.

Jamyang Zhepa Könchok Jikmé Wangpo (T): 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa dkon mchog ‘jigs med dbang po. The second Jamyang Zhepa reincarnate lama, 1728-1791. TBRC person P169.

jasaq (M): title for hereditary chief of a Mongol banner. Also *jasaq beise* or *beile*.

Ju Mipam Gyatso (T): 'ju mi pham rgya mtsho, 1846-1912. TBRC person P252.

Kadam (T): bka' gdams, a school of Tibetan Buddhism. TBRC topic T791.

Kagyü (T): bka' rgyud, a school of Tibetan Buddhism. TBRC topic T1187.

Kangxi (C): kang xi. Qing Emperor, 1654-1722 (reigned 1661-1722).

Karma Tenkyong Wangpo (T). gtsang pa rgyal po karma bstan skyong dbang po. King of Tsang, 1606-1642. TBRC person P1366.

Karmapa (T): karma pa. Office title for a reincarnation lineage of the Kagyü school. TBRC topic T107.

Kazakhs (Turkic): Muslim, Turkic-speaking people of Central Asia who constitute Mongolia's largest non-Mongol minority.

Khalkha (M): also Halh, Qalqa. The major ethnic group of Outer Mongolia.

Kham (T): khams, the cultural region of southeastern Tibet. THL place F5225.

khatak (T): kha btags, a silk ceremonial offering scarf.

Khoshuds (M): also Khoshuud, Hoshut, Qoshot, Qosot. Oirat Mongol tribe who settled in Kökenuur beginning in 1636.

Kökenuur (M): "Blue Lake," Chinese Qinghai or Tibetan *mtsho sngon*. Upper Mongolian polity in northern Amdo. THL place F7068.

Köten Khan (M): also Köden or Go-dan. Grandson of Chinggis Khan and first Mongol patron of Tibetan Buddhism, 1206-1251.

Labrang Monastery: bla brang bkra shis 'khyil. Geluk monastery in Amdo south of the Yellow River. THL place F15472.

Lazang Khan (M): also Lasang Khan, Tibetan lha bzang. Mongol lord, ruler of the Khoshuds, d. 1717.

Lhasa (T): lha sa, seat of the Tibetan government. THL place F637.

Lubsang Danzin (M): adapted from the Tibetan blo bzang bstan 'dzin. Mongol leader of the Khoshuds who instigated the 1722-23 uprising against the Qing in Amdo, 1692-1755.

Milarepa (T): mi la ras pa, 1040-1123? (for a discussion of Milarepa's dates, see Quintman, *Life of Milarepa,* page xx). TBRC person P1853.

Mindroling Monastery (T): smin grol gling, Nyingma Monastery in central Tibet. THL place F22325.

Mipam Dawa (T): mi pham zla ba, or bis pa ngag dbang mi pham zla ba, 1767-1807. TBRC person P292.

Monguor (M): Mongoloid ethnic group in contemporary Gansu province. Chinese *tu zu* 土族， Tibetan *hor* (early modern and modern usage).

Nāgārjuna (S): Tibetan klu grub.

Namgyel Drölma (T): rnam rgyal sgrol ma, Mongol queen of Labrang region. No TBRC record.

nangso (T): nang so. Domestic watchmen; local lay officials who serve the monastery.

Ngakwang Lozang Gyatso (T), the Fifth Dalai Lama: ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682. TBRC person P37.

Ngari (T): mnga' ris, region of far western Tibet. THL place F15400.

Nyingma (T): rnying ma, a school of Tibetan Buddhism. TBRC topic T1082.

Oirats (M): Western branch of Mongols.

Ordos (M): Mongol tribe who settled south of the Yellow River in China's contemporary Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.

Pakpa, or Drogön Chögyel Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (T): ‘gro mgon chos rgyal ‘phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1235-1280. TBRC person P1048.

Panchen Lama Lozang Penden Yeshé (T): pan chen bla ma blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes, 1738-1780. TBRC person P168.

Potala Palace (T): pho brang po ta la. THL place F16408.

Qianlong (C.): qian long. Sixth Qing Emperor and patron of Tibetan Buddhism, 1711-1799 (reigned 1735-1796).

Qubilai Khan (M): also Khubilai, Kublai, Kubla. Mongol khan who established rule over China, 1215-1294.

Repkong (T): reb gong. District in southern Amdo. THL place F15374.

Rongwo Monastery (T): rong bo dgon bde chen chos 'khor gling. THL place F23075.

Sakya (T): sa skya, a school of Tibetan Buddhism. TBRC person T617.

Sakya Pandita, or Sakya Pandita Künga Gyeltsen (T): sa skya paN+Di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182-1251. TBRC person P1056.

Samyé Monastery (T): bsam yas. Imperial Tibetan Monastery, founded ca. 779. THL place F22327.

sangha (S): the Buddhist monastic community.

Sangyé Gyatso (T): sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. Regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, 1653-1705. TBRC person P421.

Semarkar (T): sad mar kar, queen of Zhang Zhung and sister of Songtsen Gampo. No TBRC record.

Sera Monastery (T): se ra dgon. One of the three Geluk seats in central Tibet. THL place F433.

Serkhok Monastery (T): gser khog dgon, or officially btsan po dgon. Geluk monastery in Amdo, north of the Yellow River. THL place F22526.

Shunzhi (C): shun zhi. First emperor of the Qing dynasty, 1638-1661.

Sokdzong (T): *sog rdzong*, Chinese *henan* 河南. Mongol principality in southern Amdo. No THL record.

Songtsen Gampo (T): srong btsan sgam po. Founder of the Tibetan Empire, 617?- 650. TBRC person P8067.

stupa (S): Sanskrit stūpa, or Tibetan mchod rten. A Buddhist reliquary mound or monument used as a support for worship.

Sumpa Khenpo Yeshé Penjor (T): sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal ‘byor, 1704-1788. TBRC person P339.

tangka (T): thang ka. An iconographic painting on canvas of a deity, saint, or teaching lineage.

torma (T): gtor ma, an offering cake used in religious ritual. TBRC topic T170.

Trashi Lhünpo (T): bkra shis lhun po. Monastery in Tsang, seat of the Panchen Lama. THL place F22251.

Tri Dé Songtsen (T): khri lde srong btsan. Tibetan emperor, ca. 798-815. TBRC person P8LS13667.

Tri Song Detsen (T). khri srong lde btsan. Tibetan emperor, ca. 742-800. TBRC person P7787.

Tsako Somang (T): tsha ko so mang. Queen of Gyelrong, ca. 18th c. No TBRC record.

Tsang (T): gtsang, polity in central Tibet. THL place F15354.

Tukwan Lozang Chökyi Nyima (T): thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 1737-1802. TBRC person P170.

Ü: dbus, polity in central Tibet. THL place F15349.

Uighurs (Turkic): also Uyghurs, Uygurs, Uigurs. Turkic-speaking people from Northern Mongolia who settled in Xinjiang during the rise of the Mongol Empire.

vinaya (S): the canonical literature of the Buddhist monastic discipline.

Welmang Pandita (T): dbal mang pandita dkon mchog rgyal btsan, 1764-1853. TBRC person P176.

Wutai Shan (C): wu tai shan, the Five-Peaked Mountain. Tibetan ri bo rtse lnga. No THL record.

Yarlung (T): Yar lung or yar klungs, region in southern Tibet. THL place F7951.

Yellow River: Chinese *huang he,* Tibetan *rma chu.*

Yongle (C): yong le. Third emperor of China's Ming dynasty, 1360-1424 (reigned 1402-1424).

Yongzheng (C): yong zheng. Fifth Qing emperor, 1678-1735 (reigned 1722-1735).

Yugur (M): Yellow Uighurs, Chinese *yu gu zu*. An eastern branch of Uighurs in Gansu Province that follow Tibetan Buddhism.

Zhalu Monastery (T): zhwa lu dgon. THL place F22253.

Zhang Zhung (T): zhang zhung, ancient kingdom to the west of Tibet. No THL record.

Zhé Temple (T): zhwa'i lha khang, temple in central Tibet. No THL record.

Zünghars (M): Oirat Mongol tribe under the leadership of Galdan Khan.

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