



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-modern Tibet**

Jansen, B.K.

### **Citation**

Jansen, B. K. (2015, February 24). *The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-modern Tibet*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/32040>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/32040>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/32040> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

**Author:** Jansen, Berthe

**Title:** The monastery rules : buddhist monastic organization in pre-modern Tibet

**Issue Date:** 2015-02-24

## 5. MONASTIC ORGANIZATION

### Introduction

In most monastic societies a well-developed organizational structure was in place. Nonetheless ‘the Vinaya does not appear to provide for an administrative structure or hierarchy beyond that of seniority.’<sup>408</sup> In the literature of Tibet, the structure of monastic organization is most evident in the monastic guidelines. Little is known of the Tibetan monastic organization from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. It appears, however, that monasteries became larger during and after the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is during this time that the first *bca’ yig*-like prototypes emerge. This may be because larger monasteries were seen to be in need of a more streamlined organizational structure. The *bca’ yig* can then possibly be seen as a benchmark for the institutionalization of monasticism in Tibet. A similar argument is made in the discussion of the relative late emergence of summaries of Guṇaprabha’s *Vinayasūtra* in Tibet, which may also be seen as indicators of increased monastic institutionalization.<sup>409</sup>

In the case of the monastic guidelines, it is difficult to confirm this hypothesis as a significant number of texts have been destroyed. Looking at the texts that were preserved, we see that the genre emerges only during the 12<sup>th</sup> century and that a surge in new *bca’ yig* occurred after the establishment of the Ganden Phodrang in 1642, indeed when many monasteries were forced – and volunteered – to ‘re-organize’. This at least indicates that the guidelines were written when an improved or new monastic organization was felt to be necessary.

### Hierarchy and Equality in the Monastery

Equality and hierarchy are often seen as dichotomies.<sup>410</sup> It has also been argued that hierarchy can co-exist with notions or practices of egalitarian behaviour, albeit in a somewhat contradictory fashion.<sup>411</sup> In many Asian countries hierarchy is more highly valued than it is in the West, and Tibet has been no exception.<sup>412</sup> There is no doubt that the Tibetan monastery was hierarchical, in much the same way as Tibetan society itself. Nonetheless, certain elements in the monastic organization, many of which can also be detected in the Vinayic literature, suggest a sense of egalitarianism. The importance of hierarchy in the monastery becomes very clear when looking at the emphasis the *bca’ yig* give on the correct seating arrangements of the monks (*grwa gral*) during the assembly (*tshogs*). While one would perhaps assume that monastic seniority is the decisive factor here,<sup>413</sup> in the case of Tibetan monasteries, the arrangements were much more complex.

In Tashi Lhunpo monastery there even existed a *bca’ yig* that dealt specifically with the seating arrangements during the assembly. Unfortunately, this work does not

---

<sup>408</sup> Ferguson and Shalardchai, 1976: 104, 5. In the context of monastic Buddhism ‘seniority’ always refers to the time since ordination and never to age.

<sup>409</sup> Nietupski, 2009: 11.

<sup>410</sup> e.g. Rawls, 1999 [1971]: 264: ‘The principle of fair equality of opportunity goes against the ideas of a hierarchical social structure with a governing class.’

<sup>411</sup> See for example Dumont, 1980: 231-8.

<sup>412</sup> Thailand is another example where the concept of hierarchy is associated with order and harmony. See Ferguson and Shalardchai, 1976: 140.

<sup>413</sup> In the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* seniority was the most decisive factor. Schopen describes this as follows: ‘This rule of seniority in its broadest form dictated that a monk’s access to places, goods, and services be determined by his monastic age or the length of time he has spent as an ordained monk – the longer one had been a monk the closer he got to the head of the line.’ Schopen, 2004c: 177.

seem to be extant.<sup>414</sup> More generally, the seating was not just according to seniority and the level of vows taken, but had to do with a number of other factors. One *bca' yig* from 1802 notes that when arranging the seating 'one should listen to the two disciplinarians, and not be pushy (*ham pa mi byed*) with regard to one's seniority, saying, "I am older,<sup>415</sup> I was here first".<sup>416</sup> In the heavily populated Drepung monastery not everyone had a seat in the assembly to begin with. In 1682, the Fifth Dalai Lama encouraged the monastery to restrict some people's entry to the assembly hall. Here the author takes both seniority and education-level into account. In addition, he talks of the 'riffraff' (*'bags rengs*) who want to use the possessions of the Sangha (*dkor*).<sup>417</sup> It appears that to deny the riffraff entry to the assembly-hall was not directly motivated by a sense of hierarchy. Instead, it was paramount to denying these people a means of income; wages (*phogs*), tea, and offerings were usually distributed during the assembly. This policy served to disincentivize the less sincere renunciates from crowding the already overpopulated monastery. As it said in the aforementioned text:

Previously, according to the speeches about the examinations that were made by earlier honourable monks, there was no custom of restricting the riffraff who are after *dkor*. However, nowadays, if all are allowed in, then the junior monks who are involved in study will not be able to enter [the assembly hall]. Therefore, of course not all monks [can enter], and the riffraff who have not been there beyond eight years or those who have not passed the five higher exams should not be let in.<sup>418</sup>

In some cases, authors of monastic guidelines felt that the level of education should take prominence over seniority. The *bca' yig* written in 1909 for all Sikkimese monasteries reflects this sentiment:

Monks, both *dge tshul* and *dge slong*, who behave well, get – in addition to general admiration – a seat and a table, even when they are young, and get a double share (*skal*: i.e. wages), the same as the chanting-master and the disciplinarian (*dbu chos*). With the monastery's monetary allowance they should be given rewards (*gsol ras*) annually, taking into account their particular conduct (*byed babs dang bstun*).<sup>419</sup>

This is, to a certain extent, a departure from the norm, for it was common that status (here in the form of a seat, a table, and an extra allowance) was conferred on the basis of seniority and official appointment. The author Srid skyong sprul sku (1879-1914) here values behaviour over the traditional sense of hierarchy.

<sup>414</sup> This text called *Tshogs kyi bzhugs gral bca' yig chen mo* (the Great Monastic Guidelines on the Seating Arrangements at the Assembly) is mentioned in *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 87.

<sup>415</sup> Here *nga che* could also mean 'I am more important' rather than 'older'.

<sup>416</sup> '*Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig*: 402: [...] *chos khirms pa gnyis kyi ngag bkod ltar ' khod pa ma gtogs/ nga che nga gnyan slebs snga rim gyi ham pa mi byed/* Here *gnyan* is read as *sngon*.

<sup>417</sup> This concept is further elaborated in Chapter 6.

<sup>418</sup> '*Bras spungs bca' yig*: 301: *sngar lha btsun cha bas rgyug tshad mdzad pa'i gtam tsam las dkor phyir 'brengh mkhan gyi 'bags rengs bkag srol med kyang da cha tshang mar byas na chos grwa 'grim mkhan gyi btsun chung mi tshud 'dug pas grwa pa gang yin brjod med dang 'bags rengs kyi rigs lo brgyad dang rgyug tshad mtho lnga ma longs na mi gtong/*

<sup>419</sup> '*Bras ljongs bca' yig*: 270: [...] *dge slong dang/ dge tshul tshul mthun byung na/ spyir gzig pa che ba'i khar/ gdan dang lcog rtse 'phar kha/ grwa gzhon gras yin kyang dbu chos dang 'dra mnyam gyi gnyis skal// dgon pa'i dngul phogs thog nas lo re bzhin byed babs dang bstun gsol ras babs gzig gnang rgyu/*

On some occasions, lay-people participated in major rituals at certain monasteries. One early 20<sup>th</sup> century *sgrig yig* that is only concerned with the correct execution of the *sKu mchod 'phrul thos grol chen mo* ritual<sup>420</sup> also notes that the attending lay-people should be seated according to their knowledge while always behind the monks: 'the *upāsaka* lay-people sit at the end of the row, and are properly arranged according to their training.'<sup>421</sup> In fact, the Bhutanese seating-arrangement ritual (*bzhugs gral phun sum tshogs pa 'i rten 'brel*) initiated in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, in which both lay- and monk-participants were carefully seated according to their religious, political and social status, is said to replicate the seating order of the monastery, which was based on both seniority and learning. The ritual was praised as creating hierarchy and order in a society where these aspects were seen to be lacking.<sup>422</sup>

As reflected in the above given fragment on Sikkim, monks with official positions (such as disciplinarian or chanting-master) are also found higher up in the hierarchy, and while most *bca' yig* do not explicitly mention this, reincarnations would also have a better seat in the assembly. In the '*Bras spungs bca' yig*, for example, the Fifth Dalai Lama stipulates that the elder monks sit at the front (*gral stod*) according to seniority, the intermediate ones sit in the middle (*gral rked*), while the 'riffraff that is after monastic wealth (*dkor*)' sit at the back (*gral gsham*).<sup>423</sup> In addition to the level of education, monastic seniority, and official position there appears to have existed another benchmark, which determined an individual's place in the assembly:

From now on, the purity of the *samāya* and the vows shall be examined on a yearly basis. And when impurities do occur the individuals, whether they are high or low, up until the level of lamas and incarnations (*sprul sku*), are not to enter the great assembly. Judgement will be made, commensurate to the severity and the number of the impurities, as to whether individuals entirely forfeit their entitlement to inclusion in the assembly row, or whether they retain [a place] in the side-assembly.<sup>424</sup>

---

<sup>420</sup> Not much is known about this ritual. Judging from the name, it can be assumed that it was some kind of commemorative ritual held in Pelyul monastery, which may have involved the recitation of the *Bar do thos grol* ('The Tibetan Book of the Dead').

<sup>421</sup> *Thos grol chen mo sgrig yig*: 385: *dge bsnyen khyim pa rnams gral mjug phyogs te bslab gral ma nor bar sgrigs*. The word here translated as 'training' (*bslab*) is ambiguous, for in monastic contexts it often also refers to the vows (S. *śikṣā*).

<sup>422</sup> Penjore, 2011: 17.

<sup>423</sup> '*Bras spungs bca' yig*: 300, 1: [...] *grwa mnying yongs grags gral stod/ bar shar ba rnams gral rkad/ dkor phyir 'brenng mi 'bags rengs rnams gral gsham/* The exact meaning of the phrase *dkor phyir 'brenng mi 'bags rengs rnams* is not clear, but it is definitely very pejorative, which my translation tries to convey. '*bags* means polluted or degenerated, while *rengs* can mean stiff or obstinate.

<sup>424</sup> *dPal yul dar thang bca' yig*: 194: *lar phan chad nas lo re bzhin dam sdom la gtsang dag zhib cha bgyid nges pas bla sprul man mtho dman gang nas ma dag pa byung tshe tshogs chen du mi tshud nges la/ ma dag pa tshab che chung dang mang nyung la dpag nas tshogs gral la gtan nas mi dbang ba dang/ zur tshogs tsam la bcas rjes bcaad/* The word *zur tshogs* could have multiple meanings. It may refer to a less prominent spot (possibly on the 'side-rows') when assemblies are held, but it might also indicate a less important assembly, i.e. a different occasion altogether. The latter gloss is more likely, because in the monastic guidelines for Phabongkha monastery the context clearly indicates that *zur tshogs* is a minor assembly that does not require the whole monk-community, *Pha bong kha bca' yig*: 246.

The level of monastic purity thus could also decide where or even whether a monk could sit in the assembly-hall.<sup>425</sup> All in all, we can surmise from this that the (spatial) hierarchy is dependent on the level of perceived qualities of the monks and that these qualities were specified in various ways throughout time and in different monasteries. While this emphasis on the correct order of seating is found throughout Tibetan society,<sup>426</sup> the ordering on the basis of the individual monk's qualities is likely to be connected to the Buddhist idea that the worthier the recipient of offerings (*mchod gnas*) is, the more merit the donor (*yon bdag/ sbyin bdag*, S. *dānapati*) gains. Thus, in the monastery, those who sit in a prominent place get served first and monks in the front row are also likely to receive larger and better shares of offerings.<sup>427</sup>

According to Gombo's experience, for the – mostly married – lamas in the Nyingma religious institution in his village the seating arrangement was meant to be according to learning, age, and seniority: 'in practice, however, their seating positions reflected their social backgrounds.'<sup>428</sup> In Chinese Chan monasteries, the rector (*wei na 維那*), which may be equivalent or similar to the Indic *karmadāna* or *vihārapāla*,<sup>429</sup> was in charge of guarding the hierarchy and seniority at the monastery, which in practice meant that he needed to know the correct seating order.<sup>430</sup> While I am not aware of a particular office in the Tibetan context that is similar to this, overseeing the seating arrangements was generally the task of the disciplinarian and his assistants. The importance attached to the correct order of seating demonstrates that it reflected a particular value system that is shared with other types of Buddhist monastic communities throughout Asia.

While the make-up of the monastery is thus thoroughly hierarchical, at the same time there is a sense of egalitarianism in that important positions, such as that of the disciplinarian, were chosen by means of voting. The apparent presence of elections within the Vinaya is regularly commented upon: when the Sangha met, a chairman had to be elected. This post was valid only until the end of the meeting. According to Pachow, all *bhikṣus* had an equal right to vote.<sup>431</sup> In Tibet, candidates (*'os mi*) for an official position would be selected by the general monastic office (*bla spyi*). However, voting was not open to all: in some cases, only monks with a certain level of education could cast their vote and in others, only those who had been living in the monastery for at least ten years were able to do so. While in the Vinaya having the status of *bhikṣu* appears to have been a prerequisite for voting, ordination status (*dge tshul* or *dge slong*) does not seem to have played a significant role in the Tibetan context.<sup>432</sup> That the voting process did not always take place in an honest fashion is

<sup>425</sup> There is a parallel here with the narrative found among others in the *Cullavagga* IX, in which the Buddha perceives the presence of someone in the assembly who was not pure. This impure person is explained as someone without vows and without precepts. This man was not allowed to partake in the recitation of the *prātimokṣa*, and was taken out of the assembly, see Rhys Davids and Oldenberg, vol. IX, 1881-1885: 299-319.

<sup>426</sup> This is also apparent in Tibetan wedding ceremonies; see Jansen, 2010.

<sup>427</sup> In the Tibetan context, the advantage of sitting in front is obvious: the butter in the tea that is served during the assembly usually collects on top (partially due to the cold climate), thus those who are first in line get the portion high in caloric value, whereas the tea of those at the back contains hardly any butter.

<sup>428</sup> Gombo, 1983: 52.

<sup>429</sup> For the terms *karmadāna* and *vihārapāla* see Silk, 2008: 127-35; 136-46. The Indic use of these terms seems to diverge significantly from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Chinese one.

<sup>430</sup> Yifa, 2002: 151-3.

<sup>431</sup> Pachow, 2000 [1955]: 230.

<sup>432</sup> This information is largely based on my fieldwork and pertains to the contemporary situation in Namgyel dratshang, Nechung, and Gyütö. The bca' yig I have read hardly report on this voting

suggested by the stipulation regarding the collection of nominations of candidates or actual ‘absentee ballots,’ given in the 19<sup>th</sup> century *bca’ yig* for Tashi Lhunpo:

The tantric lamas who hold office (*las sne*) need to appoint new functionaries (*las tshan*). And when the lists of nominations (*’os tho*) of those lamas who had to go to faraway places in China, Mongolia, Kham or Tibet are collected, they [the appointing lamas] need to be honest and collect them, having taken the Three Jewels as a witness. They may not, out of partiality (*phyogs lhung gis*), do things that will harm or help individuals.<sup>433</sup>

In the case of Ganden monastery, the office of disciplinarian is now elected by the general office (*bla spyi*) alone. Previously, however, the Tibetan government had the authority to appoint monks to this post.<sup>434</sup> Goldstein mentions that the government also chose the abbots of the Three Great Seats from a number of candidates that were preselected by the monasteries themselves.<sup>435</sup> Positions of any consequence were almost always temporary, however, which meant that the governing class fluctuated frequently and allowed for internal socio-economic mobility that was nonetheless limited in many ways.

### **Social Stratification within the Monastery: the *Chos mdzad* and other Cases**

The privilege of sitting at the front of the row was not always ‘earned’ by being educated, serving the monastery, or being an incarnation of some variety. This privilege could, in some cases, also be bought or obtained through other means. Thus, while the view that entering a monastery would do away with one’s previously held status in lay society is widespread,<sup>436</sup> there are indications that social and socio-economic stratification was a reality among the monks in Tibet. Stein notes casually and without providing any sources that ‘social classes are maintained in the monasteries’<sup>437</sup> Likewise, Carrasco contends that most of the class differences within lay society were carried over into ‘the church’.<sup>438</sup> Even though it is very likely that merely entering the monastery would not even out any existing class differences within the lay-community, not much research on the social dynamics within the monasteries has been conducted to date.

In Chapter 4, the need to pay ‘fees’ to enter the monastery was briefly discussed. Alternatively, the family of the prospective monk could pay additional fees, taking the shape of offerings made to the whole community of monks. With these fees they could buy their son certain privileges. The monks entering the monastery in that way were sometimes called *chos mdzad*, which translates as ‘practitioners of the dharma’. In the Gelug school these ‘monk-sponsors’, as Dreyfus calls them, often

---

process. That voting is a continuation of older practices and not influenced by modern (or Western) processes is speculative, but, in my opinion, likely nonetheless.

<sup>433</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca’ yig*: 85: *sngags pa’i bla ma las sne rnams nas de kha’i las tshan gsar bkod dang/ rgya sog khams bod kyi bla ma phyogs thon dgos rigs kyi ’os tho bsdu skabs kyang drang ’brel ’os nges dkon mchog dpang btsugs te bsdu ba las phyogs lhung gis so so ’i phan gnod sgrub byed du ’gro rigs mi byed/*

<sup>434</sup> *Bod kyi dgon sde*: 86: *de ni bla spyis ’dem bsko byed kyin yod/ sngar bod sa gnas srid gzhung gis ’dem bskor the gtogs byed kyin yod pa dang/*

<sup>435</sup> Goldstein, 1968: 220.

<sup>436</sup> Michael naively states that ‘for the monk or nun social origin was, of course, no longer relevant.’ See Michael, 1982: 119.

<sup>437</sup> Stein, 1972 [1962]: 140.

<sup>438</sup> Carrasco, 1959: 216.

came from aristocratic families and were usually housed in the more influential ‘monastic households’ (*bla brang*), ‘which were like small dynasties of monastic administration’.<sup>439</sup> While these monks tended to be aristocrats, it is not the case that they were always noblemen: often they were simply wealthy. In Sera je they were, like the incarnations, also allowed to wear fine wool on the backs of their garments.<sup>440</sup> The main exemption that these monks were granted was that they did not have to carry out *gzhon khral* (literally: youth tax)<sup>441</sup> or *gsar khral* (new tax); menial tasks,<sup>442</sup> such as sweeping and fetching water, that junior monks had to carry out for the duration of one or two years. While it does not use the term *chos mdzad*, a recently written history of Tshurphu monastery describes the process of getting exempted from performing these tasks:

Furthermore, some relatives of a newly enrolled monk, in order to prevent him from having to perform youth tax (*gzhon khral*) for the studying monks, held something called ‘the burning light of the message: a confession to the rows [of monks]’ (*gral bshags*), during the assembly of the Sangha. This involved giving an enrolment tea (*sgrig ja*) and along with that there was the custom of giving each member of the Sangha (*dge ’dun*) an offering of money. Previously this was half a silver *zho* each,<sup>443</sup> but later on this became, in Tibetan currency, five *zho* for each member as an offering of money. Then one did not have to perform junior tax.<sup>444</sup>

In theory, this could be seen as a way to allow these monks to spend more time studying, but this suggestion was vehemently denied by my monk informants, who were generally dismissive of the *chos mdzad*. Re mdo sengge explains:

The *chos mdzad* was a position in the monastery that could be bought; it had nothing to do with the level of education. It was for the rich. The advantage was that one had more rights (*thob thang*): one did not have to work and one would get a prominent place in the monk-rows (*gral*). It was not for incarnations, except for the very minor ones, who would not get a good place in the rows to begin with.<sup>445</sup>

<sup>439</sup> Dreyfus, 2003: 51.

<sup>440</sup> Cabezón, 1997: 348. The original text not given in Cabezón’s translation reads: *bla ma sprul pa sku dang grwa tshang gi chos mdzad sogs kyi sku ’gag rgyab sha’ mther* [sic: *shwa ther?*] *dra ma lhen giong chog pa dang/* See *Tshogs gtam chen mo*: 26. This wool is in all likelihood comparable in quality to pashmina or shatoosh. Re mdo sengge, dKon mchog chos nyid and Blo bzang don grub all claim that the robes the *chos mdzad* wore were the same as those of the ordinary monks.

<sup>441</sup> *Tshig mdzod chen mo*: 2432: *grwa pa gsar pa byas nas las sne zhig ma byung bar chu len rgyu dang rdog khres dhor rgyu/ ja blug rgyu/ spyi khang la gad phyis byed rgyu sogs kyi bya ba byed dgos par gzhon khral zer/*

<sup>442</sup> This is also noted in Dazyab, 2009: 111. In Tshurphu this tax was also called *grwa khral* (monk tax), see *mTshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag*: 259.

<sup>443</sup> Literally it says *skar rnga* [sic: *lnga*]: five *skar ma*, which made up half a *zho*. One *zho* is a tenth of one *srang*.

<sup>444</sup> *mTshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag*: 258: *yang sgrig zhugs grwa pa rnams kyi khyim bdag ’ga’ zhig gis gsar zhugs nas gsham thab* [sic: *thabs*] *bslab gral gyi gzhon khral rgyugs mi dgos pa’i phyir du dge ’dun ’dus tshogs rnams la bshags ’bul snyan sgron gyi mtsho byed (gral bshags) zhes pa sgrig ja dang mnyam du dge ’dun rer sngar lam phyag ’gyed dngul kyang zho med skar rnga* [sic: *lnga*] *re ’bul srol ’dug kyang phyis bod dngul srang med zho lnga re phyag ’gyed du phul phyin gzhon khral rgyugs mi dgos/*

<sup>445</sup> Personal communication with Re mdo sengge, Dharamsala, July 2012.

Blo bzang don grub lived in Drepung monastery for five years until he was forced to leave and return to his native Ladakh in 1959. His description of the *chos mdzad* concurs with the above, while it also suggests that a prominent place in the rows was only allotted to the *chos mdzad* in the monastic house (*kham tshan*), but not in the main assembly:

They were often of aristocratic background. Their quarters (*shag*) were much nicer. The physical space was the same, but they had the means to furnish the rooms nicely. They did not have to do chores: they were not used to working hard. There were other exemptions as well; they did not have to go to the assembly – well... maybe except when there was a major assembly (*tshogs chen po*). They also did not have to go to the debate ground (*chos rwa*): they could just hang out. When a communal tea (*mang ja*) was served at the house (*kham tshan*) they could sit at the head of the row (*gral mgo*). But this was not the case at the college level (*grwa tshang*). There the older monks got to sit at the head. Their special treatment often did not do much good for their studies. The poorer ones (*nyam chung*) usually made the better students: they worked much harder. The life of the *chos mdzad* was just easier, not better.<sup>446</sup>

While the term *chos mdzad* is not employed by Cech, she notes that a lama (here: a monk) could ‘buy off’ his duties by providing tea for each monk. Thus, in the case of two monks who had taken their vows on the same day, the one who had had the financial means to give a communal tea-round got seniority over the one who had not.<sup>447</sup>

Actual references to the *chos mdzad* are rare in the monastic guidelines. In fact, the *bca' yig* for Tashi Lhunpo appears to be the only set of monastic guidelines, apart from the *Tshogs gtam chen mo*, that explicitly mentions the title. Das states that monks in Tashi Lhunpo bore titles reflecting their social status. He writes that when the boys who were to be ordained took the vows, the ‘Grand Lama’ (i.e. *Ta bla ma*) added certain titles of aristocratic distinction to the names of those from the upper classes: old nobility and descendants of earlier tantric families were given the title of ‘shab-dung’ [*\*zhabs drung*] and sons of land-holders and high officials were called ‘je drung’ [*\*rje drung*], the class of gentlemen, and the ‘sha-ngo’ [*\*zhal ngo*] family were called ‘choi-je’ [*\*chos mdzad*].<sup>448</sup> Again, while Das does not give the source for this information, it is quite clear that, in one way or the other, the *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig* was available to him, since it says in this text:

Then with regard to the *gtong sgo*:<sup>449</sup> the certified incarnations; the *zhabs drung* whose tantric practitioner (*sngags bon*) lineages are intact; the *rje drung*,

---

<sup>446</sup> Personal communication with Blo bzang don sgrub, Spituk, August 2012.

<sup>447</sup> Cech, 1988: 77.

<sup>448</sup> Das, 1965 [1893]: 8.

<sup>449</sup> This word may mean different things in different context. The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* describes it as meaning either ‘cost’ (*'gro song*) or the activity of regularly giving ordinary material goods toward a certain cause (*gtong yul nges pa can la 'char can zang zing gi rgyun gtong ba'i byed sgo*). More specifically, it refers to the gifts the graduate handed out to the monk-population in the event of receiving a certain ‘academic’ title. Colloquially, the word is most commonly known as the contributions monks need to make when receiving their *dge bshes* title. Furthermore, it may indicate simply the whole ceremony of being granted a title. Although the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* suggests that this custom is a thing of the past, it is still in place in exile monasteries (p. 1049: *sngar dge bshes kyi ming btags byed ched du nges par gtong sgo rgya chen po zhig gtong dgos pa*).

who are the monks with *sger rigs* origins,<sup>450</sup> and the *chos mdzad* who have come from a lineage of *zhal ngo*,<sup>451</sup> get [their] titles from the moment they enter the monastery. Aside from these people, unless it is definite they have really earned it, they are not to be given [titles] at will.<sup>452</sup>

The author thus singles out the titles that are given to certain people on the basis of their birth,<sup>453</sup> while specifying that other titles, and in particular academic ones, should be bestowed with the utmost care. He goes on to say that only those who are genuine aristocrats or from Kham or Mongolia, in other words, the incarnations and the others, mentioned above, may hold an aristocratic *gtong sgo* (*sku drag gi gtong sgo*).<sup>454</sup> This ceremony may indeed refer to the price (in the guise of gifts to the Sangha) that was paid in order for those from good families and those from areas such as Kham and Mongolia to obtain a position of privilege. Again, the author states how certain privileges could be bought, whereas others could only be earned:

Even when these people have held this aristocratic *gtong sgo*, other than [exemptions from] the junior tax (*gsar khral*) and the living arrangements, like before, this will not satisfy any expectations with regard to any of the exams. Doing things like having a special tea in order to get certain exemptions or in order to quickly move up from the ranks of the ordinary monks has been gradually put a stop to long ago. Therefore this may in no way be done.<sup>455</sup>

This suggests that in the Tashi Lhunpo of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the attempt to move up in the monastic hierarchy by offering financial incentives was persistent and occurred with some regularity. Titles, like that of *chos mdzad* were – as my informants also suggest – often not more than ways to get an easier life in the monastery.

Having such a title was not always merely ceremonial, however. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the *drung dkyus*, a type of middle-rank government official was drafted as a sort of tax from the Three Great Seats by the Ganden Phodrang government. It appears that these officials were chosen from among the *chos mdzad* monks. The reason given for this was that the position was unpaid and these wealthier monks could be supported by their families. As a *drung dkyus* one could climb up to more elevated positions within the government,<sup>456</sup> which allowed the nobility to get an even stronger foothold in the political arena. While Goldstein does not link the two, it cannot be a coincidence that at that time some aristocratic families were made to send

<sup>450</sup> Das' gloss of *sger rigs* is correct here. It must refer to *sger pa*, referring to private landowners and the lower aristocracy. In other cases *sger pa* indicated all (lay-) nobility. Travers, 2011: 155-174.

<sup>451</sup> This may refer to either a type of hereditary chiefs or to military officials.

<sup>452</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 73, 4: 'di'i gtong sgo'i skor la/ bla sprul thob nges/ sngags bon gyi rgyud ma nyams pa'i zhabs drung/ sger rigs khungs btsun gyi rje drung/ zhal ngo'i brgyud las gson nges pa'i chos mdzad de/ 'di dag kyang thog ma grwa sar 'jug skabs nas zung/ dngos gnas thob nges yin na ma gtogs rang snang gang shar gyis ming btags mi chog cing/

<sup>453</sup> This is not dissimilar to what was common practice during the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392) in Korea. The sons of the concubines of the king would often become monks. When they got ordained they automatically obtained a high administrative rank (i.e. *samjung* 三重). Vermeersch, 2008: 171.

<sup>454</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 74: 'di'i skabs su'ang bla sprul sogs sku drag dang khams sog bcas dngos gnas yin na ma gtogs sku drag gi gtong sgo mi gtong/

<sup>455</sup> *ibid.*: de dag yin nges rnam nas sku drag gi gtong sgo btang yang gsar khral dang sdod gnas sngar rgyun ltar las dpe rgyugs spyi 'dre la re khengs byed sa med cing/ dkyus ma'i rigs sgrigs spo mgyogs khyad sogs kyi ched khyongs ja gtong rgyu sogs bcad mtshams sngon ma na rim du bkag pas gtan nas mi byed/

<sup>456</sup> Goldstein, 1968: 156, 7.

an unspecified number of sons to the Three Great Seats so that they could become monk officials there (as a sort of monk tax).<sup>457</sup> The same families presumably were rewarded for their contribution through their sons being given the opportunity to exert influence on a state level.

Gombo argues that while one's family's socio-economic background did, to a large extent, determine one's position in the monastic institution, this was less pronounced in the larger monasteries that had a strong focus on learning.<sup>458</sup> Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge the extent of this type of monastic social stratification within the smaller monasteries, examples given above demonstrate that – while it is possible that this type of class disparity was less prominent there – a lot could be gained through entering one of the larger monastic institutions as a member of the higher strata of society.

The history of Buddhist monasticism in, for example, Thailand, shows that the monastic life was at a certain point in time only attractive to the poorer people: the permanent monks were (and are) almost invariably the sons of farmers or poor city-dwellers.<sup>459</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, to have a monastery consisting of just the poor and needy was seen in Tibetan societies as detrimental to the continuation of the Sangha. In order to attract sponsors, it needed to have not just good but also well-connected monks. The position of *chos mdzad* made becoming a monk for those used to a life of relative luxury less unattractive. By incentivizing the entry of wealthier and aristocratic monks, the monastery opened itself up to ties with their affluent lay-relatives and friends. In a way, the incentives offered by monasteries to join up were balanced against the disincentives developed to ward off the less influential and affluent. This policy clearly did nothing to improve education or discipline, but did strengthen the bonds between the monastery and wealthier lay-people. Having an ongoing connection with the higher layers of society could ensure the survival of the monastery. A level of inequality along with the contempt many ordinary monks obviously felt towards these *chos mdzad* may have been seen by the monastic administrators as a small price to pay.

### **The Size of the Monastery, Discipline, and Social Control**

*But do not take as important for there to be many monks [...] Leading a large assembly of monks but being outside the Way is completely wrong.*<sup>460</sup>

McCleary and van der Kuijp state that ‘unlike European medieval monastic organizations, the Tibetan monastic system retained kinship as the basic unit of social organization.’<sup>461</sup> Taken at face value, this statement contradicts the opinion voiced by Goldstein and Tsarong that ‘the basic building block in the monastic system is not a family-type social group but rather the solitary monk compartmentalized as an autonomous social and economic unit.’<sup>462</sup> In secondary literature, there seems to exist some contradictory information with regard to the monastery's social organization and the position of the individual monk therein: in some cases it is argued that the family-situation is replicated within a monastery,<sup>463</sup> while others are of the opinion

---

<sup>457</sup> *ibid.*: 155.

<sup>458</sup> Gombo, 1983: 65, n. 10.

<sup>459</sup> Bunnag, 1973: 43.

<sup>460</sup> Dōgen, Leighton, and Okumura: 156.

<sup>461</sup> McCleary and van der Kuijp, 2010: 164.

<sup>462</sup> Goldstein and Tsarong, 1985: 21.

<sup>463</sup> Mills, 2000: 17-34.

that a Tibetan monk is often seen as a person with a high level of individuality (in particular when compared to lay-people with comparable social backgrounds) and even that Tibetan Buddhism itself affords a ‘high degree of individualism.’<sup>464</sup> The level of individuality and group identity was no doubt also dependent on the size of and the level of control at the monastery. From Welch’s research one can generally conclude that in China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the bigger monasteries had more control and kept strict discipline, whereas the smaller temples had a more relaxed attitude.<sup>465</sup> The observance of the rules was heavily dependent on the contact with the lay-people and the economic situation of the monastery:

Strict observance of the spirit as well as of the letter of the rules could most often be found at monasteries that had their own landed income and hence did not depend on mortuary rites; that were not an object of pilgrimage and did not welcome lay people to dine or spend the night; and that were so large that the only alternative to strictness was total disorder.<sup>466</sup>

There exist two divergent views on the correlation between a monastery’s size and the level of monastic discipline. The one currently held by many (lay) Tibetans in exile is that discipline is (and was) better in the larger monasteries,<sup>467</sup> whereas at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bell observes the exact opposite.<sup>468</sup> This may be because Bell was in Tibet during a particularly tumultuous time when the larger monasteries were asserting their political influence. Miller connects the position of the monastery within society to the level of discipline. Discipline then was a way for the institution to ‘enforce its demands and obtain the support needed for large numbers of non-productive residents.’ She also notes that the small monasteries have relied more on the communities in their immediate surroundings and were more likely to show a relaxation of ‘orthodox dGe lugs pa practices.’ She connects this relaxation of the rules to the economic needs of monks in local (read: poorer) monasteries to survive, which necessitated some monks to do farm work or trading.<sup>469</sup>

Goldstein reports that the large monasteries neither placed severe restrictions on comportment nor did they demand educational achievements.<sup>470</sup> Assumedly there was simply less social control in bigger communities. One of my informants claimed that while the moderately sized nunnery did not need a *bca’ yig*, his home monastery Sera je in South India did because ‘it is a very big place.’<sup>471</sup> Some of the *bca’ yig* display the relative strictness of the monastery in terms of discipline. The ‘*Bras spungs bca’ yig* is a witness to the problems overpopulation caused in Drepung, arguably once the largest monastery in the world. Drepung’s massive population of monks may have been a contributing factor to the challenges the monastery faced when its guidelines were written, such as the members of monastic houses (*kham tshan*) and the smaller compartments therein (*mi tshan*) fighting with each other. The guidelines that the author, the Fifth Dalai Lama, composed are clearly geared towards

---

<sup>464</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969: 74.

<sup>465</sup> Welch, 1967: 116, et seq.

<sup>466</sup> *ibid.*: 128.

<sup>467</sup> Dagpa for example, notes that ‘[d]iscipline, hierarchy and studies characterized the large Tibetan monasteries [...]’ Dakpa, 2003: 177.

<sup>468</sup> Bell, 1998 [1946]: 199.

<sup>469</sup> Miller, 1958: 250.

<sup>470</sup> Goldstein, 2009: 12.

<sup>471</sup> Personal Communication with rGan Rin chen, Dharamsala, August 2012. Presumably, a smaller size institution could also rely more on information getting passed on orally, see Chapter 3.

curbing the unbridled growth at the monastery during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The uncontrolled nature of the monk-increase was seen to be the root of the problem, though not the size itself.<sup>472</sup> The Eighth Panchen Lama bsTan pa'i dbang phyug (1855-1882) notes that in the smaller monasteries affiliated with Tashi Lhunpo discipline was much more relaxed:

The leader (*mgo 'doms* = *sgo 'doms*) of the religious discipline should – without merely paying lip-service – act in accord with the contents of the established rules (*bca' sgrigs*) of this monastic establishment (*gdan sa*). Not only that but the lamas<sup>473</sup> of each village monastery will also from now on enforce the ground rules (*rtsa 'dzin*)<sup>474</sup> regarding what is entirely prohibited.<sup>475</sup> In particular, the greater laxity (*bag yangs che ba*) in the village monasteries (*gzhis dgon*) has meant that monks from these village monasteries (*gzhis byed kyi grwa pa*) distribute alcohol (*chang*) at the assembly and also [distribute] the meat of livestock (*nor lug*) which have been earmarked for the ceremonial offering (*gtong sgo*), i.e. the many things that are totally at variance with the Buddhist way (*nang pa sangs rgyas pa'i lugs*).<sup>476</sup>

Here, the author observes that certain practices, such as openly drinking alcohol and accepting livestock, which presumably would be slaughtered on behalf of the monastery, were not uncommon in the smaller monasteries. The above-cited section is furthermore significant because it shows that this text also addresses the minor monasteries and their leaders, or assumes that some of his audience are the future monastic heads of these village monasteries.

The greatest differences in discipline between monasteries are perhaps most pronounced not when it comes to size but when the overall orientation of the monastery is concerned. Smaller monasteries that were related to larger institutions often saw the brightest and most ambitious monks leave to further their studies. This situation was thus more than a brain drain; it also left the local monastery with those people who were less motivated to be good monks.<sup>477</sup> The discipline at monasteries that mainly ritually served the local lay-population were, as the passage above shows, often more in danger of slipping, perhaps exactly because of closer ties to the lay-community, but possibly also because educational standards were lower. Many *bca' yig* demonstrate the corruptive force that lay-people could present, while the same

---

<sup>472</sup> Jansen, 2013a: 118-23.

<sup>473</sup> Here, the word *bla ma* must refer to the heads of the village monasteries.

<sup>474</sup> This must refer to the most basic of rules that monks needed to adhere to. It may even be the case that these refer directly to what is morally right, regardless of the nature of location of the monastery.

<sup>475</sup> With regard to '*phyin chad*', the word (also: *da phyin chad*), which translates as 'from now on', signifies a break with previous practices. It very clearly addresses matters that were actually taking place. The author then in effect says: 'I want this to stop right now!' The phrase is a good indicator of when the author leaves behind his vision of the ideal monastery and actually attempts to put an end to certain practices.

<sup>476</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 82, 3: *gdan sa 'di kha'i bca' sgrigs don bzhin chos khrims kyi mgo 'doms kha tsam min pa mdzad dgos par ma zad/ khyad par gzhis dgon khag 'di bag yangs che bar brten/ gzhis byes kyi grwa pa la ishogs su chang gtong ba dang/ gtong sgo'i rgyur dmigs nor lug ched du bca'd pa'i shas gtong sgo gtong ba sogs nang pa sangs rgyas pa'i lugs dang ye nas mi mthun pa du ma 'dug pa 'di rigs/ phyin chad gzhis dgon gang sar gtan nas mi byed pa'i rtsa 'dzin bla ma so sos rgyun 'khyongs su byed/*

<sup>477</sup> This is also noted by Gyatso in the context of contemporary Gelug monasteries: 'Part of the problem within the Gelug school at least, is the dominance of the larger monasteries, which inadvertently does something of a disservice to the smaller ones.' Gyatso, 2003: 228.

texts also call on the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with, and a good reputation among, the lay-population. The correlation between the level of discipline and the contact with lay-people on the one hand and that of discipline and the monastic economic situation on the other is important to examine, for it shows the degree of dependency between the unordained and the ordained.<sup>478</sup>

### The Managerial Monks and their Qualifications

The terminology denoting the people who hold official positions in the monastery has varied. One of my respondents, a monk-official originally from Chamdo (Chab mdo), calls the monasteries' officials (*dgon pa'i las byed*) 'the representatives' ('*thus mi*').<sup>479</sup> Colloquially, among monks in exile perhaps the most commonly used term is simply *las byed*,<sup>480</sup> a word that is also used for those (lay-people or monks) who hold any kind of government job. In the Tashi Lhunpo of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the monks in office were called *rtse drung*, whereas those in a lower position were called *las tshan pa*.<sup>481</sup> In the monastic guidelines the terms *las tshan pa*,<sup>482</sup> *las sne*,<sup>483</sup> *las thog pa*,<sup>484</sup> *las 'dzin*,<sup>485</sup> and *mkhan slob*<sup>486</sup> all occur, each having a slightly different connotation. We see that particularly the earlier *bca' yig* contain idiosyncratic, and now obsolete, titles. The '*Bri gung mthil bca' yig*', written between 1235 and 1255, displays at least two unusual terms denoting certain official posts, namely *sgom pa ba* and *dpon las*:

Now, from the point of how to live correctly, I request the general Sangha, but also the *sgom pa ba*,<sup>487</sup> along with the *dbu mdzad pa* and the twenty *dpon las*,<sup>488</sup> to do what I tell them.<sup>489</sup>

Later, in particular after the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a more standardized and homogenous set of titles develops. This may also have to do with the fact that later (post 17<sup>th</sup> century) *bca' yig* are often primarily directed toward the officials, whereas the earlier ones speak more directly to the general populace of monks. The growth of monks in the 17<sup>th</sup>

<sup>478</sup> This relationship is examined in more detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>479</sup> Personal communication with mKhan po Chos dbyings lhun grub, Bir, August 2012.

<sup>480</sup> This term is not just a modern one: it is mentioned in the *bca' yig* written in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, *dPal ri chos sde bca' yig*: 457.

<sup>481</sup> Jagou, 2004: 327, n. 81: '*rtse drung* qualifie le moine fonctionnaire'; *ibid.* n. 82: '*las tshan pa* désigne un fonctionnaire subalterne'.

<sup>482</sup> e.g. *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*.

<sup>483</sup> e.g. '*Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig. las sne pa* also occurs. This is short for *las kyi sne mo (pa)*. In other instances, this term may refer to monks who are involved in monastic service as opposed to education. In the *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*, for example, the monk who repeatedly fails his exams is threatened to be made into a *las sne*, in all likelihood someone charged with menial labour, *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 288.

<sup>484</sup> e.g. *gDan sa chen po'i bya ba las kyi sne mor mngags rnams kyi bca' yig*.

<sup>485</sup> e.g. *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*.

<sup>486</sup> e.g. '*Bri gung mthil bca' yig*. This term is of course a contraction of *mkhan po* and *slob dpon*.

However, it is clear from the context that it is used to denote all those in official positions.

<sup>487</sup> This title I take as an equivalent to *sgom pa*. This was a high civil and military function within the Drigung Kagyü school, the so-called 'seat of civil power'; see Sperling, 1987: 39. This official generally was a lay-person and had considerable power, but this *bca' yig* clearly shows that he ultimately answered to the abbot (here: the author of the text).

<sup>488</sup> As far as I am aware, this word is not attested in any dictionary. In this context, it appears to indicate a group of minor officials.

<sup>489</sup> '*Bri gung mthil bca' yig*: 247b: *da ci 'os sdod pa'i ngos nas ngan bus ji ltar gsung ba de dge 'dun spyis bsgrub pa dang sgom pa bas dbu mdzad pa dpon las nyi shu po dang bcas pas bsgrub par zhu*

century may also have had something to do with this development. It is furthermore safe to assume that by this time the *bca' yig* for the bigger monasteries served as something of a template for the smaller monasteries of the same school.

Some *bca' yig* contain detailed information on the selection-criteria for monks in official positions, others only address this when the officials were known to have behaved badly in the past, and yet others do not contain any job-descriptions. The fact that many of these texts direct their attention to these roles reflects how important these 'managers' were for the monastery and the maintenance of its rules. The selection-criteria vary: in some cases the monk had to have reached a level of education,<sup>490</sup> while in others the monk needed a certain level of economic independence. *Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las* (1927-1997) remarks that in the Indian context there was a strict system of economy in place in which the managers of the general possessions (*spyi rdzas*) then could only be a *śrāmaṇera* (*dge tshul*) or an *upāsaka* (*dge bsnyen*), but never a *bhikṣu* (*dge slong*).<sup>491</sup> *Dagyab* mentions that it was unusual for highly educated monks to be appointed to managerial positions.<sup>492</sup> However, in Sakya the *zhabs pad*, who had the most practical power, had reached the level of 'doctor of theology' before he assumed the position.<sup>493</sup> The general character and reputation of the candidate was also taken into account.<sup>494</sup> Other times, the only requirement was that the officials remained impartial and honest. The importance of an unbiased attitude is regularly stressed, which gives the impression that monks in these managerial positions *may* occasionally have tended to enrich themselves by having others (both monastic and lay-) pay in exchange for favours, or that people in these positions simply had a tendency to favour their own friends or kinsmen. The *bca' yig* for Tashi Lhunpo states:

The functionaries (*las tshan pa*) of the other three colleges<sup>495</sup> need to fulfill their allotted duties correctly, without succumbing to the evils of partiality. In particular, the disciplinarians (*chos khrims pa*) of the debate ground (*chos grwa*) need to encourage in an efficient way the improvement of the study of logic (*mtshan nyid*) without being partial to anyone.<sup>496</sup>

Monk-officials also need to be decisive and they must not let bad behaviour go unpunished. The '*Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig* states for example that in the case of someone breaking the rules 'the two disciplinarians (*chos khrims pa*) should not turn a blind eye (*btang snyoms su ma bzhaq par*), but should give a fitting punishment (*bkod 'doms*).'<sup>497</sup> Both favouring certain individuals and being lax in enforcing the rules were apparently not uncommon among functionaries. So much so

<sup>490</sup> Nowadays, in the larger Tibetan monasteries in India only the more senior and high-level *geshes* are considered for the posts of abbot and disciplinarian; see Gyatso, 2003: 230.

<sup>491</sup> *Dung dkar gsung rtsom*: 69.

<sup>492</sup> *Dagyab*, 2009: 55.

<sup>493</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969: 206.

<sup>494</sup> *mKhan po dKon mchog chos skyabs* mentions that these days repeat-offending monks, who have stained their record by having been caught with alcohol and cigarettes repeatedly, are not eligible to become monastic functionaries in the future. Personal communication, Rajpur, August 2012.

<sup>495</sup> Previous to this section the tantric college was specifically mentioned.

<sup>496</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 85, 6: *grwa tshang gzhan gsum gyi las tshan pa mams kyis kyang rang rang gi bgo* (86) *skal gyi bya ba rnam phyogs lhung gdon bskyod kyi dbang du ma song bar ji lta ba bzhin bsgrub dgos pa dang/ khyad par chos grwa chos khrims pa rnam nas mtshan nyid slob gnyer dar rgyas yong ba'i lcag skul gnad smin rang gzhan phyogs lhung du ma song ba byed/*

<sup>497</sup> '*Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig*: 403: *chos khrims pa gnyis nas btang snyoms su ma bzhaq par 'os 'tshams kyi bkod 'doms byed dgos shing/*

that some *bca' yig* stipulate punishments for those officials that let monks go scot-free or display a bias toward a certain group. Several sources mention that monks born in the vicinity of the monastery could not be appointed to official positions out of fear for bias, or accusations thereof.<sup>498</sup> This will be treated in more detail below.

The '*Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig* notes that when the committing of a *pārājika* offence goes unpunished, those in charge of punishing the *spyi gnyer* needs to prostrate themselves five hundred times, while – when the disciplinarian and the chant-master (*dbu chos*) are guilty of letting misbehaving monks go unpunished – they will have to do a thousand prostrations each.<sup>499</sup> Although most *bca' yig* are clearly not intended to function as monastic management self-help books, the *bca' yig* of Mindröl ling monastery provides a mission statement for all monks in a management position:

In short, all those burdened with managerial positions, by providing for the livelihood of this place (*sde*), protect the tradition of liberation of those who are wise, disciplined and good.<sup>500</sup>

The official monks at Sakya had equally high expectations to live up to. They are reminded of the workings of karma and are then requested to sacrifice their lives for the monastery:

Therefore, once one has been assigned a duty, one shall – for the sake of the very integrity of the religion and politics of the glorious Sakya – have the courage to be able to give up one's body, life, and possessions without reservation, and one shall have the perseverance to be able to serve the higher lamas, the lineage (*gdung brgyud*) and the religious community (*chos sde*) ceaselessly, and one shall hold a sincere wish for the subjects of the monastery (*gdan sa*) to expand, prosper and remain for a long time.<sup>501</sup>

Here, working for the monastery is presented as virtuous and, in line with sentiments held by monk-officials today, there is – *pace* Cassinelli and Ekvall – no sense of 'incongruity' with regard to the monks filling managerial positions 'taking them from their life of meditation and religious observance and putting them in charge of secular matters.'<sup>502</sup>

<sup>498</sup> This illustrates the potential influence of monastic administrators. In some areas these monks also chose the headmen of the villages. Goldstein, 1968: 133.

<sup>499</sup> '*Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig*: 404, 5: *lhag par chos khrims gnyis dang/ do dam thun mong nas pham pa bzhi bcas 'gal ba byung rigs rna thos tsam byung 'phral rtsad gcod thog gong gi chad las sogs khrims kyi bya ba la nan tan byed dgos/ de la spyi gnyer sogs kyis 'gal na phyag lnga rgya re/ dbu chos kyis 'gal na stong phyag 'bul dgos/*

<sup>500</sup> *sMin sgröl gling bca' yig*: 312: *mdor na las 'dzin khur yod thams cad kyis sde 'di'i 'tsho tshis 'dzin pa la mkhas btsun bzang po'i rnam thar gyi srol bzung/*

<sup>501</sup> *gDan sa chen po'i bya ba las kyi sne mor mngags rnams kyi bca' yig*: 319: *ngo skal du gyur pa dpal sa skya'i bstan srid lar rgya 'di nyid kyi phyir lus srog longs spyod thams cad phangs med du gtong nus pa'i snying stobs dang/ bla ma gong ma gdung brgyud chos sde dang bcas pa'i zhabs tog dus khor mo yug tu sgrub nus pa'i brtson 'grus dang/ gdan sa'i mnga' zhabs rnams dar zhing rgyas pa yun ring du gnas pa'i lhag bsam rnam dag snying khongs su bcangs ngos/*

<sup>502</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969: 143, 4.

## The Management Team

Particularly in modern times the ‘management team’ is very important for the organization of the monastery. This committee, depending on the size of the institution, may both decide on internal issues, such as the education programme, as well as on external issues that have to do with financial matters, for example. This team or council is sometimes referred to as the *lhan rgyas* and can consist of the abbot, the disciplinarian(s), the chant-master, and the secretary.<sup>503</sup> According to Nornang, the monastery of Dwags po bshad grub gling counted three ‘offices’; the *gnyer tshang*, the *spyi bso* and the *lhan rgyas*. The former two dealt largely with financial and external matters, whereas the latter appointed its members to those two offices and was primarily concerned with the general monk-population.<sup>504</sup> The most important member of this *lhan rgyas* was the *zhal ta pa*, an educated monk who was in charge of supervising the kitchen and its staff. He and the chant-master were the only ones to have access to the boxes in which the official monastic documents were kept.<sup>505</sup>

In Sera je, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term *spyi so* denoted the committee that gave out the wages (*phogs*) to the monks at certain times.<sup>506</sup> In textual materials we often see the word *bla spyi*: the monastery committee,<sup>507</sup> which is similar, if not the same, as *spyi so/ bso/sa*.<sup>508</sup> Miller explains the word *spyi sa* to refer to either a place where goods are stored, goods donated for a particular purpose, or funds from which interest is drawn to pay for monastic rituals.<sup>509</sup> In many ways, this office served as the treasury for the general populace of monks. To confuse matters further, the term *spyi bso* refers in some cases to an individual rather than to a team of monks.<sup>510</sup> The same is true for *bla spyi*.<sup>511</sup> The most generic and widespread name, however, is *dgon pa/ pa’i gzhung*:<sup>512</sup> the monastic authorities or government.<sup>513</sup> In the large monastery of Drepung during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the committee for the management of an individual college (*grwa tshang*), called *phyag sbug*, consisted of four or five members. This committee was responsible, on a lower level, for the distribution of

---

<sup>503</sup> In Dwags po bshad grub gling this team consisted of the chant-master (*dbu mdzad*) and eight monks. This council selected the abbot. See Nornang, 1990: 253. The term *lhan rgyas* is also regularly used to refer to a committee consisting of lay-people, e.g. *mTshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag*: 583: *gzhis rgan lhan rgyas*. In exile, contemporary *bca’ yig* are compiled jointly by the members of the *lhan rgyas*. Personal communication, Ngag dbang dpal sbyin, Dharamsala, July 2012.

<sup>504</sup> Nornang, 1990: 263-9. In 1920, Sera monastery (full name: *Se ra theg chen gling*) had two offices the *spyi so* and the *gnyer tshang*, see *Se ra theg chen gling rtsa tshig*: 186. Sera’s individual colleges naturally had their own organizational committees.

<sup>505</sup> *ibid.*: 253. This term *zhal ta pa* also features as the translation of *vaiyāpṛtyakara*: ‘an administrative monk’, although in some contexts this office was not filled by a monk. See Silk, 2008: 39-73 and 44 in particular. According to *brDa dkrol gser gyi me long*, it can be equated with *do dam pa*, which can be roughly translated as ‘manager’. See *brDa dkrol gser gyi me long*: 765.

<sup>506</sup> *Se ra byes bca’ yig*: 569.

<sup>507</sup> e.g. Dagab, 2009: 56, 7; *Bod kyi dgon sde*: 86.

<sup>508</sup> *bla spyi* is likely to be an abbreviation of *bla brang spyi sa*, as evidenced in *dGon khag gi dge ’dun pa rtsa tshig*: 303.

<sup>509</sup> R. Miller, 1961: 427, 8. This ‘jisa mechanism’ or ‘model’ is explained to underlie all Tibetan Buddhist monastic economies. Chapter 6 deals with this topic further.

<sup>510</sup> e.g. *Rong po rab brtan dgon bca’ yig*: 538. Here the word is used in a way similar to *spyi pa*, on which more below.

<sup>511</sup> e.g. *Ra mo che bca’ yig*: 139.

<sup>512</sup> e.g. Dagab, 2009: 57.

<sup>513</sup> In smaller monasteries, the monastic authorities may be referred to simply as *bla brang*. Here then this word does not refer to the estates held by wealthier incarnations. See for example *Pha bong kha bca’ yig*: 241.

certain goods, such as tea, food, and money that came to the monastery, to the members of that college.<sup>514</sup>

The above names and titles serve to demonstrate that there was no single system of monastic organization in Tibet. For the current purpose, we are interested in how the people in charge of maintaining the monastery behaved and were expected to behave, so that their perceived and actual relationships within the monastery and outside of it can be better determined. The *bca' yig* are very informative on the subject of monastic job-descriptions and general management. Some of these monastic guidelines in fact solely address those monks with an official position.<sup>515</sup> They thus convey the monk-officials' status, background, remuneration, and duties towards monks and lay-people. It is important to understand that, in much the same way as in Buddhist India, monks did not have as their main vocation administration or management.<sup>516</sup> It is thus not necessarily the case that monks of all schools in Tibet 'were trained for the management of human affairs as well as for religious service.'<sup>517</sup> Most offices were temporary and tenure was rare. The posts most commonly described in the *bca' yig* are those of disciplinarian (*dge skos/ bskos; chos khrims pa; zhal ngo*), chant-master (*dbu mdzad*), and steward (*gnyer pa; spyi ba; spyi gnyer*), whereas the positions of treasurer (*phyag mdzod, mdzod pa*) and the various types of maintenance personnel (e.g. *dkon gnyer, nor gnyer pa, mchod dpon*, etc.) are referred to occasionally.<sup>518</sup> Absent from this list is the abbot (e.g. *mkhan po*), the head of a monastery or college. This important role that carries with it 'not just responsibility, but real power and prestige,'<sup>519</sup> is hardly commented upon in the monastic guidelines. This is in part because the abbots were often the authors of the *bca' yig* or those who informed the authors, but also because the abbots may have been regarded as having a distinct (religious) status that set them apart from the rest of the monks.<sup>520</sup>

Generally speaking, the members of the committee and the others who held official posts were monks. This is by no means standard Buddhist practice. In Thailand, the monastery committee (*kammakan wat*) consists of the abbot, one or more junior *bhikkhus*, and several laymen.<sup>521</sup> The lay-presence in monastic organizations is widespread and rationalized throughout the Buddhist world.<sup>522</sup> However, Welch maintains that in China laymen generally speaking 'played no role whatever in the internal administration of monasteries,' although this may not necessarily reflect a historical reality.<sup>523</sup> While Tibetan monasteries do not advertise the involvement of lay-people, the *bca' yig* convey their presence occasionally. In the sections below the various offices and their roles are elaborated in more detail.

<sup>514</sup> Dakpa, 2003: 171, 2.

<sup>515</sup> e.g. *gDan sa chen po'i bya ba las kyi sne mor mngags rnams kyi bca' yig*.

<sup>516</sup> Silk, 2008: 211.

<sup>517</sup> Michael, 1982: 44.

<sup>518</sup> While these terms are derived from non-Bon sources, the hierarchical system and its terms appear remarkably similar in (current) Bon monasteries, see Karmay and Nagano, 2003. While the latter two types of monks, the treasurer and maintenance personnel, feature frequently in the *bca' yig*, they will not be dealt with here. This is partly due to the limited role they played in the actual organization of the monastery and partly due to constraints of space.

<sup>519</sup> Gyatso, 2003: 230.

<sup>520</sup> On the role of the abbot see more below.

<sup>521</sup> Bunnag, 1973: 129.

<sup>522</sup> Pardue notes it was common to have lay-supervisors at the monastery who had to report back to the state on the quality of conduct. See Pardue, 1971: 121. The Christian monasteries employed lay-people as managers and otherwise, in very similar ways. See for example Smyrlis, 2002: 245-261.

<sup>523</sup> Welch, 1967: 374.

### Monastery-officials

It has been noted that, while with regard to Buddhist terminology the Tibetans have been consistent and meticulous in translating and employing Indic terms, this practice has been not extended to titles that (may) denote monastic offices. Most Tibetan official titles appear to be native ones, perhaps with the notable exception of the terms *dge skos* (disciplinarian) and *zhal ta pa* (manager), which have been briefly mentioned earlier. Many of these words, however, turn out to be used in a wide variety of ways in different monasteries and at different times. Not infrequently these terms have ‘lay-world counterparts’, which leaves one to wonder whether the monks emulated the lay-people or vice-versa.<sup>524</sup> The treatment of various monastic official terms and roles below is merely an initial – and necessarily incomplete – venture into a territory that demands further elaboration. Arguably the most prominent position in the monastic guidelines, the disciplinarian alone could be subject of a lengthy academic work.

#### The Disciplinarian (*dge skos/dge bskos/ chos khrims pa/ zhal ngo*)

*I never saw a master of discipline in the lamaseries wearing a delightful smile. More often they seemed to be the type of tormentors that might step out of a picture of the Eighteen Buddhist Hells.*<sup>525</sup>

The word *dge skos*<sup>526</sup> occurs in the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, the *Vinayasūtra*, and the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* as a translation for the Sanskrit *upadhivārika*.<sup>527</sup> The Tibetan term, which is not a literal translation from the Sanskrit, may be short for *dge bar skos pa*; he who establishes [others] in virtue, or he who is established in virtue. In the Indic context, the term is translated as ‘supervisor’ or ‘provost’ of the monastery. He is in charge of the material possessions of the Sangha and in the *Kṣudrakavastu* his task is to beat the dust out of cloth seats.<sup>528</sup> In Tibetan-ruled Dunhuang, the *dge skos* appears to have been in charge of loaning out grains from the temple granary against interest.<sup>529</sup> The connection of the *dge skos* to the maintenance of discipline appears exclusively in later Tibetan sources. He is a supervisor of the standards of discipline but he is not seen to have a consultative role,<sup>530</sup> solving problems according to Vinaya scripture.<sup>531</sup> Rather, his role is executive and he is to punish those who are in breach of the rules. His judiciary arm was said to stretch beyond the monks in the monastery itself:

The disciplinarian has the authority to take charge of things related to the discipline of the general monk populace. Previously, he could also take charge

---

<sup>524</sup> Thargyal and Huber speculate that the administration of the Derge kingdom was modeled on that of the monasteries: Thargyal and Huber, 2007: 49.

<sup>525</sup> Schram, 2006 [1954]: 374.

<sup>526</sup> The spelling *dge bskos* also occurs regularly. For the sole reason of consistency I refer to *dge skos*.

<sup>527</sup> Silk, 2008: 103, 4; Schopen, 1996a: 117; and Schopen, 2004b: 68, 9; 103, 4.

<sup>528</sup> The role of the *upadhivārika* varied in the different narratives in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* from having a rather elevated status to being not much more than a janitor. See Schopen, 1996a: 97, n. 35.

<sup>529</sup> Takeuchi, 1993: 56, 7. The source used is Pt 1119. In Pt 1297, the disciplinarian (*dge skos*) of Weng shi’u temple (*weng shi’u si’i* (si = 寺)) also loans out grains (*gro nas*).

<sup>530</sup> Gyatso, 2003: 230.

<sup>531</sup> The *dge skos* should therefore not be confused or equated with the term *vinayadhara*, someone who has memorized and has extensive knowledge of the Vinaya.

of the judiciary issues of the lay-people and monks [who lived at] the monastic estate.<sup>532</sup>

While the word *dge skos* has older Indic precedents, the earliest extant *bca' yig* do not mention the term. Discipline in Drigung thil in the first part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century was kept in the following way:

In order for the new monks to listen to the honourable *slob dpon*<sup>533</sup> who holds the vinaya (*'dul ba 'dzin pa*, S. *vinayadhara*), you, supervising monks (*ban gnyer ba rnams kyis*) must encourage them. Not being familiar with the trainings and the precepts (*bslab bsrung*) will cause annoyance to all.<sup>534</sup>

In this monastery the executive power lay with the aforementioned twenty *dpon las*, as is evidenced by the following segment:

Items of clothes worn by monks (*ban dhe*) that are not in accord with the Dharma, such as *ral gu*,<sup>535</sup> black boots, a type of woollen blanket,<sup>536</sup> all kinds of hats (*zhwa cho ru mo ru*), need to be taken off by the twenty [*dpon las*]. From then on they are not to be worn.<sup>537</sup>

Some of the available sources state that the *dge skos* required a certain level of education, whereas others stipulate a preference for non-intellectuals. Nornang, for example, notes that in his monastery before the 1950s the *dge skos* were appointed from among the *sgrogs med* monks, i.e. monks who did not study logic.<sup>538</sup> The colleges of Drepung monastery found middle ground by choosing their disciplinarians during the summer period from among the scholars and those who would serve in the winter from among 'the lay brethren'.<sup>539</sup> Per college two disciplinarians thus served terms of six months at a time.<sup>540</sup> This half-year term was the same for Mindröl ling monastery in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>541</sup> Its *bca' yig* gives the job-description for the office of disciplinarian as follows:

<sup>532</sup> *Bod kyi dgon sde*: 86: *dge bskos kyis grwa ba spyi'i sgrig khrims thad the gtogs bya ba'i dbang cha yod/ sngar yin na des dgon pa'i mchod gzhis skya ser gyi gyod don la'ang the gtogs byas chog*

<sup>533</sup> The text reads *slob dpon lha*. This unusual address 'lha' is here taken as an expression of respect, possibly interchangeable with *bla*.

<sup>534</sup> '*Bri gung mthil bca' yig*: 248b: *slob dpon lha 'dul ba 'dzin pa la ban gsar rnams 'dul ba nyan pa la khyed ban gnyer ba rnams kyis bskul/ bslab bsrung ngo ma shes pas thams cad sun 'don par 'dug*

<sup>535</sup> This word is derived from the Sanskrit *rallaka*, a blanket or cloth made from wool, possibly from the *rallaka* deer, comparable to Pashmina, Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*: 868.

<sup>536</sup> '*Bri gung mthil bca' yig* b: 168a reads *glag pa* for *glog pa*, this may be an alternative spelling for *klaḡ*, which is an archaic word for a thick cape woven from wool. *Tshig mdzod chen mo*: 40: (*rnying*) *bal gyis btags pa'i snam bu'i lwa ba*.

<sup>537</sup> *ibid*: 250a: *ban dhes ral gu gon pa dang/ lham nag dang/ glog pa dang/ zhwa cho ru mo ru la sogs pa chos dang mi mthun pa'i gos rnams nyi shu bos shus/ phyin chad ma gon/*

<sup>538</sup> Nornang, 1990: 251.

<sup>539</sup> By this I assume the author means the non-scholar monks, without *dge slong* ordination.

<sup>540</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson, 1986 [1968]: 241.

<sup>541</sup> This six-month term is also in place in Gyütö monastery in India, while I was informed that in Tibet the disciplinarian's position used to change four times a year. Personal communication with Ngag dbang sangs rgyas, Dharamsala, August 2012. The maximum term appears to be three years, which is in place in Drigung Jangchub ling ('Bri gung byang chub gling) in India. Personal communication with the director of Drigung Jangchub ling, Rajpur, August 2012.

The disciplinarian – who, having the approval of the general constituency, has good intentions for the general welfare, is involved with the *spyi so* and is very strict on discipline – is appointed for six months. He sets forth the general discipline, in all its facets, with effort, without regard for shiny white faces (*ngo skya snum*).<sup>542</sup>

The disciplinarian is in charge of the day-to-day upkeep of discipline: his permission must be gained before leaving the monastery grounds, he makes sure all dress appropriately and he is responsible for the comportment of the monks, during assembly, but also outside of it.<sup>543</sup> He confiscates improper attire or forbidden objects, such as weapons, but also divides the share of donations (*'gyed*) to the Sangha among the various monks.<sup>544</sup> He furthermore was responsible for keeping the register (*tho len po*) of the total monk-population (*grwa dmangs*).<sup>545</sup> In Drepung monastery during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the disciplinarian was also charged with handing out degrees. According to the Fifth Dalai Lama the *dge skos* did not always remain an impartial judge:

It is well known that when taking the *gling bsre* [exam],<sup>546</sup> one would be let off the hook without having one's level of education examined, had the disciplinarian received a present (*rngan pa*).<sup>547</sup>

The *bca' yig* for Tashi Lhunpo monastery sees as its ideal candidate someone who is not just well educated, but also affluent, with a reliable background (*rgyun drang*),<sup>548</sup> and a sturdy appearance.<sup>549</sup> The text then states that suitable candidates should not try to get off the shortlist and that those not on the list should not try to get on it. The monk selected for the job is then given a seal or contract (*tham ga*), which lists his responsibilities, and from that moment on he cannot go back on his word.<sup>550</sup> While describing the procedure, the text then warns that no one should try to order

---

<sup>542</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 309: *dge bskos spyi'i 'os 'thu'i steng nas spyi bsam bzang zhing blo spyi sor gnas pa khrims non che ba re zla ba drug re bsko ba dang/ ngo skya snum la ma bltos pa'i spyi khrims yo srong 'bad rtsol gyis thon pa byed/* The unusual phrase *ngo skya snum* is here understood to indicate a certain bias, perhaps based on mere external qualities (a face that is white and shiny). The call to impartiality is also found in *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 87, where the word *snyoms gdal* is used, which can be translated as 'a fair approach'.

<sup>543</sup> *mTshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag*: 280.

<sup>544</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 238. What the disciplinarian is meant to do with the forbidden objects is not specified.

<sup>545</sup> *Bod kyi dgon sde*: 87.

<sup>546</sup> This is one of the lower level *dge bshes* degrees at Drepung, Tarab Tulku, 2000: 17, 9.

<sup>547</sup> *'Bras spungs bca' yig*: 308: *gling bsre gtod* [sic?: *gtong*] *skabs dge skos kyi rngan pa blangs nas yon tan che chung la mi blta bar gtong ba yongs su bsrags shing/*

<sup>548</sup> I take this to refer to his ordination lineage. No mention is made, however, if having *dge slong* ordination was a prerequisite. The elderly monk Shes rab rgya mtsho of Sakya noted that one did not have to be a *dge slong* to be a disciplinarian there. Personal communication, Rajpur, August 2012.

<sup>549</sup> This physical quality is also mentioned by an anonymous monk-officer in 'Brug pa dkar [sic] rgyud monastery in Clement Town, Dehradun. He said that while the chant-master needs to be well educated (*slob sbyong yag po*) the disciplinarian has to be *gzugs po stobs chen po*: big and strong.

<sup>550</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 86: [...] *dge skos las 'khur 'dzin dgos kyi tham ga byung phral dang len byed pa las/ tham ga phyr 'bul dang don bud sogs dgyis mi chog cing* [...] In contemporary Namgyel dratshang, the new disciplinarian (*dge skos*), during his appointment ceremony, recites a prayer (*smon lam*), the wording of which is not set. In this prayer he promises to follow the Vinaya and to serve the monastery. Personal communication Ngag dbang dpal sbyin, Dharamsala, July 2012.

around those who exercise the general law (*spyi khyab kyi khrims*), such as the disciplinarian, or those have done so in the past.<sup>551</sup>

The above selection procedure for Tashi Lhunpo was for the position of ‘great disciplinarian’ (*dge skos chen mo*). This position is similar to that of *zhal ngo* in Drepung, Sera and Ganden. This is a disciplinarian who oversees the great assembly (*tshogs chen*) and has a position of considerable power. The word *zhal ngo*, literally meaning simply ‘presence,’ is also used in the secular world. Aside from referring to ‘someone who does the Sangha’s work’ the term is also simply explained to mean ‘manager’ (*do dam pa*).<sup>552</sup> In Bhutan, *zhal ngo* are the ‘hereditary chiefs’, i.e. the leaders of the clans.<sup>553</sup> The sense of an exalted social status in the secular world is also attested in *bKra shis lhun po bca’ yig* where it is mentioned that the *chos mdzad* have come from a lineage of *zhal ngo*.<sup>554</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word referred to a low ranking military officer,<sup>555</sup> which the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* specifies as a military commander over a group of twenty-five people.<sup>556</sup> Although there is no clear evidence for this, I find it unlikely that the monastic institution borrowed this term from the ‘secular world’ or vice versa. The term in all cases seems to imply a certain natural authority that the *zhal ngo* possessed.

In Tashi Lhunpo, the disciplinarians for the individual colleges were called *chos khrims pa*. These *chos khrims pa* exercised their own set of rules with the help of their own guidelines:

The *chos khrims pa* is one who, without hypocrisy, enforces the rules with regard to the duties allotted to each tantric functionary. By praising the good and putting an end to the bad and by taking the contents of tantric college’s own *bca’ yig* as a base, he enforces the rules and guards their upholdance (*rgyun skyong*).<sup>557</sup>

A large monastery could thus house a sizeable number of disciplinarians. In smaller monasteries, there was often just one disciplinarian, who was either called *dge skos* or *chos khrims pa*.<sup>558</sup> While the role of the disciplinarian was seen by some monks as a burden or a distraction, within the Gelug school in particular it was an important stepping-stone. For the selection of the position of *dGa’ ldan khri pa* (the head of the Gelug school), one had to have served as – among other things – a *dge skos* at either Gyütö or Gyümè (rGyud smad).<sup>559</sup>

It can be surmised from the above that the disciplinarian, as the enforcer of both unspoken rules as well as the *bca’ yig*, generally speaking was not required to

<sup>551</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca’ yig*: 86: *dge skos ’di bzhin spyi khyab kyi khrims gnon du song gshis byed dang byas zin kyi rigs la mtho dma’ sus kyang g.yog skul bgyis mi chog cing [...]*

<sup>552</sup> *brDa dkrol gser gyi me long*: 765: 1) *do dam pa’i ming* 2) *dge ’dun gyi las byed mkhan gyi ming*

<sup>553</sup> Aris, 1976: 690.

<sup>554</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca’ yig*: 71: *zhal ngo’i brgyud las gson nges pa’i chos mdzad de/*

<sup>555</sup> Travers, 2008: 14.

<sup>556</sup> *Tshig mdzod chen mo*: 2379.

<sup>557</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca’ yig* 84: *sngags pa’i las tsham rnams nas kyang so so’i bgo skal gyi bya ba chos khrims pa nas khrims gnon ngo lkog med nges/ bzang po la gzengs bstod dang/ ngan pa tshar gcod pa sogs ’di dang rgyud grwa rang gi bca’ yig dgongs don gzhir bzhag gi khrims gnon rgyun skyong dang/*

<sup>558</sup> I have not been able to explain the use of the two terms on the basis of school or regional preference. It appears that monasteries in Ladakh prefer *chos khrims pa*.

<sup>559</sup> I was told that in Gyütö monastery the *bla ma dbu mdzad* could become the abbot and only retired abbots could become *dGa’ ldan khri pa*. Personal communication with Ngag dbang sangs rgyas, Dharamsala, August 2012.

have an in-depth knowledge of Vinayic literature, whereas a thorough understanding of the local monastic rules was pivotal. He had high levels of responsibility and power and was therefore corruptible. This is perhaps one reason that the Bon Bya ti lo monastery in Lithang (Kham) only replaces its disciplinarian yearly and leaves all the other administrative monks in place.<sup>560</sup> While, as shall become apparent from the discussion below, the disciplinarians did not stand alone in maintaining discipline in the monastery, the day-to-day activities depended greatly on the moral standing of these monks.

### The Chant-master (*dbu mdzad*)

In many *bca' yig* the chant-master and the disciplinarian are mentioned together as *dbu chos*, a contraction of *dbu mdzad* and *chos khrims pa*. This indicates that these two offices were seen to be of similar status. The Fifth Dalai Lama, however, allots the disciplinarian six shares, while the chant-master gets just five shares.<sup>561</sup> The *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig* describes the duties of the *dbu mdzad* in the tantric college and says he needs to make sure that the intonation, pace, and 'melody' (*gdangs dbyangs*) of the prayers that are recited during the various rituals are carried out exactly in accordance with tradition.<sup>562</sup> This is obviously not the chant-master's only job, for we have seen above that he was often also part of the administration.

As with the disciplinarian, for bigger monasteries such as Tashi Lhunpo, there also were – aside from those for the smaller congregations – one or more chant-masters for the great assembly (*tshogs chen dbu mdzad*), who were in charge of keeping the traditional ways of reciting and restoring them where necessary.<sup>563</sup> The maintenance of the ritual traditions is also stressed in the *dPal yul gdan rabs*, in which it is said that the chant-master was to make sure that 'innovations do not stain them.'<sup>564</sup> In Gyütö monastery, a position not dissimilar to that of *tshogs chen dbu mdzad* exists, which comes with more responsibilities. There the one who serves as *bla ma dbu mdzad* (a position higher than that of *dbu mdzad*) keeps the *bca' yig chen mo* in a box (*bla sgam*) to which only he has access. This position can only be obtained by a *lha rams dge bshes* who has finished the three year tantric exam.<sup>565</sup> The other *lha rams dge bshes* can vote in a new *bla ma dbu mdzad*. Only those who have been *bla ma dbu mdzad* can become the abbot of the monastery and only those are eligible to become *dGa' ldan khri pa*.<sup>566</sup> Despite the fact that leading prayers is still an

<sup>560</sup> Karmay and Nagano, 2003: 508.

<sup>561</sup> *'Bras spungs bca' yig*: 305: *dbu mdzad la lnga skal dge skos la drug skal*. This is to say that they would get respectively five or six times as much of the donations as an ordinary monk would.

<sup>562</sup> This is a paraphrase of *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 84: *dbu mdzad nas cho ga bskang gso sogs zhal 'don char 'phar thams cad mgyogs khyad sla bcos su ma song bar snga tshig gdangs dbyangs thams cad dam pa gong ma'i phyag len gzhir bzhaq 'phyugs med dang/*

<sup>563</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 87: *tshogs chen dbu mdzad dag nas kyang char 'phar zhal 'don gang ci mgyogs khyad sla bcos su ma song bar gdangs dbyangs 'don lugs gang ci nyams pa sor chud/ ma nyams pa gong 'phel yong ba byed/*

<sup>564</sup> *dPal yul gdan rabs*: 359.

<sup>565</sup> Possibly contradictory information is given here:

[http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/study/history\\_buddhism/buddhism\\_tibet/gelug/brief\\_history\\_gyumay\\_gyuto\\_tantric\\_college.html](http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/study/history_buddhism/buddhism_tibet/gelug/brief_history_gyumay_gyuto_tantric_college.html) (viewed 27-02 2014), where it is mentioned that the *bla ma dbu mdzad* are chosen from among the former *dge skos*.

<sup>566</sup> Personal information, Ngag dbang sangs rgyas, Dharamsala, August 2012. The *bla ma dbu mdzad* of Gyütö monastery in India himself was abroad during the time of my fieldwork. The monks at the monastery recommended him as the most knowledgeable on the topic of *bca' yig*. Their set of monastic guidelines, the *rGyud stod bca' yig chen mo*, is said to be the original scroll from the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century that had been taken from Tibet to India. It is not taken out of its box often except when the *bla*

important part of the job, the *bla ma dbu mdzad* position is significantly distinct from the normal *dbu mdzad* post. It even gets translated as ‘assistant abbot’.<sup>567</sup> The post of *dbu mdzad* is not always an exalted position, however. In Drepung, the *lag bde dbu mdzad* appears to have been the supervisor of the kitchen-staff and was paid – on a par with the scholar monks (*rigs grwa pa*) – one share (*skal*) of the offerings.<sup>568</sup>

The word *dbu mdzad* does not appear in canonical texts. It may simply be the honorific term for leader (e.g. *’go byed*), a term used to denote the head of a lay-organization. A variant of the title is found in the 1845 *bca’ yig* for Rinchen gang, one of the very few extant sets of monastic guidelines for a nunnery. There the nun in charge of leading the assembly is called *dbu byed*.<sup>569</sup> While it is tempting to surmise from this that authors felt less need to use honorifics when addressing female clergy-members, it actually appears that the term is used to denote a chant-master in the Sakya school, regardless of gender.<sup>570</sup> Another word that denotes the same position is *byang ’dren pa*, literally ‘the one who begins’ (in this case the prayers or rituals). According to the *dPal yul gdan rabs*, this *byang ’dren pa* is in the best case a lama, otherwise a *bla phran* and if the qualifications of education, voice and behaviour are met it can also be a *mchod gral pa*: a practitioner monk who has completed retreats.<sup>571</sup> Aside from having a good character and voice, he also needs to be able-bodied.<sup>572</sup> While this position is presented as a temporary one in most sources, Nornang reports that in his monastery the *dbu mdzad* was a life-long position. He, together with the *zhal ta pa*, had sole access to the boxes that contained official documents.<sup>573</sup>

### Manager or Servant? (*zhal ta palba*)

This official title was mentioned briefly above as a translation of the Sanskrit *vaiyāpṛtyakara*,<sup>574</sup> and is equated with the Tibetan word *do dam pa*: manager. The tasks covered by this person in the Indic context range from doing domestic jobs to making important financial and managerial decisions. While the term *zhal ta pa*<sup>575</sup> appears to be obsolete in contemporary Tibetan monasteries, older Tibetan sources suggest a range of meanings comparable to those found in Buddhist texts from India. The initial meaning of the word is someone who serves, derived from the verb *zhal ta*

*ma dbu mdzad* decides to read it out in the presence of the assembly. This is done not at a special occasion, but when it seems appropriate, at least once in every three years. My informant, the disciplinarian at the time, thinks that over time new rules have been added to the original manuscript.

<sup>567</sup> Powers, 1995: 481; 530. The author further explains the hierarchy at the Gyütö monastery.

<sup>568</sup> *’Bras spungs bca’ yig*: 305. I have not come across this title elsewhere. It is likely that it refers to the foreman of the kitchen staff (*lag bde*). Alternatively, it could mean the ‘graceful’ *dbu mdzad*. In any case, this post is clearly distinct from that of chant-master, who is paid much higher wages, namely five shares.

<sup>569</sup> *Rin chen sgang bca’ yig*: 214.

<sup>570</sup> e.g. in the colophon of Kun dga’ blo gros’ (1729-1783) *dPal rdo rje gzhon nu’i byin ’bebs kyi rol yig mthon ba rang grol gsal byed mdzes rgyan*. In *gSung ’bum vol. 3*. Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 2008: 926. This text, a so-called *dbyangs yig*, was written at the behest of the chant-master (*dbu byed*) Rin chen rgyal mtshan. Although little is known about the organization of nunneries, contemporary cases suggest that titles of officials and the like are the same as in the monasteries, e.g. Schneider, 2009: 285.

<sup>571</sup> *dPal yul gdan rabs*: 359: *dbu mdzad chen mo’am byang ’dren pa ni/ rab bla ma yin pa dang/ ’bring bla phran dang/ yon tan dan skad gshis kun spyod bcas tshad gzhi’i ’dang na mchod gral pa zhig gis kyang chog*

<sup>572</sup> *ibid.*: *mi gzhi skad gshis lus tshugs bcas legs par dgos/*

<sup>573</sup> Nornang, 1990: 253.

<sup>574</sup> For an extensive treatment of this role in Indic textual material, see Silk, 2008: 38-73.

<sup>575</sup> The variants *zhal ta ba* and *zhal ta* also occur.

*byed pa*: to do service.<sup>576</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century *bca' yig* for Mindröl ling gives the prerequisites for the *zhal ta pa* as follows:

A suitable candidate should be appointed with care, for the *zhal ta* needs to be of middling vows (*bar shar*),<sup>577</sup> intelligent (*blo gtsang*) and good at handling the stove (*thab g.yos*). He has a sound sense of responsibility with regard to the welfare of the community (*spyi tshis kyi khur bsam bzang*) and good hygiene. He does not discard supplies or allow them to go to waste, which is to say that he thus leaves them intact.<sup>578</sup> Doing these types of things will become a cause for himself and others to accumulate merit. Furthermore he does not to manage things privately, by loaning out and giving away water, wood and kitchen appliances.<sup>579</sup>

This suggests a post for someone who is not a *dge slong* and who is involved in kitchen work. After serving as a *zhal ta*, one would become the 'seat steward' (*gdan gnyer*), someone who manages the laying out and clearing away of seats during the assembly.<sup>580</sup> The fact that this position gets full mention in the text suggests that it is of some import. A person doing kitchen work had access to both food and (costly) pots and pans that needed to be managed carefully.<sup>581</sup> Here the author also connects the *zhal ta's* role to a larger issue: by guarding the contents of the kitchen carefully, one would thereby ensure that offerings given by the faithful would not be wasted, thereby allowing the donors to accumulate maximal merit. The *bca' yig* written for Sera je by the Seventh Dalai Lama lists the kitchen staff required to provide all the monks with tea. The kitchen needs one supervisor (*do dam pa*), three tea-makers (*ja ma*), two people in charge of the fire (*me 'bud*), two people who fetch water, and finally two *zhal ta pa*.<sup>582</sup> The suggestion here is that in Sera je in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the *zhal ta pa* were servants doing odd-jobs. Another *bca' yig* states that the two hornblowers (*dung mkhan*), the clean-handed *zhal ta ba* (*zhal ta ba lag gtsang ba*),<sup>583</sup> the shrine-keeper (*dkon gnyer*) and the disciplinarians' assistants (*chab ril ba*) need to be chosen from among the young monks (*lo grangs*). This suggests that all these posts are junior positions.<sup>584</sup> Equally, the guidelines for Tengpoche monastery in Nepal

---

<sup>576</sup> Alternatively, one finds *zhal ba byed pa*, e.g. in *dPal yul dar thang bca' yig*: 193, where this type of service clearly refers to physical labour such as fixing roofs and painting the buildings.

<sup>577</sup> According to the *Tshig mdzod chen mo*: 1823, a *bar shar ba* is someone who holds the middling ordination vows (*rab tu byung ba'i bslab pa 'bring gras*).

<sup>578</sup> I here emend *thim pa* to 'them pa.

<sup>579</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 310: *zhal ta bar shar blo gtsang thab g.yos mkhas pa re 'os 'thus dmigs btsugs kyis bskos ngos/ spyi tshis kyi khur bsam bzang zhing gtsang sbra che ba/ yo byad rnam bar ma dor tshud ma zos par dmigs su thim pa sogs rang gzhan tshogs bsag gi rgyur ci 'gyur dang/ chu shing thab chas g.yar gtong sogs kyis sgos skyong mi byed/*

<sup>580</sup> *ibid.*: 311.

<sup>581</sup> Elsewhere in the same text, the monks are warned that the kitchen (*rung khang*) is the domain of its staff (*zhal ta'i las byed*) and that they cannot just enter it and stay near the stove. See *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 286.

<sup>582</sup> *Se ra byes bca' yig*: 586; *Se ra byes bca' yig* 2: 83.

<sup>583</sup> This term *lag gtsang ba* could refer to the literal sense of maintaining a certain level of hygiene, which may well be important when the *zhal ta ba* are to handle food and drink. However, more figuratively it could have the sense of being honest and incorruptible, which may be equally if not more important here.

<sup>584</sup> *Gangs dkar gling bca' yig*: 147. Interestingly, in this work (p. 149) the steward (*gnyer pa*), the disciplinarian, the chant-master, the *zhal ta ba*, the two hornblowers, and the shrine-keeper are all allotted equal shares. This may be a typical feature of a smaller monastery.

from 1918 note that the junior ones, namely the tea server (*phyag bde ba*), the shrine-keeper and the *zhal ta ba*, should not be lazy in carrying out their tasks.<sup>585</sup>

The *bca' yig* written by Tsong kha pa mentions the *zhal ta pa* a number of times. He is named together with the disciplinarian as having a position that merits being exempt from certain rules, such as having to ask for permission to leave the monastic grounds and so on. Here, this title refers most definitely to a post of equal importance to that of the disciplinarian, and the task of managing the monastery is clearly part of his duties.<sup>586</sup> Similarly, in Tshurphu monastery in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the 'Sangha's' *zhal ta pa* (*dge 'dun gyi zhal ta pa*) appears to have been one whose job it was to investigate those monks who stayed at lay-people's houses without permission.<sup>587</sup> In Drepung there seems to have been a variant of this title, namely *zhal ta dpon*. This *zhal ta dpon* was, together with the disciplinarian, in charge of examining and enrolling new monks.<sup>588</sup> This task of selecting members of the monastic community appears similar to that of the \**vaiyāpṛtyakara bhikṣu* (*dge slong zhal ta byed pa*) as portrayed in the *Pravrajyāvastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*.<sup>589</sup>

It is unclear why this term has not survived the test of time, whereas most other organizational titles have remained unchanged for centuries. The above sources suggest inconsistencies with regard to what a *zhal ta pa* was meant to do, ranging from performing menial tasks such as kitchen-corrée to supervising and managing the monks. It is perhaps exactly this range of meanings that made the title unworkable in the modern context, in which – generally speaking – there is a drive towards uniformity among the monasteries, regardless of their affiliation.

### Head-monk or Head of Finance? (*spyi pa/ sa/ bso/so/ spyi gnyer*)

Earlier, the ambiguity of the term *spyi sa/ bso/so* was briefly discussed. That it could refer to both a group of people and individual monks makes it slightly problematic. The word *spyi pa/ ba*, however, appears to refer solely to a person.<sup>590</sup> The sources at hand suggest, however, that this term may refer to disparate roles. Some texts speak of the *spyi pa* as someone in a supervisory position, while others suggest that this post was strongly linked to monastic moneymaking. Starting with the former, the *bca' yig* for the Sakya nunnery of Rinchen gang appears to ascribe a role to the *spyi pa* that is rather similar to that of disciplinarian in other cases:

If one is a nun who is enrolled (*sgrig rgyugs pa 'i rigs*), one's own clothing should conform to tradition. One is not allowed to wear clothes the colour of which has not been altered, such as [any] light colours. When one goes against the above, then an appropriate punishment will be given. The *spyi pa* should not hold back. The incumbent *spyi pa* (*spyi pa las thog pa*) has to enforce the

<sup>585</sup> *sTeng po che bca' yig*: 462/ 5b.

<sup>586</sup> e.g. *Byams pa gling bca' yig*: 251a.

<sup>587</sup> *mTshur phu bca' yig*: 706/4a.

<sup>588</sup> *'Bras spungs bca' yig*: 302. The post of *zhal ta dpon* does not seem to be in use in other texts.

<sup>589</sup> *Vinayavastu* ('*Dul ba 'i gzhi*, D1): 97b; Silk, 2008: 55, 6.

<sup>590</sup> In contrast, in a work on the history of Labrang monastery in Amdo the *tshogs chen spyi ba* is translated as 'the general accounting office', which collected taxes on every load-bearing animal. Nietupski, 2011: 91.

religious rules (*chos khrims*), so the *spyi pa* has to take responsibility for [adherence to] the monastery's regulations of order (*sgrig rnam gzhag*).<sup>591</sup>

The text further specifies her duties by saying that 'the contribution of the *spyi pa* is to bring those subtle matters of behaviour and rules (*sgrig lam kun spyod*) that are not clarified here but that are in line with the old system to the attention of all and to make sure that they are put in practice.'<sup>592</sup> Similarly, in Pelri chödè's (dPal ri chos sde) monastic guidelines, the *spyi pa* is named together with the chant-master and the disciplinarian as someone who needs to be contacted should monks misbehave.<sup>593</sup>

In the *bca' yig* of Mindröl ling it is said that when monks travel as a group (*ser sbrengs*) the *spyi pa* is to confiscate 'unsuitable' items of clothing (*zhe mi mthun pa*) that monks are found to carry with them. When any crimes occur that fall under the 'general law' (*spyi khrims*), they need to be brought before the *spyi pa*, once one is back at the base.<sup>594</sup> The same text states elsewhere that unless one has been assigned to do so by a *spyi pa* and is accompanied by a monk-friend (*khrims grogs*), one is not to wander around the village of 'Pher brgya as a guide for one's acquaintances, and so forth.<sup>595</sup> Clearly, the above-cited instances of the word suggest the *spyi pa* to be someone with authority, but not necessarily someone with financial responsibilities.

It appears to be more common for the term *spyi pa* to refer to a post that is of substantial economic import. Unlike in countries such as Thailand, where a lay-bursar called *waiyawachakon* handled all money on behalf of the monastery,<sup>596</sup> there is (and was) no perceived problem with monks being involved in financial matters. Ekvall, speaking largely from the experience he had accumulated by living and working as a missionary in the border areas of Tibet (mainly Amdo), describes this post in great detail. He notes that the monastery's wealth is 'administered by a formally and tightly structured organization and is headed by a sPyi Ba (superintendent). Often there are two of these, who are elected or appointed from among the monks and serve terms of two to four years.' He goes on to relate that the *gnyer pa* aid the *spyi pa*, who may also have assistants (*spyi g.yog*).<sup>597</sup> Ekvall's description of the duties of the *spyi pa* merits citation *in extenso*:

To be successful, the sPyi Ba must combine the talents of good business executives, the acumen of investment bankers, and the special gifts of salesmen. They must be able to plan and manage such business ventures as the dispatch of trade caravans, the management of livestock herding, the cultivation of fields, and various handicrafts activities, building projects, and the general upkeep and maintenance of all the projects. They must know how

---

<sup>591</sup> *Rin chen sgang bca' yig*: 214: *btsun ma sgrig rgyugs pa'i rigs yin na/ rang rang gi chas gos lugs mthun ma gtogs/ tshos mdog ma bsgyur ba'i gos skya bo sogs gyon mi mchog gong 'khod de rnams dang 'gal tshe spyi ba'i ngo srung med pa 'os rigs kyi chad pa 'gel/ spyi pa las thog pa su yin de chos khrims kyi go chod kyang yin pas dgon pa'i sgrig rnam gzhag spyi pa'i lag len sogs thag pa khur blangs byed dgos rgyu yin zhing/*

<sup>592</sup> *ibid.*: *spyi pa'i gtong gzhi sgrig lam kun spyod phra mo sogs 'dir ma gsal ba rnams snga rgyun bzhin mthun phyogs rnams kun gyi thugs la bcangs phyag len la thebs par byas/*

<sup>593</sup> *dPal ri chos sde bca' yig*: 458.

<sup>594</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 307: *gal te spyi khrims la gras kha byas pa'i nyes che ba rnams slar gzhis su spyi par btug*. The word *gzhis*, here translated as base, may either refer to the place the monks have set up camp or the home monastery.

<sup>595</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 282: *spyi pas bskos shing khrims grogs yod na ma gtogs ngo shes sne shan sogs 'pher brgya'i grong 'khyams mi byed/*

<sup>596</sup> Bunnag, 1973: 33.

<sup>597</sup> Ekvall, 1964: 195.

and to whom to lend wealth at interest to the best advantage, avoiding unprofitable enterprises and defaulters. In addition, they must be effective salesmen, advertising and proffering the religious services of the monastery so as to elicit, if not directly solicit, gifts to the Grwa Tshang. Salesmanship is also required to induce individuals, families, and communities to accept capital funds as an investment from which the Grwa Tshang may be assured of regular income. In Central Tibet, the collection of taxes is one of their principal duties.<sup>598</sup>

The above account is confirmed by the *bca' yig* for Dophü chökhör ling (rDo phud chos 'khor gling) monastery (in Central Tibet) from 1938. It warns of the temptations that accompany the post of *spyi pa*:

Those who hold the post of *spyi ba* at the *bla brang* are involved, during their service, in efforts to sustain the general good [such as] farm work, sales and loans, horses and donkeys. They have an exemption, but only up to a certain level. It is not allowed to do more than what's necessary, which would be both contradictory and harmful to the general rules and good behaviour.<sup>599</sup>

It appears that they did not just involve themselves in business but also that they managed the treasury for the general population of monks. It is said in the monastic guidelines for Sera je monastery, that when there were gifts that were unsuitable to divide among the Sangha, they were to be placed in the treasury of the *spyi pa*.<sup>600</sup> In other instances, the *spyi pa* also serve as the liaison for the benefactors who wish to sponsor tea for the monks.<sup>601</sup> Together with the disciplinarians they inform donors on how their money is spent (i.e. how much goes towards buying wood (*shing rin*), etc.). However, when the people fall short, they may not argue with them about it, putting them under pressure.<sup>602</sup>

While previously the word *spyi bso/so* was connected to an institutional office,<sup>603</sup> this term can be equated with that of *spyi pa* in a number of cases, thus referring to an individual post.<sup>604</sup> According to Dakpa, in Drepung the *spyi so*, of which there

<sup>598</sup> Ekvall, 1964: 195, 6. For a more detailed examination of the role of the individual monk within the larger context of monastic economy, see Chapter 6.

<sup>599</sup> *rDo phud chos 'khor gling bca' yig*: 568: *bla brang spyi pa las 'dzin rnams nas kyang las 'khur ring spyi don 'tsho ba'i 'du 'god kyi so nam dang tshong bun/ rta bong dgos nges grangs bcad bcas nas dmigs bsal las de lhag sgrig lam kun spyod la gnod 'gal 'gro rigs mi chog [...]* The translation is a loose one, for the language is elliptical.

<sup>600</sup> *Se ra byes bca' yig*: 578: *dge 'dun la bgo ring mi chog pa'i rnyed pa'i rigs spyi ba'i mdzod du 'jog* I suggest emending *ring* to *rung*. This is in accord with the Vinaya regulations on the acceptance of gifts that are either unsuitable or useless to the Sangha. Items that are not of any use to monks, such as perfume, still need to be used in some way. See Schopen, 1995b: 107.

<sup>601</sup> *Ra mo che bca' yig*: 131: *sbyin bdag gi sne len byed dgos rnams spyi pas byed cing [...]*

<sup>602</sup> *ibid.*: *ma lcogs pa'i rigs la u tshugs kyi rtsod pa mi gtong/* The issue of monks dealing with (lay-) sponsors is further discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>603</sup> The term *spyi so* as referring to an individual is not attested in the *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, where it is described as the office [of] those who manage the general income of each of the monasteries in the olden days: 1680: *snga dus dgon pa so so 'i thun mong gi gtong yong bdag gnyer byed mkhan las khungs/* While both spellings appear with equal regularity in the *bca' yig*, *spyi bso*, in which the second syllable *bso* might be the future tense of the verb *gso ba*, i.e. to make grow, to restore, to nourish, appears to make more etymological sense. Literally then, *spyi bso* stands for either an office or someone in charge of caring for the general [welfare of the Sangha]. Elsewhere, the spelling *spyi gso* also occurs, e.g. Karmay and Nagano: 756. Here it is rendered as 'accountant'.

<sup>604</sup> This is also confirmed in Dargyab, 2009: 56; 58.

were two, were responsible for the finances.<sup>605</sup> The same was true for the *spyi bso* at the Kong stod dung dkar monastery in 1943:

Two people serve as *spyi bso* for a period of three years. They make sure there is no decline by keeping clear account of grains, silver, animals, and household items in the record of income (*sprod deb*) and that what needs to be given and offered, which includes the interest on grains and butter and the income from dairy products (*she 'bab*), accords with the record of expenses (*gtong deb*).<sup>606</sup>

This shows that the *spyi bso* have tasks that are similar to that of a modern-day accountant. The big difference is that, in line with Ekvall's description, the *spyi bso* had to make sure that the monastery would not incur any loss, by managing its income in the *sprod deb* and its expenses in the *gtong deb*. At some monasteries, the *spyi bso*'s assistants were called *mchod gnyer* (keepers of offerings). Together with the *spyi bso* they enjoyed several exemptions. The monastic guidelines the Thirteenth Dalai Lama wrote for Rongpo rabten (Rong po rab brtan) monastery in 1930 state that except for the *spyi bso* and the *mchod gnyer*, no one was ever 'allowed to do farm work, cattle herding, business and the like, whether near or far.'<sup>607</sup> As with other managerial posts, this position was vulnerable to abuse:

The general office, of which the managers of the offerings (*mchod gnyer*) are the heads, is [to record] meticulously<sup>608</sup> all that is deducted, invested, reduced and subtracted from that which was given by the faithful (*dad rdzas*) to the field of merit, which is the Three Jewels, according to how it is stated in the allowance-ledger (*phogs deb*) that has been issued by the government. No selfish unmeritorious evil actions may ever be permitted.<sup>609</sup>

The above statement reveals a number of important issues, aside from the fact that the *mchod gnyer* were seen to be corruptible. It shows that the things offered by the faithful (*dad rdzas*) were in some cases not exactly voluntary,<sup>610</sup> for these offerings could be increased or reduced by the *mchod gnyer*, suggesting that they were susceptible to bias. Further it indicates that the allowance-ledger (*phogs deb*) contained rules on how to deal with and record offerings and other types of income. Generally speaking, the *phogs deb* stated how much the different classes of monks received.<sup>611</sup> At the same time, this ledger indicates that the monastery was

<sup>605</sup> Dakpa, 2003: 171.

<sup>606</sup> Kong stod dung dkar dgon bca' yig: 597: *spyi bso mi ngo gnyis nas las thog lo gsum ring sprod gsal 'bru dngul/ sems can/ 'dzin chas dngos rigs sprod deb nang gsal rtsis len thog 'bru mar gyi bskyed/ sheb 'bab [sic: she 'bab] bcas nas mchod gtong 'bul dgos/ gtong deb ltar nyams med byed/*

<sup>607</sup> Rong po rab brtan dgon bca' yig: 538: *spyi bso dang mchod gnyer khag la ma gtogs zhing las/ phyugs skyong/ khe tshong sogs nye 'gyangs gang sar nam yang mi chog*

<sup>608</sup> This phrase serves to illustrate that all that is taken out needs to be put right back where it came from. It literally means for the meat-broth to be [re-] absorbed into the meat. *Tshig mdzod chen mo*: 2821: *sha khu sha thim: gang nas byung ba de de rang du gtong dgos pa'i dpe/ ... rgyal khab kyis 'gro song gtong rgyur gnang ba de dag sha khu sha thim du gtong dgos pa las/ gang byung 'thor gyar du gyur na mi 'grig*

<sup>609</sup> Rong po rab brtan dgon bca' yig: 537: *spyi bsos gtsos pa'i mchod gnyer khag nas gzhung stsal phogs deb nang gsal ltar mchog gsum bsod nams kyi zhing la dad rdzas sha khu shar thim las chad 'jog 'khri 'then sogs rang 'dod bsod nams ma yin pa'i las ngan rigs nam yang mi chog/*

<sup>610</sup> For more on these types of 'offerings' see Chapter 7.

<sup>611</sup> See Jansen, 2013a: 131, 2; 'Bras spungs bca' yig: 306, 7. For more on these ledgers, see Chapter 6.

economically accountable to and dependent of the government, which appears to be part of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's political policies. Presumably, it gave the government the leverage it needed to impose stricter rules regarding 'playing favours' (or simply corruption).

Yet another similar term is *spyi gnyer*, which also may refer to the assistant of the *spyi pa*. In Sera je there were two of them, and they were allowed to keep up to three horses,<sup>612</sup> something that was forbidden for the ordinary monks. This suggests that they had to venture out of the monastery on a regular basis. In the *bca' yig* for Drigung thil from 1802, the *spyi gnyer* is mentioned together with the disciplinarian (here: *chos khrims pa*), the two then get abbreviated to *spyi chos*. They appear to play an important supervisory role in the monastery. The *spyi gnyer*, as did others who held official positions (*las 'dzin*), had to make sure that their robes were in order, in particular when venturing outside of the monastery.<sup>613</sup> This suggests the *spyi gnyer* had a representative role.

### **The Steward or the Financial Caretaker (*gnyer pa*)**

While the above terms *zhal ta pa* and *spyi pa* appear nowadays largely obsolete, the word *gnyer pa* is in active use in the monasteries today. It indicates a monk who is in charge of the finances of the monastery. A monastic institution could have several *gnyer pa*. mKhan po chos dbyings lhun grub, referring to the contemporary situation in Khampa gar in India, explains that the different sections of the monastery, such as the *bshad grwa*, function more or less independently. They have separate economies and they each have a *gnyer pa*. However, the owner of the whole monastery (*dgon pa'i bdag po*) is Khams sprul rin po che. When the one section faces difficulties the others help out.<sup>614</sup> Similarly, for Sakya Chökhör ling (Sa skya chos 'khor gling) in India, the two *gnyer pa* look after the monks during certain rituals (*zhabs rten*) and other religious congregations. They are also responsible for the food-bill.<sup>615</sup>

In pre-modern Tibet, the *gnyer pa* appear to have filled positions often similar if not equivalent to that of the *spyi pa*. The elderly monk dKon mchog chos nyid, speaking of his time in Yangri gar<sup>616</sup> in the 1950s, notes that in Tibet certain types of incarnations or the richer monks would fill the position of *gnyer pa*. More generally speaking, the monks that worked in the administration, the *bla brang*, needed to be affluent (*rgyu chen po*). They would travel around, making investments, buying and selling things, and do business for the monastery. They needed to have some start-up capital, so this kind of enterprise was not for the poorer monks.<sup>617</sup> Dagyab notes that, at least in the years prior to 1959, in the case of a deficit, such a monk would have to replace the losses himself, whereas he could assume that, in the case there was any surplus, he could keep it.<sup>618</sup> That this post is strongly connected to being both wealthy and business-savvy is highlighted by the fact that in the modern Mongolian language the term 'Jisa nyarab' (*\*spyi sa'i gnyer pa*) carries a special meaning, namely 'that of a person who has money but is very careful and not willing to use it'.<sup>619</sup>

<sup>612</sup> *Se ra byes bca' yig*: 581.

<sup>613</sup> *'Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig*: 404.

<sup>614</sup> Personal communication with mKhan po chos dbyings lhun grub, Bir, August 2012.

<sup>615</sup> Personal communication with bSod nams chos rgyal, Rajpur, August 2012.

<sup>616</sup> The full name of this monastery is 'Bri gung yang ri sgar thub bstan sde bzhi rab rgyas gling

<sup>617</sup> Personal communication with dKon mchog chos nyid, Phiyang, August 2012.

<sup>618</sup> Dagyab, 2009: 60.

<sup>619</sup> The Mongolian term that is closely related to *gnyer pa* is *hetsuu hun*, meaning 'clever one'. Purevjav, 2012: 262.

This notion that a person who does business on behalf of the Sangha needs to have money of his own does not occur solely in the Tibetan tradition: the rules in the Theravāda Vinaya state that monks were liable to pay damages when their actions lead to the Sangha incurring a loss. From that can be deduced that monks tended to own property.<sup>620</sup> In the Tibetan case, this Vinayic concern for illegitimately using the Sangha's possessions translates into a general rule that the people investing those very goods had to be of some means themselves.<sup>621</sup>

The *gnyer pa* may have also held an important managerial position with regard to managing the lands that belonged to the monastery. In Ganden, the *gnyer pa* had two ways to manage the lands belonging to the monastery (*chos gzhis/ mchod gzhis*). He could let it to others (*gla mkhan*) and set up a contract (*chings yig*) for that purpose or alternatively, he could appoint a subject of the monastic region (*dgon sde'i mi ser*) to look after the affairs and collect the revenue.<sup>622</sup> In the same monastery, before 1959 the individual houses (*kham tshan*) each had three financial managers (*dngul gnyer*)<sup>623</sup> in Lhasa, who would accept repayment from debtors and busied themselves with collecting rent. These managers were supported by two 'pursuers' (*'ded pa*) who would act as debt-collectors.<sup>624</sup> That the *gnyer pa* had to be mobile is apparent in the '*Bras spungs bca' yig*, where it is stated that while the two disciplinarians were allowed to have just one horse each, the *gnyer pa* of Phan bde legs bshad gling college could have five horses and the *gnyer pa* of bDe yangs college could keep two horses and two *mdzo mo*. The tantric ritualists (*sngags sgrub mchod pa*) could have up to one horse and one *mdzo mo*.<sup>625</sup>

Of those who dealt with business that required going out of the monastery, it was not just the *gnyer pa* who had to be of some means. This is witnessed by the *bca' yig* for Mindröl ling, where it is indicated that a *rtsis 'dzin pa* – someone taking account of loans (against interest) and repayments of those loans – had to make up for any loss that would occur:

All the things that are given as loans (*rtsis 'khri*) to which the *rtsis 'dzin pa* of the treasury and a suitable assistant are assigned with utmost care – except for when there is an exceptionally great need – may not be loaned out to others. And even if something needs to be used, the official to whose care it was given needs to make sure the value does not get diminished. In the case of loss, he needs to replace it.<sup>626</sup> When the loss is great a replacement and [an extra]

---

<sup>620</sup> von Hinüber, 1995: 11.

<sup>621</sup> The larger implications for the monastic economy and the Tibetan society as a whole of this 'rule' are explored in Chapter 6.

<sup>622</sup> *Bod kyi dgon sde*: 172. Similar to the Tibetan *gnyer pa*, in Korea, during the Koryŏ period the steward (直歲 *chikse*) was in charge of collecting rents from the temple's estates, while the treasurer (典座 *chŏnjwa*) had the function of providing for the material needs of the monastery. Vermeersch, 2008: 217.

<sup>623</sup> Perhaps the difference between the *gnyer pa* and the *dngul gnyer* is simply that the latter only dealt with monetary issues, whereas the former apparently also dealt with farmlands.

<sup>624</sup> Dayab, 2009: 61. While it does not say whether these people were lay or ordained, there are accounts of monks collecting debts for their monastery. For an account of a monk collecting debts, see Gyatso, 1998.

<sup>625</sup> '*Bras spungs bca' yig*: 314. As mentioned earlier, ordinary monks were not allowed to keep any animals.

<sup>626</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 309, 10: *rgyan khang gi rtsis 'dzin pa bgres pa re dang rogs 'os pa re dmigs btsugs kyi bskos pa'i rtsis 'khri'i yo byad thams cad dgos nges kyi dmigs bsal rnams su ma gtogs gzhan du g.yar po gtong len sogs mi byed cing bed spyod dgos dus kyang las byed so sor rtsis sprad ngos chud zos mi yong ba'i 'khos khyab dang/ gal te bor ba la tshab pa gang 'os/ chud zos che*

profit<sup>627</sup> may be taken. When it is minor, recompense should be made. When there is a recollection of who the persons in question are, then they should be held to account. But when they are not identified, the bookkeeper (*rtsis pa*) himself, as it was explained above, needs to carefully make sure that it is taken care of by offering recompense himself.

It is not clear here whether this person loans to monks or to lay-people – but in the light of other accounts,<sup>628</sup> I assume that lay-people would visit the monastery to take out loans. The word *rtsis 'khri* refers to something that has been put in the care of someone else and thus is not necessarily a loan. However, here it is likely that it refers to things that people have taken to the monastery as a security<sup>629</sup> in order to get a loan, or things that have been entrusted to the monastery for safekeeping. The role of the *rtsis 'dzin pa* might be comparable to the post of *gnyer pa* in other monasteries at other times.<sup>630</sup>

The Bon monastery of Menri also had a different term for the persons managing its finances. There two monks had the function of *phan tshun dge rgan*.<sup>631</sup> They were chosen for their abilities and appointed for three years. Each year one of them would go to the Byang thang area (encompassing northern and western Tibet) to collect funds from the nomads there. A rich family would then donate thirty to forty yaks, butter, etc. The donations would be transported to Tsang (in Central Tibet) to sell on. With the money this monk-official then would buy grain. The other *phan tshun dge rgan* had to oversee the production of tsampa (*rtsam pa*). The tsampa was distributed during the daily tea (*rgyun ja*) in the assembly hall.<sup>632</sup> Another term found for a similar position is *kha 'go ba*<sup>633</sup> or simply *'go ba*. According to Nietupski, in Labrang monastery these representatives were chosen because they were natural leaders, good speakers, bold, and publicly aggressive. They had to know ‘the fundamental corpus of rituals and doctrines’ but they were ‘not scholars or even very pious.’ They were generally wild and rough and some allegedly renounced their vows temporarily.<sup>634</sup>

The sources dealt with above have clearly suggested that the financial managers were monks. There are some indications, however, that this role was ambiguous in other sources. dKon mchog chos nyid expressly states that in the monastery in Yangri gar a *gnyer pa* had to have either *dge tsul* or *dge slong* vows,<sup>635</sup>

---

*ba la tshab dang rnying pa'ang len/ chung ba la gun bsab/ dran 'dzin gang 'os rnams so sor 'gel pa dang/ ngos ma zin pa rnams la rtsis pa rang gis gong gsal bzhin gun bsab pa sogs do dam ca gas 'drons pa byed/*

<sup>627</sup> Here *rnying pa* is likely to be a misreading for *rnyed pa*.

<sup>628</sup> According to Cassinelli and Ekvall, all the monasteries in the Sakya polity made loans to the laity on a regular basis. They were handled by the monastery's ‘business manager’. See Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969: 275.

<sup>629</sup> There is a separate term for this in Tibetan *gta' ma*, although it is not regularly used in the materials at hand.

<sup>630</sup> Interestingly, the role of *gnyer pa* in Mindröl ling monastery was more like that of a janitor. ‘The jobs concerning the general monastic compound (*gling*), such as the willow fence [are taken care of] in consultation with the *gnyer pa*. According to older custom restoration and masonry work was done in the spring.’ *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 311: *lcang ra sogs gling spyi'i bya ba rnams gnyer pa dang bstun nas byed par dpyid dus zhig gso'i ar tshags sngar srol bstar chags dang/*

<sup>631</sup> This may be akin to the post of *phan tshun che mo*: the supervisor of political and economic matters in Bon monasteries, Karmay and Nagano, 2003: 756.

<sup>632</sup> Kvaerne, 1970: 189.

<sup>633</sup> Caple, 2010: 201. This is translated with ‘manager’.

<sup>634</sup> Nietupski, 2011: 63.

<sup>635</sup> Personal communication with dKon mchog chos nyid, Phiyang, August 2012.

while Blo bzang don grub maintains that in Spituk, Ladakh, both the *gnyer pa* and the *phyag mdzod* were chosen from among the *dge slong*.<sup>636</sup> Partly because the term *gnyer pa* is also used in secular organizations<sup>637</sup> some confusion remains on the identity of this financial caretaker. Furthermore, in Ladakh, the families that are financially responsible for certain ceremonies also get called *gnyer pa*.<sup>638</sup> Ekvall, however, in describing the role and function of ex-monks (*ban log*; elsewhere: *grwa log*), notes that they ‘are the doers of secular deeds when the monastery needs them to be done; they have the time and opportunity for economic and political activity, they often hold managerial positions in the monastery, such as the *gnyer pa* and the *spyi ba*.’<sup>639</sup> While ex-monks were usually fiercely loyal to their monastery and well aware of important monastic issues, in other places it appears that lay-people managed the whole monastery.<sup>640</sup> Likewise, in bSam bde gling, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the steward (\**gnyer pa*?) was also a layman.<sup>641</sup> Michael furthermore notes that managers of monastic estates were often *mi ser* (here: lay-people) and that they could make the monastery rich.<sup>642</sup> These ‘managers’ could also refer to the people contracted by the *gnyer pa* to manage the fields.<sup>643</sup>

In many ways, the *spyi pa* and the *gnyer pa* had very similar functions. In Dwags po bshad grub gling, the offices that took care of financial matters were split into two: the *gnyer tshang* controlled the agricultural land and the *spyi bso* department controlled the livestock, grain, cash and other donations. The *gnyer tshang* office was responsible for paying the monks their allowance (*phogs*) and also had to provide them with soup (*thug pa*) on a regular basis. In the years before the 1950s, the *spyi bso* fared much better financially, but it was not allowed to help out the *gnyer tshang*.<sup>644</sup> Naturally, not all monasteries had access to income from both land-rent and livestock, and a clear distinction between the *spyi pa* as the head of the *spyi bso* and the *gnyer pa* as the leader of the *gnyer tshang* was not necessary, which may account for the crossover in meanings.

### Ex-monks and the Monastery

As briefly alluded to above, ex-monks seem to still have played important roles in certain aspects of the monastery’s running. Ekvall, describing the situation as he found it in Amdo between 1925 and 1941, speaks of the so-called *ban log* (*grwa log*), which he translates as ‘monk rebel’. According to him, these were individuals who had been debarred from remaining as monks for having violated the basic rules (i.e. the four root vows). However, for various reasons, they continued to live in their quarters in the monastery, wear the garb of monks, and were still in high standing outside the monastery. A *ban log* could engage in extensive trading for himself or the community, often using his residency at the monastery as a storage and trading post.

---

<sup>636</sup> Personal communication with Blo bang don grub, Spituk, August 2012.

<sup>637</sup> e.g. in Mustang, see Ramble, 2008: 286. Sherring gives a description of his dealing with what he calls ‘Nirba’, who are unmistakably lay-administrators. See Sherring, 1974 [1916]: 170 et seq. In Derge the cabinet ministers, usually belonging to the class of aristocrats, were also called *gnyer pa* (or *gnyer chen*), see Thargyal and Huber, 2007: 49.

<sup>638</sup> Joldan, 2006: 73.

<sup>639</sup> Ekvall, 1959/60: 217.

<sup>640</sup> Dargyay, 1982: 74.

<sup>641</sup> French, 1995a: 241.

<sup>642</sup> Michael, 1982: 158.

<sup>643</sup> As found in *Bod kyi dgon sde*: 172, previously cited above.

<sup>644</sup> Nornang, 1990: 250, 1; 256. Separate economies based on the source of the income is not unusual and – as shall be further explored in Chapter 6 – is resonated in Vinayic materials.

He was also able to hold managerial positions such as steward (*gnyer pa*). In some cases, he had a family living outside the monastery.<sup>645</sup> This ‘rebel monk’ thus bought and sold, collected debts and lent out funds at interest. He was particularly important when monasteries went to war and monks became armed mobs or private armies. A *ban log*, even when he killed during a conflict, would still have a place in the monastery. Ekvall states that ‘by his activities he both exercises political power on behalf of the monastery and increases and enhances such power.’<sup>646</sup> This makes the *ban log* the doers of secular deeds when the monastery needed them to be done: they had both the time and the opportunity for economic and political activity.<sup>647</sup>

In Sakya too, a former monk could maintain his official position, provided he made a generous offering to his monastery.<sup>648</sup> In other words, there was little correspondence between religious standards and political propriety.<sup>649</sup> To house ex-monks who nonetheless displayed loyalty to the monastery may have been a practical solution to the limitations holding *dge tshul* or *dge slong* vows could present. This was solved in Sri Lankan Buddhism by employing a *kappiyakāraka* (*rung bar byed pa*, S. *kalpikāra*): a lay-person appointed to procure necessities for the Sangha and make them allowable (*kappiya*).<sup>650</sup> At first glance, the *ban log* that Ekvall describes appears to be a Tibetan (Amdo) equivalent. However, as we shall examine in the next chapter, the handling of money was less problematic for Tibetan monks (or for that matter monks within the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* tradition).<sup>651</sup>

While Ekvall’s observations on these ex-monks are no doubt accurate, they are far removed from the ideal scenarios most of the monastic guidelines sketch. The authors of these texts appear keen to remove these blotches from the monastery, or at least to prevent them from partaking in any of the offerings that were divided among the monks.<sup>652</sup> Contrary to what is commonly thought, it was possible for a monk who had been expelled to retake the vows and return to the monastery. This return to the ranks was under strict supervision and with the proviso of certain stipulations.<sup>653</sup> Furthermore, according to the monastic guidelines of Pelyul darthang monastery, these ex-monks that retook their vows could not hold positions of ritual importance such as that of lama (here: teacher), chant-master or teacher of ritual dances (*’cham dpon*).<sup>654</sup>

While in some Tibetan societies disrobing was seen as the greatest shame,<sup>655</sup> it was a common occurrence in others.<sup>656</sup> Often the economic outlook for monks who

<sup>645</sup> Ekvall, 1959/60: 210.

<sup>646</sup> *ibid.*: 219.

<sup>647</sup> *ibid.*: 217.

<sup>648</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969: 144.

<sup>649</sup> *ibid.*: 69.

<sup>650</sup> Gunawardana, 1979: 99. An interesting parallel is found in Cistercian monasteries in 13<sup>th</sup> century England. The Cistercian monks had a group of middlemen, who were laymen, to do the business they were not allowed to do. See Madden, 1963: 344.

<sup>651</sup> On the extent of monks handling money in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, see for example: Schopen, 2006: 225-245.

<sup>652</sup> For the case of the Fifth Dalai Lama dealing with these ‘vowless’ monks, see Jansen, 2013a: 115-21.

<sup>653</sup> On the expulsion of monks and their re-entering see Chapter 8.

<sup>654</sup> *dPal yul dar thang bca’ yig*: 193, 4: *de rigs rnam tshogs la gzhus kyang bla ma dang dbu mdzad ’cham dpon lta bu’i go sar dbyung du med/*

<sup>655</sup> Gyatso notes that ‘The greatest social opprobrium was reserved in Tibet for those who gave up their ordination.’ and also that ‘Well attested cases do exist where monks would basically be cast into the wilderness, without possession or provision if they were found to have transgressed their root vows. Such unfortunate individuals would end up not only as outcastes from the monastic community, but from society at large as well.’ See Gyatso, 2003: 233.

disrobed was bleak and this may have been one of the reasons why relatively few monks returned to lay life. Contrastingly, Dargyay notes that former monks were in demand to become secretaries in the noblemen's household.<sup>657</sup> Naturally this only pertained to the educated monks. When I asked the elderly Sakya monk Shes rab rgya mtsho what happened to monks who disrobed he said:

Ex-monks would usually go to Kham: they did not stay around. Life must have been difficult for a monk who had given up his vows, because he would not know a lot about work. If you would have a good family to fall back on, it would not be that bad. Otherwise it would be quite difficult.<sup>658</sup>

The role of ex-monks is underappreciated in current scholarship, but mainly because our sources, the monk-authors, are weary to report on them, for obvious reasons. However, the ex-monk's affiliation with the monastery, which was in some cases an emotional bond, in others a pragmatic and financial one, often remained. This contributed to the development of informal networks.

### **The Abbot: Figurehead or Frontman?**

Like most other offices in the monastery, that of the abbot is not straightforward. As mentioned above, the abbot's position is less regularly commented upon in the monastic guidelines, likely because not infrequently the abbots were either the authors or the people who requested the composition of the *bca' yig*.<sup>659</sup> This is not to say that the guidelines are unable to inform on the role of the leader of a monastery or college. In the Gelug system *mkhan po* is most regularly used to denote the ruling head of a monastic institution, although in some cases the leader was called a *khri pa* or *khri chen* (throne holder), which usually, but not always, referred to this person being an incarnation instated as head of one or more monasteries. In non-Gelug schools the latter position is more akin to what is called the *bstan pa'i bdag po* (or *bstan bdag*): the owner of the Teachings; the highest authority possible.<sup>660</sup> The throne-holder of Sakya is called *khri thog pa*. It is tempting to suppose that, in the case of there being both a temporary head (such as a *mkhan po*) and an incarnated leader-for-life (such as the *khri pa* or *bstan bdag*), the latter has the function of acting as religious figurehead, whereas the former is more involved in practical matters. It does not appear as clear-cut however.

Taking monasticism as it occurs in Ladakh as a starting-point, Mills makes a case for ritual authority being extended over both the monastery and the lay people as the prerogative of the incarnates, and that ritual authority often extended into

---

<sup>656</sup> In other Buddhist cultures disrobing is (and was) a very common feature of the monkhood. Bunnag describes how in Thailand when a monk disrobed his personal sponsor, who had given him a monthly allowance when a monk, would equip him for lay life by giving him money and clothes. See Bunnag, 1973: 157.

<sup>657</sup> Dargyay, 1982: 21.

<sup>658</sup> Personal communication with Shes rab rgya mtsho, Rajpur, July 2012.

<sup>659</sup> Cech also notes that the Bon *bca' yig* she examined does not mention the abbot much. However, she extrapolates from this that he did not have much to do with the enforcement of rules, see Cech, 1988: 85.

<sup>660</sup> In fact, the Sakya author Kun dga' blo gros (1729-1783) refers to the Dalai Lama (*Gong sa mchog*, here in all likelihood the Eighth Dalai Lama) as 'the owner of the complete Teachings' (*yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i bdag po*), the ultimate authority. See *bSam yas lcog grwa bca' yig*: 408.

organizational authority.<sup>661</sup> Nietupski shows a similar presupposition, as he casually mentions that the Fourth 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa served as throne holder (I assume this to be *khri pa* or *khri chen*) of several monasteries and that 'he was thus no stranger to diplomacy, administration, legal or economic matters.'<sup>662</sup> This first of all raises the question of what a 'throne holder' was expected to do: what were his duties?

Presumably a successful throne holder needed to have charisma and religious authority so as to legitimise his exertion of power and diplomacy. The *bca' yig* of Drigung thil states that its monks, 'in order not to destroy oneself and others by means of disrepute (*kha smras*) and the many grounds for disputes (*kha mchu'i rtsa ba*)',<sup>663</sup> need to look at the acting abbots as role-models and follow their example.<sup>664</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall state that in Sakya, the abbots of the monasteries were not meant to concern themselves too much with governmental (and thus managerial) affairs and that often officials (presumably those with a 'religious rank' in the monasteries) had less political power than the ordinary monks.<sup>665</sup>

It appears that there was – at least at the larger monasteries – a dual system in place, in which a group of monks would effectively run the monastery, dirtying their hands if necessary, without 'incriminating' the religious figurehead. This arrangement is comparable to that in place in Thailand where 'it is quite common for the real business of running the *wat* [monastery] to be undertaken by the deputy, whilst the abbot preserves his charisma by remaining aloof from these affairs.'<sup>666</sup> It can then thus be argued that it does not necessarily follow that a throne holder, or any religious figurehead for that matter, was also always assigned a practical, administrative or managerial role. This dual system may have its parallel in the way most of the Dalai Lamas related to their regents (*sde srid*).<sup>667</sup>

It is also possible, however, that in smaller monasteries the abbot (or throne holder) held dual functions. This would probably be seen as far from ideal because it meant that the position of the 'spiritual head' of the monastery could get compromised, by being forced to (openly) get involved in semi-secular or worldly affairs. During the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, there was a concerted effort underway to keep the abbots away from governmental affairs.<sup>668</sup> A *bca' yig* written in 1889 by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama on the occasion of the establishment of an unnamed and unidentified educational college (*mtshan nyid grwa tshang*, possibly in Mongolia) gives the job-description of the abbot (*mkhan po*) as follows:

An abbot mainly needs to manage affairs. The abbot also definitely needs to be a spiritual teacher who is endowed with the qualities of being learned, disciplined and kind. In the best case, he has already gained higher degrees at

<sup>661</sup> Mills, 2003.

<sup>662</sup> Nietupski, 2011: 140.

<sup>663</sup> In some cases *kha mchu* could also refer to lawsuits.

<sup>664</sup> 'Bri gung mthil *bca' yig* a: 249a: *kha smras dang kha mchu'i rtsa ba mang pos rang gzhan thams cad phung bar mi mdzad par mkhan po byang mgon dang/ dpon chen byang she'i mdzad pa 'di la ltos la de'i rjes su 'brongs/*

<sup>665</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969: 318.

<sup>666</sup> Bunnag, 1973: 94, 5.

<sup>667</sup> Notable exceptions here are the Fifth, the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

<sup>668</sup> Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969: 318.

one of the big monasteries. If that is not the case, he should have the qualification of having completed the studies of the five main texts.<sup>669</sup>

Naturally, because the monastic institution in question is one that focused on education, the abbot also needs to be learned. However, here – without going into details – the dual function of the abbot as a ‘spiritual friend’ and a manager is clearly indicated.

While the size and the function of the monastery is thus a factor, much also appears to depend on whether the appointment is for life or merely temporary. Schram, describing the Tibetan Buddhist Monguor people in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century notes that the ‘fa-t’ai’ (i.e. *fatai* 法臺, for which he gives the Tibetan gloss *m’Kampo* (\**mkhan po*)) had in principle the power to address malpractices (in particular by the intendancies; the *phyag mdzod*, who *did* have tenure), but in effect they declined to do so because they were elected by the intendant and after their three-year term they still had to remain in the monastery. Thus, the abbots were in the words of Schram ‘practical Orientals’ and chose not to introduce reforms. This reduced their powers to ‘theoretical and honorary dimensions.’ An abbot furthermore had to be a rich man, for he had to be able to entertain the more highly placed inmates of the monastery with sumptuous banquets several times a year. The poorer monks who were put forward as candidates for the position of abbot often declined for that reason.<sup>670</sup>

In the Nyingma monastery of Pelyul darthang in Golog, Amdo, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the abbot is also held responsible for the upkeep of discipline along with the disciplinarian.<sup>671</sup> A clear distinction is made between the abbot and the disciplinarian, however. The abbot has a supervisory function (*klad gzigs*), whereas that of the disciplinarian is executive (*do khur*).<sup>672</sup> This suggests that the abbot was the one who had the final responsibility. Indeed, when in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century monks from Sera monastery were found to have cashed in debts by forcefully seizing goods from lay-people, the Thirteenth Dalai lama fined the abbot, making him ‘legally’ responsible for the conduct of his monks.<sup>673</sup> In Pelyul in Kham, consulting the abbot (here: *bstan pa’i bdag po*) was advised as a last resort. Only when other officials such as disciplinarians could not come to a satisfactory solution was he asked for advice. Alternatively, the officials could come together in council and come to a decision having discussed the matter.<sup>674</sup> In the hierarchy of the monastery, the abbot had the highest authority. It was his name and his deeds that would be taken up in the monastery’s abbatial record (*gdan rabs*). Thus the owner of the Teachings (*bstan pa’i gdag po*) was also called the *gdan rabs ’dzin pa’i khri rin po che*.<sup>675</sup>

It is suggested that both in China and in Thailand abbots were expected to be, aside from spiritual leaders, on good terms with government officials and lay-donors and regularly meet with them. The monastery was greatly dependent on these

---

<sup>669</sup> *Thor rgod rgyal po bca’ yig*: 368: *de ltar mkhan pos gtso bor do dam byed dgos te/ mkhan po yang mkhas btsun bzang gsum gi yon tan dang ldan pa’i dge ba’i bshes gnyen zhig nges par dgos shing/ de yang rab byung na gdan sa chen po rnam kyi ming btags che khag thon zin dang/ de ltar ma byung yang bka’ pod lnga pa bslab sbyangs mthar phyin pa’i mtshan nyid dang ldan pa zhig dgos/*

<sup>670</sup> Schram, 2006 [1954]: 373, 4.

<sup>671</sup> *dPal yul dar thang bca’ yig*: 199: *sgrigs yig ’di’i nang ’khod tshad mkhan po dang dge bskos gnyis kyi khur thang yin la/*

<sup>672</sup> *ibid.*: *de dag gi klad gzigs mkhan po dang do khur dge bskos nas mdzad dgos pas/*

<sup>673</sup> Bell, 1998 [1946]: 200.

<sup>674</sup> *dPal yul gdan rabs*: 357: *bka’ shag gong gsal mi sna rnam bsduud nas grol mol thog thag gcod bya rgyu.*

<sup>675</sup> *ibid.*: 358.

relationships for its economic and political survival.<sup>676</sup> While in many regards the Tibetan monastic economy was such that it depended to a lesser extent on sponsors, it is highly likely that the abbot was responsible for the upkeep of relations with important players on the outside world. The *bca' yig* I have seen do not discuss this, but if the situation in contemporary Tibetan monasteries is a continuation of the past, then – in particular concerning non-Gelug monasteries – the presence, charisma, and amicability of the abbot is indeed crucial for the reputation, discipline, and finances of a monastic institution.

### **Managerial and Religious Offices: a Two-tiered Institution?**

*Senatores boni viri, senatus autem mala bestia*

There is a perceived relationship between the discipline and the presence of an important master. The contemporary 'lama Tshul khrims' complains that the discipline has deteriorated dramatically in his monastery and when asked to give a reason for this he explained:

This is because the *bstan bdag* used to always be present in the monastery, making sure the monks would behave well and that they would all go to the assembly. Now both our main lamas travel to the West frequently, and they also have a lot of responsibilities elsewhere. Now there is no one with authority whom the monks will respect. Actually, I think that important lamas need to stay at the monastery to look after its affairs. Previously the lamas lived here, also because they did not really know English and did not have the opportunity to travel. Now this is all different: they speak English and teach all over the world, but the monastery suffers from their absence.<sup>677</sup>

This is also echoed by Mills who, in examining the state of smaller Gelug monasteries in Ladakh, writes that 'the monastic discipline of ordinary monks is in some sense linked to, and constituted by, the activities of incarnates.'<sup>678</sup> While this may be the case in the smaller Gelug monasteries and in the other schools that have a tradition of assigning important administrative positions to the higher incarnations, we find that according to the examples given above concerning his role, the abbot is important for the maintenance of discipline, but only by being an example or an inspiration. The day-to-day matters were (and usually still are) taken care of by the disciplinarians, the chant-masters and the various types of managers. Thus, while the abbot has a degree of what could be called 'ritual authority' over the monastery's inhabitants, it is important to understand the practical limitations of that authority. In other words, there appeared to be a two-tiered institution, in which the abbot was able to maintain the moral highground, while the managers were burdened with the upkeep of the monastery and – when push came to shove – had to take certain measures, which could be perceived as reproachable.

It appears that some *bca' yig* attempted to close the gap between the behaviour of the managerial and the symbolical powers. In the opinion of their authors, *all* monks should behave in an exemplary way. The monastic guidelines thus address this disjunction between what figures in authority prescribed for a monastery and what the monks actually did. Therefore, when attempting to understand how monasteries were

<sup>676</sup> Reynolds, 1979: 225; Foulk, 2004: 291.

<sup>677</sup> Personal communication with lama 'Tshul khrims', Dehradun, August 2012.

<sup>678</sup> Mills, 2003: 315.

actually organized, not too much should be made of this ‘ritual authority’,<sup>679</sup> for the bca’ yig demonstrate that often not more than lip service was paid to this authority.

Another point is that there existed a high degree of authority, embodied by the offices that have been described in this chapter. This ‘combined’ authority was hardly ever called into question. According to Kurzman, when ‘leaders have a high level of authority and control over resources, this may serve to reduce organizational mobilization, as activists are then not able or not willing to challenge the organizational leadership.’<sup>680</sup> This reduction in the organizational mobilization is in the case of Tibetan monasteries clearly visible: the organizational structures were relatively stable over a number of centuries and any change was viewed with great suspicion. Similar to the Christian monasteries in the Middle Ages described as ‘institutions designed to stem the tide of change,’ it seems that their Tibetan counterparts too were ‘living symbols of immutability in the midst of flux.’<sup>681</sup>

In the context of Tibetan monasticism, the identity of the institution is clearly distinct from that of the individual monk. This may have had further ramifications: when monks act in the name of their monastery, the ultimate (moral) responsibility lies with the inanimate institution. As long as there was no perceived self-interest for the monks involved, monks may not have been held accountable for actions that would have otherwise been seen as ‘unethical’. It would have been unimaginable to blame ‘the system’, i.e. the Sangha as a whole, for any wrong-doing, as this was (and is) seen as bearing severe karmic consequences. Viewed in this way, we can understand how the actions of the monastery as a whole were hardly ever criticized, whereas individual monks, government representatives, and local rulers were more easily reproached. This would in turn have maintained the status quo.<sup>682</sup> The Tibetan system of monastic organization – despite it being in no way entirely homogenous – was geared towards maintaining the monastery and thereby the Sangha as a whole. This outlook also had an impact on the way the monastic institution and its monks dealt with economic issues, to which we turn below.

---

<sup>679</sup> cf. Mills, 2003.

<sup>680</sup> Kurzman, 1998: 43.

<sup>681</sup> Southern, 1970: 29.

<sup>682</sup> We can see a parallel in the corporate world, as the question of who can ultimately be held accountable or responsible (with all its legal implications) is one that is still very much a matter of debate. For a very interesting discussion of this issue, see Ashman and Winstanley, 2007: 83-95.