

# Relations with the Laity

## *The Roles of the Monastery in Society*

### INTRODUCTION

*Put homeleavers first and householders after.*

— DŌGEN (1200–1253) 1996: 159

Monastics throughout the ages—Buddhist and otherwise—have sought to actively distinguish and distance themselves from the lay population. In this respect one can say that monkhood is “an alternative culture.”<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the high percentage of the male population devoted to monastic life meant that an overwhelming majority of families in Tibetan society was linked to the monastery as a social group and an institution, making laypeople socially and emotionally involved in the support and perpetuation of the monastery.<sup>2</sup> This is reiterated by Gyatso, who comments: “So thoroughly are the monks and the idea of monk-hood integrated into the wider society that they are not seen as a separate block, constantly vying with the lay authorities.”<sup>3</sup> Some see the presence of the large number of monks in Tibet as due to the fact that they were perceived to be in a better position to accumulate merit than the laity. According to Kapstein, they were then—by extension—seen to contribute to the merit of society as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Many monastic guidelines demonstrate great concern for the general standing and reputation that the monks enjoyed in wider society.<sup>5</sup> The reasoning often given for creating certain rules is that if the monks did not behave properly, the laypeople would lose faith in the community of monks and thereby in the Sangha, part of the Three Jewels. Similar arguments are common in Vinayic literature. Due to the position of political, judicial, and economic power maintained by the larger monasteries in pre-modern Tibet, relationships between donor and recipient, between layperson and monk, were multilayered and varied according to time

and place. By reading the guidelines one can get a glimpse of the balancing act that took place between monks and lay society. All had happiness, stability, and continuity as shared goals. The methods to achieve these goals, however, occasionally differed.

Miller, providing a sociological perspective on Tibetan monasticism, stresses the interrelatedness of the Tibetan monasteries. Commenting on all of Tibet, she paints a picture of “[a]n area rent by political divisions, sectarianism, and regional conflicts, where some isolated monasteries are independent and powerful and the vast majority of monastics must depend either on the favor of the lay authorities or on the poverty, backwardness, and superstition of the population.”<sup>6</sup> Although it is true that there were great divergences between the “landed monasteries” and the landless ones, it cannot be said that the vast majority of monasteries had no say whatsoever in their own lot, as Miller seems to suggest. At the same time, recent scholarship on more peripheral Tibetan Buddhist communities demonstrates that the paradigm of the powerful monastery was by no means all-pervasive.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there were not many monasteries that were actually powerful and reasonably independent. Monasteries that had to negotiate power and services were the norm. Numerically, monastic institutions that stood in the service of the direct community were in the majority. This means that even in “theocratic” Tibet, just like in other Buddhist countries, more often than not “the focus of the structure of village life” was the relation between the monastic community and the village population.<sup>8</sup> This relationship was not without tensions.

Many monastic guidelines contain—implicitly or explicitly—views on the presence of laypeople. A balance had to be struck with regard to the laity’s access to the physical space of the monastery. That the guidelines often place restrictions on laypeople entering the monastic compound is indicative of the societal role of the monastery. Related to this is that pastoral services—in the West associated with the duties of ordained members of organized religions—were not part of the responsibilities of the monks or the monastic institution. Closely connected to the role of the Sangha in society is the issue of identity, a decisive factor when it comes to understanding societal interactions.

#### MONASTIC IDENTITY AND MONASTIC BOUNDARIES

*Social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat.*

—BOURDIEU 1984: 479

Representing oneself as “other” appears to be essential for the survival of monastic Buddhism. It is well known that monks, from the time of the Buddha onward, actively distinguished themselves from laypeople. Goldstein and Tsarong make a strict distinction between the identities of laypeople and the clergy:

Lay people existed to serve monasticism by producing sons and surplus. Tibetan monasticism, therefore, attempts to socialize recruits into an alternative set of norms, values, and standards for perceiving and evaluating the world: a cultural template in which love, desire, and wealth were renounced as the source of misery and suffering.<sup>9</sup>

One can wonder whether such an “alternative set of norms” exists and to what extent it differed from laypeople’s norms. Furthermore, to present laypeople as merely existing to serve the monkhood is to deny the complex interactions that took place. While there may or may not have been an alternative set of norms, there indeed was an alternative set of *rules* that monks had to abide by.

Certain rules in the Vinaya can be explained on the basis of their intention to distinguish the Sangha from the lay community. These are, for example, not moving one’s arms back and forth while walking and not eating noisily.<sup>10</sup> Developing a separate identity from laypeople was essential for the continuation of the Sangha as a distinct entity. The monastic guidelines can be read as expressions of this identity, this *esprit de corps*. They serve to remind monks of their behavior: to adhere to a relatively strict code of conduct, to remain celibate, and to abstain from drinking alcohol. They make monks mindful of their attire: they could not wear lay clothing, and the correct manner of wearing the robes is emphasized throughout the texts. The texts also stress the importance of the kind of daily activities acceptable for monks, namely, to perform religious ceremonies, to study, and to recite prayers and texts.<sup>11</sup>

One of the other ways to keep the Sangha from becoming indistinguishable from the laity was to impose restrictions on the physical movements of monks and laypeople alike.<sup>12</sup> Most monastic compounds had clearly delineated physical boundaries,<sup>13</sup> and the *chayik* comment regularly on both monks and laity crossing them. For the monks, this often had to do with asking permission to leave the monastery’s premises, whereas for laypeople entry in some cases was not given at all. The monastic guidelines for Mindröl Ling acknowledge that monks sometimes could leave the compound, provided they had gained permission and were accompanied by another monk:

Monks are not allowed to go outside of the boundary markers without permission, however important their reason is. In short, if one does need to go out, by way of exception, such as in order to roast and grind [barley], one is not to go without a monk companion.<sup>14</sup> If one does go to town without company, one needs to offer a butterlamp of seven measures,<sup>15</sup> and if one has crossed the boundaries one offers a butterlamp of three measures. Depending on the situation one should make somewhere between twenty and a hundred prostrations, making one’s fault public in the assembly.<sup>16</sup>

The disciplinarian granted the permission and punished those who left without authorization. These regulations were deemed necessary to restrict inappropriate

interaction between laypeople and monks. In a similar way, a Sri Lankan *katikāvata* from the twelfth century does not forbid leaving the monastery, but limits the entry to the village between dusk and dawn, unless it was to help one's parents and widowed sisters or in the case of needing to get medical help for a fellow monk.<sup>17</sup> The rules in Tibetan monasteries were tightened during the yearly retreats, when any movement (and thus social interaction) was limited, even between monk residencies.<sup>18</sup>

The laity's movement across the monasteries' boundary markers was also regularly restricted. A *chayik* for the Bon Menri monastery states that no laypeople could enter the monastery except those who served the monastic estate and those who looked after the animals or brought in the firewood.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that lay workers were employed at the monastery, but also that this monastery was not seen to have a direct "pastoral" function, and as was suggested earlier this was the case for Tibetan monasteries in general. The monastic guidelines of some other monasteries show that laypeople were welcome, provided that their purpose was religious. This was particularly the case when female visitors were involved.<sup>20</sup> Other monasteries had to make rules in order to avoid "exploitation" by laypeople posing as pilgrims: "From the end of summer until the beginning of winter, only those pilgrims who take refuge without their sheep and goats are allowed to stay in the surroundings of the monastery."<sup>21</sup> These guidelines were written in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century for Pelyul Darthang monastery in Amdo, which was situated in a nomadic area. It seems likely that in the past laypeople had been using their visit to the monastery as a pretext to graze their animals on its pastures, which explains why in the autumn people were only allowed to visit without their flock.

The Jesuit missionary de Andrade, who traveled around Western Tibet in 1626, also notes that common people did not tend to frequent the temples, which were nearly always closed. He writes that they visited them only on two days of the year to attend religious festivals.<sup>22</sup> The above examples serve to point out that in an ideal monastic world contact between laypeople and the Sangha was to be restricted. We know, however, that not all monasteries were created equal. Some monasteries had a function that could be compared to that of Christian churches that encourage believers to visit, whereas others limited contact with the outside world.

Currently, certain monasteries encourage pilgrimage, resulting in laypeople passing through the premises, while others strongly discourage or even forbid it.<sup>23</sup> The guidelines also record such rules, allowing us to identify the kind of monasteries that restricted contact with laypeople. Unlike the function of the (modern) Christian churches, the Tibetan monasteries—and their temples—were not places where people in need of spiritual guidance were expected to seek refuge. Interaction was usually only encouraged for religious purpose and services.

## GENEROSITY AND CHARITY

The most commented-upon relationship between the Sangha and the laity is undoubtedly that of recipient and donor of offerings, respectively. In this interaction, the monks are assigned a passive role, as Strenski—in commenting on Theravāda Buddhist giving—remarks: “ritual giving sits squarely in the center of the relation between the Sangha and lay society. The monks are always receivers, the laity always givers.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, it has been asserted that the clergy is “the paradigm of non-reciprocity.”<sup>25</sup> This type of generosity is well supported in Buddhist doctrine and takes up a prominent position in most Buddhist cultures. Its prominence has had, according to some scholars, important repercussions for Buddhist societies. For Spiro, writing on Burma, the fact that all acts of generosity involved monks meant that “nonreligious charity” was not supported, because it was seen as less meritorious. He argues that this translated to less social action, and that this phenomenon was shared with other Theravāda countries.<sup>26</sup>

The phenomenon of giving to the Sangha then could be seen as resulting in less social action on the part of the laity, but what were the monks expected to do with what they received? Christian clergy is often reported to have used its resources to aid those in need. Taken on the whole, this is less apparent among Buddhist monks,<sup>27</sup> and this has, in part, to do with the Vinaya rules. First of all, a monk was meant to use what he was given, even when it was of no direct use to the Sangha. Only when the gift is used does the act of giving generate merit for its donor. For the monks, accepting offerings was not merely a privilege, it was a duty, as Schopen describes the role of the Sangha as portrayed in the Vinaya: “A monk here is one who accepts gifts so others can make merit, and he is *obligated* to do so by the authority of the Buddha.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, the monks—according to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*—were also under the obligation to *use* what was given to them: this was “their obligation to make merit for their donors.”<sup>29</sup> Secondly, only members of the Sangha were meant to use the offerings, and no one else. The Buddha is reported to have said: “Monks, you must not give to others what was given to you for your own use.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the Sangha was obliged to accept most offerings, to use what it was given, and it could not pass on these gifts to the laity. Tensions, ensuing from these rules regarding charity, can be perceived throughout the Buddhist world. Not being able to refuse a gift could be a reason or justification, for example, for monasteries coming to own lands and even people. While slavery, in the most common sense of the word, was not a feature of Tibetan society, it did occur that a rich donor “gave” people to a monastery. An example of this is the gift of eighty Amdo families to Labrang monastery in 1712 by the Mongolian prince Erdeni Jinong.<sup>31</sup> Even though the primary sources may state that “families were donated,” this act sounds more inhumane than it actually was. In practical terms, this simply meant that the tax, in labor and in kind, which the donor previously received from a number of

families would from then on be paid to the monastery. There is unlikely to have been any noticeable change in the circumstances of those so “gifted”: they were not displaced, nor was there any significant upheaval of the social structure of these communities. While the guidelines do not tend to comment on such transactions, the above-outlined issues regarding charity are regularly discussed.

#### CHARITY FOR LAYPEOPLE

*The beggar beside the road means nothing to the monk.*

Spencer Chapman, who penned the above line ([1938] 1984: 182), visited Tibet in the 1930s and was critical of the position of monks there. However, it was not just Tibetan monastics who were thought not to give to beggars.<sup>32</sup> In China, during roughly the same period, lay beggars were not only kept out of the monastery, but were also refused food. The rationale that Welch’s informants gave for this is that monks were meant to be the receivers and not the givers of charity.<sup>33</sup> Similar arguments are made in the Tibetan monastic guidelines. One such text, written in 1820 for the whole of Sera monastery by the then-regent of Tibet, contains a justification for the prohibition on monks allowing entry to beggars or to feed them:

If there are beggar-wanderers—male or female vagabonds—in the monastery asking for food, quickly protect the compound and turn them out. Particularly when the unceasing flow of communal tea and monastic tea is given to those who are not ordained, there is no difference with giving them boiling molten iron. For that reason, leftovers need to be thrown away.<sup>34</sup>

Here the author implies that by giving beggars food intended for the monk population, one would be doing them a disservice. This is because karmically speaking they would be worse off. The reference to molten iron undoubtedly refers to the results one is said to experience in one of the hells as retribution for using the Sangha’s possessions. The citation from the *Vinayavibhāṅga* often given elsewhere does not refer to boiling molten iron but to blazing iron balls: “It is preferable for one who does not have proper vows [or] whose discipline is faulty to eat iron balls that are ablaze with fire than to consume the alms from [people] in the vicinity.”<sup>35</sup> This citation is more regularly used, however, to refer to monks with faulty discipline making use of the monastery’s amenities (and by extension the laity’s donations). Another *chayik* written for Tagdrag (sTag brag) monastery in 1947 gives exactly the same citation in relation to monks whose vows are not pure, but then goes on to state:

But, as it is worse if householders partake of the Sangha’s food, it would be better not to give them anything. However, the ones who work for the Sangha and the like need to be given tea and soup. A daily morning tea and a tea and soup at noon is permitted, but no more. The managerial committee should entertain the more important

sponsors appropriately but is not to do anything that leads to faith in the Sangha becoming perverted.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, according to this text, the random giving of food to the laity should be avoided, although qualified exceptions are made for workers and significant sponsors.<sup>37</sup> There is the suggestion here that if the benefactors were to learn about laypeople receiving food from the monks, they would not be pleased.

In a rather similar way, the Fifth Dalai Lama also comments on this problem in Drepung monastery:

These days it is increasingly the habit of the monastic houses or the teachers, when they have obtained their share of allowances, to give handouts to all kinds of lowly drifters. Even the benefactors were dismayed that the communal tea and the donations would not get to each of the colleges and that they would go unrecorded. This is a very great wrong amounting to depriving the general Sangha of income.<sup>38</sup>

The set phrase that the Fifth Dalai Lama uses here, namely “depriving the general Sangha of income,”<sup>39</sup> is one of the five secondary acts of immediate consequence.<sup>40</sup> This served to highlight the gravity of the matter. It appears that monks in Drepung were giving away their donations rather randomly. This seems to have angered the donors, but it also went against certain rules. Whereas in the previous example the direct karmic consequences of giving away donations to people who do not deserve them are suffered by the recipients of the donation, the beggars, in this instance the monks who give the food to the lowly drifters, bear the karmic brunt of “depriving the general Sangha of income.”

In line with the rules for Sera monastery, the Fifth Dalai Lama also warns that if the monastic community had too much tea and soup, the leftovers needed to be used as fodder and nothing else.<sup>41</sup> Presumably this means that the food scraps could not be given to beggars and other needy people in the surroundings. Again, the reason for this restriction is likely to be a “Vinayic” one: what is intended for the Sangha should not end up in the hands of “undeserving” laypeople.

Interestingly, this is not entirely in line with the view expressed by Tsongkhapa, one of whose monastic guidelines is paraphrased by the author of the above-cited text.<sup>42</sup> In his *chayik* for Jampa Ling monastery, probably written in 1417, Tsongkhapa takes a clear stance on the issue of redistributing goods beyond the monastic community. He instructs the monks not to let beggars and people who have come to do petty trade into the monastic compounds, but instead to leave them waiting at the boundary marker. Food could then be given to them there by an *upāsaka* (*dge bsnyen*).<sup>43</sup> A later *chayik*, written in 1943 by the Tagdrag regent, for Kongtö Dungkar monastery, echoes Tsongkhapa’s ruling: “Dogs and beggars are not to be let in the monastic compound, but food and drink is to be given outside to individuals.”<sup>44</sup> The *chayik* for Mindröl Ling from 1698 also demonstrates

close parallels to Tsongkhapa's guidelines: vagabonds and beggars should not be allowed in the monastery grounds but instead should be given food outside the gate.<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere in the text, however, it mentions that the Sangha's gifts should not be distributed to the laity: "It is said that the gifts for the Sangha are not to be given to laypeople. Therefore, during the communal tea-round, one is not allowed to give anything away without permission from the disciplinarian."<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that a balance had to be struck among keeping to the rules of the Vinaya, the maintenance of the monastery, and the care for other beings. For a monastery to be excessively generous would send out the wrong message and attract unwanted elements, which in turn would put off existing or potential donors. In addition, we can see the importance attached to maintaining a strict separation between beggars and monks: for them to mix would upset the equilibrium of the religious community. An eleventh-century *chayik* for a community consisting of both monk and lay tantric practitioners gives very specific instructions on how to treat the destitute, while also keeping them at a distance:

If there are people who are poor, who out of destitution look for food and things, or if persons are not able to rid themselves of suffering, then all should give [them something]. They should be treated like outsiders without [further] contempt or respect, but they should not be allowed into the community.<sup>47</sup> They should be considered as mere "outsider friends."<sup>48</sup>

It is clear that there existed different ways to deal with the problem of helping those in need, while keeping to Vinaya rules and maintaining an autonomous community. The perhaps expected tension between the Vinayic limitations on monks' giving and the "universal" Buddhist values of love and compassion and giving<sup>49</sup> as the first of the six *pāramitās* are nowhere discussed in the texts, but the above passages show that giving to the needy was an issue that demanded regulation, implying that monks showed an inclination toward charity and that this occasionally posed challenges.<sup>50</sup>

#### THE EMPLOYMENT OF LAYPEOPLE AND CORVÉE DUTY

Related to the act of giving to the laity is the employment of laypeople by monks. Not just accepting help from the laity but remunerating or compensating them for their help was common in most Buddhist monastic societies. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* shows that those who worked for the monks were given food and clothing and that sick workers were to be given food, clothing, and medical attention.<sup>51</sup> However, it should also be mentioned that more generally "Buddhist monastic institutions almost certainly did employ forced labor, and very probably also slave labor."<sup>52</sup> In the Tibetan context, the question of whether the system in which certain monasteries called on people of the surrounding areas to perform corvée

labor<sup>53</sup> constituted forced labor is a contentious issue. It is clear, however, that at least during the first half of the twentieth century the monasteries employed lay-people as staff,<sup>54</sup> but drew in others only on special occasions. An example of this is given by a corvée-worker<sup>55</sup> of Dargyé Ling (Dar rgyas gling) monastery in Central Tibet who recalls her corvée duty: “In the Fifth Month all of us were called to the Dar gling monastery and fed there for three days. We would be given whatever offering the monks received at that time.”<sup>56</sup> On other occasions, when working for the monastery, people would be provided with meals.<sup>57</sup> The elderly monk Lobzang Döndrup of Spituk monastery in Ladakh describes labor relations with the local people, then and now:

The people had to perform corvée services and worked the many fields the monastery owned. Before, the sponsors gave the workers a salary on behalf of the monastic estate. Also, when repairs had to be done or if there was another major work one could call on the people to help, and they would take turns. If it was your turn you could pay someone to be your replacement. Nowadays, if you do not pay them they will not come. The fields are still there but now the monastery pays the people who work on them.<sup>58</sup>

Both the guidelines and eyewitness accounts confirm that, in many cases, the “compulsory labor” was regularly remunerated to a certain extent. Nornang notes that the managerial office was obliged to provide one bowl of soup and three rounds of tea or Tibetan beer (*chang*) per day at times when laypeople came to perform corvée for the monastery of Dakpo Shedrup Ling.<sup>59</sup> The provision of alcohol “as compensation” to the workers at the monastery is also attested in the Fifth Dalai Lama’s *chayik* for Gongra Ngesang Dorje Ling. One section stipulates that the use of alcohol is only permitted for ritual purposes and then only in very small amounts, but that permission should be asked when it is used as a base for medicine or as compensation for masonry or construction work.<sup>60</sup> Apparently construction work was then paid for with alcohol. Masonry and construction in particular were jobs that, ideally, were handled by laymen and women. In Sakya in the first half of the twentieth century, for example, when a considerable part of the monastery collapsed, the abbot wanted to levy labor from the subjects to restore it.<sup>61</sup>

Tsongkhapa forbids monks from initiating construction work and recommends that they ask the permission of the disciplinarian or the manager if an urgent need for it were to occur.<sup>62</sup> This is not to say that all monasteries were in a position to hand such jobs over to the local population, as some institutions did not have the necessary economic infrastructure. The early twentieth-century *chayik* for Pelyul Darthang monastery in Amdo, for example, demonstrates that monks did many things themselves: “One only gets permission to [not wear] one’s robes when the individual monastic colleges need to have work done, such as getting earth to seal the roofs, painting, and making the floor.”<sup>63</sup>

It appears that compulsory labor was a feature of politically powerful monasteries and their branches and that at other places—particularly in the monasteries in Nepal—monks either did most types of work (including farming) themselves or the works were undertaken as a (noncorvée) lay community effort.<sup>64</sup> While clearly corvée duty was by no means voluntary, we cannot know whether laypeople deemed the remuneration they received to be sufficient. Nietupski notes that among the communities surrounding Labrang monastery in the eighteenth century: “Many, even most sources reported that mandatory labor was not oppressive, simply a fact of community life.” It is furthermore suggested that this mandatory labor was “broadly publicized as a religious merit-generating activity.”<sup>65</sup> A parallel to this sentiment is given by Welch, who writes that in pre-Communist China, laymen who worked in the monastery were all fed by the monastery and sometimes accepted wages lower than the going rate, on account of the merit gained. The difference here is of course the fact that in China compulsory service to the monastery was not in place at that time. When laypeople volunteered to work for the monastery, the phrase used was “to ask for happiness.”<sup>66</sup>

Dargyay reports on the situation of laypeople who lived at a monastic estate (*mchod gzhis*) in Central Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century and notes that their behavior toward the estate was “to a great extent unemotional, objective and practical” and that “the submissive demeanor worn by subjects of the nobility was strange to them.” She notes that relationships were cordial toward the individual monks, “bearers of the Buddhist religion,” but that the administration of the monastic estate was viewed skeptically.<sup>67</sup> There is no mention of laypeople viewing their work for the monastery as religiously gratifying, however. Lobzang Döndrup describes the relationship in the context of duties toward the monastery more as a *quid pro quo*:

The relations between the people and the monastery have always been very good. They would work for the monastery and the monks would do religious services for them. These days if there is a special job to be done, for example during religious festivals, they come and help. When an important lama is coming, and when a lot of people are expected, we ask the laypeople to bring mats to sit on.<sup>68</sup>

The previously cited corvée-worker at Dargyé Ling monastery notes that she never saw monks treating the laypeople badly.<sup>69</sup> The monastic guidelines are largely silent about how to treat those employed by monks. One of the few exceptions is the *chayik* for Mindröl Ling, which contains rather lengthy regulations on how to behave when traveling.<sup>70</sup>

All that which is to be adopted and that which is to be abandoned, such as treating the valets and servants continuously gently and honestly, without being pushy and aggressive and without addressing them harshly, is the responsibility of a protector of beings.<sup>71</sup> Thus [the punishment is] a butterlamp of one measure when one

makes the load too heavy or when one, out of disregard, sends [them] to and fro on the way.<sup>72</sup>

This passage suggests that individual monks could indeed be forceful at times. The two-tiered system of the monastery and the individual monk, as discussed in Chapter 4, appears to also have been in place with regard to putting laypeople to work: *corvée* as a sort of tax was seen as unproblematic, whereas when individual monks applied a similar level of force, there would be implications. Tsongkhapa states this in no uncertain terms: “Those ordained, who have the wish to stay to receive teachings and [for that purpose] order the people from Zangri (Zangs ri) and beyond to do *corvée* duty, will accumulate grave negative karma.<sup>73</sup> This should therefore be avoided.”<sup>74</sup>

#### SPONSORS AND THE “COSTS” OF OFFERINGS AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Laypeople worked to maintain the monasteries and their inhabitants, but the service that monks performed for laypeople was theoretically of a religious nature. People were usually expected to make a contribution in lieu of provided services. The transactions were not solely of an economic nature, nor were they mere favors done out of Buddhist benevolence. The negotiation of these transactions is illustrated by rules in the monastic guidelines on religious services, accepting offerings, providing estimates of the cost of services, selling Buddhist images, and so on.

In some cases, the prices of certain offerings were very clearly stated. The Fifth Dalai Lama, for example, even sets lower and upper limits for the sponsors of particular types of offerings. The minimum was paying for soup and tea served six times a day for thirteen days; the maximum was to do the same for twenty-three days.<sup>75</sup> The cost of offerings was often seen as a possible reason for disagreements, and therefore rather complex calculations needed to be communicated to the prospective sponsor of a ritual or a communal tea-round. In Sera Je in the eighteenth century, the possibility of upsetting laypeople by naming different prices at different occasions was taken into account, which is why fixed prices had to be established:

[F]or 3,000 monks one needs at least sixty measures of tea<sup>76</sup> and three times that for the butter. The sponsor needs to be honestly informed of the three levels of quality, so that he can make a decision in accord with his wishes and his resources. Do not take more than this. Similarly, with regard to the three greater and the eight smaller offerings and arrangements and scarves for the protectors’ chapel, there should not even be a hint of dispute about the costs of the offerings.<sup>77</sup>

The point made here is that by setting a clear and honest price of the offering or religious service to be rendered, misunderstandings and arguments could be

avoided. The author of the above-cited text, the Seventh Dalai Lama, makes a similar point in his guidelines for the monastic community of Ramoché:

The disciplinarian and the managers together explain to the sponsor what they need and make sure that the things are given to the right recipients. They may not push for them to give more than they can. The sponsors for the communal tea-round may only be encouraged by the managers and not just by any other official.<sup>78</sup>

It appears then that clear rules were seen to be a desideratum when it came to negotiating the price and the types of offerings. As is the case elsewhere, the job is assigned to the disciplinarian and the manager, possibly to prevent potential donors from receiving contradictory information. Again, bias might also have played a part here, as the *chayik* for Pabongka monastery suggests:

One is to follow the established traditions when it comes to [stating] the costs of rituals, such as village rituals<sup>79</sup> and the like, be they private or public. One is definitely not to do something that becomes a cause for discord within the Sangha, such as being biased toward one's near and dear ones.<sup>80</sup>

Such statements seem to have been intended to counter a perceived bias with regard to friends and family and to wealthy donors. A set of monastic guidelines for Thekchen Damchö Gatsel Ling from 1848 also warns against treating benefactors differently, presumably on the basis of their wealth.<sup>81</sup> As mentioned before, goods that were being offered were often carefully recorded along with their value. In Pelyul Darthang the disciplinarian and the manager were charged with providing an estimate of the cost of the requested ritual and with recording it and dividing some of the proceedings among the reciting monks.<sup>82</sup> There were monks who were assigned to make an assessment of the value of the things given. Again, this was potentially problematic, as the guidelines state: "Even though there are people who ascertain the relative quality of goods, the basic value is handed over to the authorities—it is not allowed to haggle over it."<sup>83</sup>

Another occasion at which one could expect arguments is during the "buying and selling"<sup>84</sup> of religious statues, images, and books. In pre-modern Tibet, there were no shops in which one could purchase Buddhist texts and paraphernalia. Rather, these items were made to order, often by monks. Cassinelli and Ekvall note, somewhat puzzlingly, that Sakya monks were only allowed to do printing and painting for outsiders and they were not to receive payment.<sup>85</sup>

In Mindröl Ling in the seventeenth century, some kind of payment or remuneration was involved, however:

With regard to printed images of the enlightened body, speech, and mind, the original should not go to waste, but be kept in accordance with one's own wishes.<sup>86</sup> One should not argue and ask for more than the agreed-upon price for the prints. Half of the remaining offerings and the materials that were part of the printing price should be contributed toward replacing the butterlamps,<sup>87</sup> the canopies, tassels, and door-hangings in the many shrines.<sup>88</sup>

Here we learn that monks in this monastery made prints to order. Presumably, the people who made the prints were allowed to keep the other half of the “offerings,” whereas the rest was to pay for the upkeep of the shrines at the monastery, thus contributing toward the “greater good.”

The monastic guidelines confirm that prospective benefactors were sometimes given several options, taking into account their relative wealth. However, it is clear that one only got what one paid for. This is in contrast with the medieval Christian Church, which calculated religious penalties on the basis of “weighed incomes”: richer “penitents” usually bore a heavier penalty than poorer ones, so that the variation in practice was akin to a discriminatory tax.<sup>89</sup> The guidelines that report on the interaction with the sponsors make it very clear that religious services were expected to be paid for. They also exhort the monks to be straightforward and honest about the prices of the offerings or services and not to put any type of pressure on the laypeople requesting them.

#### COLLECTING ALMS AND SOCIAL PRESSURE

*As a community of “beggars of alms,” the Sangha must physically be located within secular society.*

—ISHII 1986: 6

A number of sources convey that collecting donations was often viewed as problematic by Tibetan authors. Various *chayik* stipulate the circumstances under which money for the monastery had to be amassed. Force is emphatically discouraged and so is begging for alms without permission from the authorities.<sup>90</sup> In the area under the administration of Sakya, individual monasteries had to request special permission from the Sakya government to ask the laity for donations.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, the Bhutanese law code<sup>92</sup> of 1729 notes: “lamas of the monasteries and the representatives of the *dzong* (*rdzongs*)<sup>93</sup> who ask the benefactors for alms destroy villages. From now on, they should be stopped.”<sup>94</sup>

These begging-rounds, occasionally carried out by monks on behalf of the monastery, may have presented a financial burden to ordinary people, partly also due to social pressure and one-upmanship. It is not difficult to imagine that this occasionally irritated laypeople. The *Gazetteer of the Kangra District* from 1897 describes the way in which this type of begging occurred in Spiti at that time, namely that after the harvest, the monasteries sent out five or six monks “on begging expeditions”:

They go round from house to house in full dress, and standing in a row, they chant certain verses, the burden of which is—“we are men who have given up the world, give us, in charity, the means of life; by doing so you please God whose servants we are.” The receipts are considerable, as each house gives something to every party.<sup>95</sup>

French describes a legal case reported to her by a former employee at the Lhasa courthouse that concerned the murder of two monks. These monks were part of a group traveling from Kham to Ngor monastery in Central Tibet to receive teachings, and along the way they begged for food from the locals. A man reportedly got very angry with the two monks and murdered them—possibly on account of their forceful methods of “begging.”<sup>96</sup> In some cases there seems to have been a fine line between soliciting charity, religious blackmail, and straight-out looting. Bell reports in the beginning of the twentieth century that during the Great Prayer Festival Drepung monks would take over the city of Lhasa and “loot extensively.” The wealthier people would flee the city and hide their belongings.<sup>97</sup>

A number of monastic guidelines express concerns about monks pressuring laypeople into giving donations, in particular when the sole beneficiary was the individual monk and not the monastic institution. The restrictions with regard to asking for donations are in tension with the Vinayic ideal of the monk begging for alms: “One of the most important monastic rules is that the monk obtain food and other bare necessities by begging.”<sup>98</sup> It seems as though this particular practice, so widespread in Theravāda countries, has never been common or entirely acceptable in Tibet as the sole basis for monks’ livelihood. Notable exceptions are the members of the Joden Dézhi (Jo gdan sde bzhi). These monks are understood to have solely lived off alms-begging, in emulation of their Kashmiri master Śākyaśrībhadra (1127/40s-1225), whose epithet was “the Great Almsman.”<sup>99</sup> An equally early reference that seems to suggest that the begging for alms by individual monks did occur is found in the guidelines for Drigung Til written in the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>100</sup> By contrast, the biography of the Zhalu master Trülzhik Tsültrim Gyentsen (’Khrol zhig tshul khrim rgyal mtshan, 1399–1473) reports that he asked his monastic followers to never request donations from sponsors—either directly or indirectly.<sup>101</sup>

Although the points on which monastic guidelines and Vinaya rules potentially clash are almost never explicitly remarked upon, the author of the guidelines for Drepung, the Fifth Dalai Lama, makes an exception:

Because going on an alms-round in Tibet proper, during for example the autumn, is in accordance with the intent of the Vinaya, there is no need to stop it. Except for people who collect offerings for the general good<sup>102</sup> in China, Mongolia, and Kham, etc., one is not to go to ask for donations on one’s own accord—it has to be an exception [on behalf of] the officials and the general good.<sup>103</sup>

Here the author sees the possible conflict and knows he cannot contradict the Vinaya rules directly by forbidding the practice outright. He uses the Vinayic term *bsod snyoms brgyag pa*, literally “to do the alms-round,” which he then allows, albeit reluctantly. However, he limits the practice to Tibet and employs a more pejorative term for the forbidden practice of collecting donations elsewhere, which can simply be translated as “to beg.”<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, this section was cited almost verbatim

by the Seventh Dalai Lama in a set of monastic guidelines for Sera monastery from 1737. In this text, he appears to alter the language somewhat by conspicuously leaving out Kham as a place one cannot go to collect donations.<sup>105</sup> This may have to do with the changed perception of what was seen to be Tibet (*Bod*). In the mind of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Kham perhaps did not belong to Tibet, but some fifty years later it may have done so in the opinion of his incarnation, the Seventh.<sup>106</sup>

The author of the guidelines for the—financially struggling—nunnery Rinchen Gang also provides stipulations for those who did go on an alms-round on behalf of the institution:

Because those who have to go to collect alms are the representatives of the Teachings, their entire behavior needs to be as good as possible. Mornings and evenings, their meditational deity rituals<sup>107</sup> and the like need to be performed properly. When going for alms, except when it is necessary, do not stay in the areas of one's friends, thinking one will get something [there].<sup>108</sup>

It is clear that going to collect alms here meant that one not only was expected to behave in an exemplary manner but also one's religious practices had to be correct, presumably due to the "karmic weight" that accompanied these received donations.

This tension with regard to soliciting alms still exists today among monastics, for example in contemporary Amdo. Its economy having improved, Dhitsa monastery prohibited "begging" in 2008, as it was no longer seen as necessary.<sup>109</sup> Cagle reports that monks at a number of monasteries in Amdo emphasized that the donations they received were *voluntarily* given and that their monastery no longer collected alms.<sup>110</sup>

While it may be the case—particularly in those Tibetan areas currently in the PRC—that all manner of asking for donations is discouraged, evidence from the thirteenth century suggests that the practice was perhaps not common but also not necessarily regulated by the monastic authorities. Earlier guidelines show, however, that pressuring people for gifts for one's own sake was generally disapproved of, but that well-organized, scheduled, and ordered visits on behalf of the monastery to solicit donations was usually both permitted and encouraged. The sixteenth-century monastic guidelines for Tsurpu make this point eloquently: "Aside from alms for the benefit of the Sangha, one should not beg and solicit, and particularly one should not read out the scriptures and the like, to get food and clothing with the offerings intended for the virtue of the dead and the living. Do not sell the Holy Dharma."<sup>111</sup>

Seasonal collective alms-rounds were a common feature of Tibetan monasticism,<sup>112</sup> but the daily ritualized begging for alms by individual monks that is common in Theravāda countries was largely unknown in Tibet. The pressure that seeking alms put on the laity may have been a consideration in regulating these practices.

## ACCOMMODATING LAY SENSIBILITIES

In the corpus of Vinaya texts, the concern for the reputation of the Sangha is regularly expressed. The Sanskrit term that is used in this context is *kuladūṣaka*.<sup>113</sup> Behaving badly in full view of the laity is one of the thirteen *Saṅghāvaśeṣa dharmas*, offenses that require suspension,<sup>114</sup> listed—among others—in the *Prātimokṣasūtra*. In the *Vinayavibhaṅga* the actions that may lead to *kuladūṣaka* are described as eating and drinking from the same vessel as a woman, dancing, picking flowers, singing songs, speaking loudly, making garlands, playing musical instruments, playing games, and a whole range of other behavior deemed inappropriate. It has been suggested that (some of) these acts were regarded as “courting behavior,” and therefore out of bounds for monks.<sup>115</sup> An Indian commentary explains this *kuladūṣaka* as something that causes the loss of faith, specifically by interaction with women who “belong” to Brahmins or householders.<sup>116</sup>

While this Vinayic worry over the Sangha’s good name is found throughout the Buddhist world, the kind of monk behavior that corrupted laypeople, annoyed them, or caused them to lose faith varied according to time and place. Obviously, public opinion was crucial for those monastic communities that were economically dependent on the laity.<sup>117</sup> But how important was this public opinion in places where monasteries maintained important positions in the local economy? In the previous chapter we have seen that monasteries were sometimes economically largely independent from the local population but also that there always existed a certain degree of dependency—be it on the government, interregional trade routes, or the presence of sufficient farmers to work the fields.

It comes as no surprise that the Tibetan monastic guidelines also echo the Vinaya when it comes to the act of “annoying laypeople.”<sup>118</sup> The sources at hand convey the problems that the monks occasionally caused in lay society and how certain figures in authority sought to solve them. This was sometimes aided by reasoning found in Vinayic texts, but also by coming up with solutions of a more pragmatic nature, thus bringing together orthodoxy and orthopraxy. What in fact was believed by the authors of the *chayik* to cause laypeople to become annoyed and subsequently disenchanted with the monkhood varied in time and place.

It is clear that this offense was most feared to occur when monks had to deal directly with laypeople. The guidelines contain ample examples of these interactions. The most common types of interactions in which the perceived danger of “annoying laypeople” are: receiving offerings; giving quotes of the cost of a particular ritual to sponsors; levying donations (or begging for alms); performing rituals at laypeople’s houses; taking time off and traveling. The possibility of annoying laypeople was often seen to be more likely when monks found themselves out of the direct sight of the monastery officials, such as during holidays. The guidelines for Namgyel Dratsang from 1727 note this possibility in the context of monks who were allowed a break from their duties: “During those periods one should not

do anything that causes laypeople to get annoyed, which will cause the worldly ones to lose faith. If there are people who do this, the disciplinarian will impose restrictions.”<sup>119</sup>

The most important and most regularly commented-upon relationship of monks with laypeople is that of recipient and donor. As mentioned earlier, in Tibet, the monks were not mere passive beneficiaries of offerings. Rather, they were often given a donation in return for the performance of specific rituals. These could take place in the monastery itself or at the house of the benefactor, or wherever else a ritual was deemed necessary. Thus, “the gift” was typically more akin to a transaction. This posed difficulties for the monks, for they were emphatically not meant to peddle their “dharma” and to deal with sponsors in an unethical way.<sup>120</sup> A set of monastic guidelines, written in 1888 by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, notes how monks were not meant to haggle with potential sponsors over the cost of certain rituals:

Then, even when the sponsor makes a request for any kind of religious service that is commensurate with his level of prosperity, one may by no means argue about it. One is, in accordance with the sponsor’s wishes, to reflect on the Three Jewels at lunchtime and purify the donations and so on. Thus, in all manner of behavior one is to be a cause for instilling faith in the sponsor. Other than that, one is not to do things that annoy laypeople.<sup>121</sup>

This “purifying the donations” is a ritualized way of dedicating the merit to the benefit of the donor that includes the recitation of a *dhāraṇī*, which can be found in the liturgies of most schools.<sup>122</sup> Here “to instill faith in the sponsor” can be read as doing all that was required, and monks behaving as laypeople expect them to behave. To do the opposite may have invoked their derision. It is noteworthy that here the sponsor’s material circumstances were taken into account: being of limited means was not deemed by the author to be a justification for turning him away, although the fact that this is noted in the monastic guidelines may indicate that this indeed happened on occasion. Other ritual services such as the communal tea-round were meant to have fixed fees, again to avoid upsetting laypeople.

The Seventh Dalai Lama recommends set prices and also gives the exact amounts of butter, tea, and salt to be donated: “When there are many different ways to arrange the offerings for the communal tea-round, it might irritate the sponsors and may also be a cause for annoying laypeople, who then lose faith.”<sup>123</sup> He continues to detail the amounts of tea and butter needed to provide the monks with two bowls of tea each. But he also warns that the monks could not take more than the sponsor intended to give and could afford.<sup>124</sup>

In the monastic guidelines for Mindröl Ling monastery, written in the late seventeenth century, arguing with laypeople about donations is represented as being on par with abusing power and pursuing debts:

One is not to bother laypeople by misusing power. This may consist of disputing with the laypeople over monk's shares that are not deserved, [dealing in] loans,<sup>125</sup> or ordering them to perform "corvée tax." If these mistakes are made then a punishment will be imposed of a fine of butterlamps consisting of one to three measures [of butter] and prostrations and the like.<sup>126</sup>

Here what is seen as bothering laypeople is not just arguing over the offerings but also the abuse of power by imposing corvée labor and the like. Later in the text, the author Terdak Lingpa forbids the monks who travel in a group from being too pushy in their interactions with laypeople: "The [monks] who are responsible for the baggage should not make it so that laypeople get annoyed by heavily pursuing [them] and ordering [them] around aggressively."<sup>127</sup> In fact, one would expect that monks "heavily pursuing [them]" and "ordering [them] around aggressively" would always be considered annoying by laypeople, but only this particular *chayik* classes such behavior as "bothering laypeople." More generally speaking, it appears that what caused laypeople to lose faith had mostly to do with decorum and reputation. In other words, the problem was not monastic abuse of power, but monks not behaving and dressing like monks, often in full view of the laity.

As mentioned above, there also was a possibility of monks putting too much pressure on laypeople when they went outside the monastery to ask for contributions. A set of monastic guidelines from 1899 for Taklung Drang Mangthö Samten Ling (sTag lung brang mang thos bsam bstan gling) speaks of the yearly trip used to levy donations:

When going on the annual alms-round, one needs to behave as well as possible, taking with one the six possessions and one's *paṇḍita's* hat,<sup>128</sup> one's staff and a *maṇḍala*, without falling in either of the two extremes with regards to clothing. Having given up on resentful arguments with each other and careless behavior—things that cause laypeople to lose faith—one properly observes a mindful attitude and, without wasting anything given by the faithful, be it big or small, one amasses the effective methods that increase both one's own and others' merit.<sup>129</sup>

In Tibetan societies, the practice of begging for alms was—as we have seen—occasionally problematic, and the above section warns the monks to conduct their alms-round in a careful and correct manner. Monks also came under the scrutiny of the laypeople when performing rituals in their homes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, away from the disciplinarian's watchful eye certain types of misbehavior could occur during these types of outings. The *chayik* for Ramoché monastery from the 1740s points out the potential danger:

The monks, when they go to do village rituals and the like, listen to the advice of the honorable elders and they make sure they behave in an exemplary fashion, being an inspiration to others, and as a field of merit. One is emphatically not to deceive the sponsors who have put their trust in one and do anything careless, which causes laypeople to get annoyed and lose faith.<sup>130</sup>

A similar sentiment is expressed by the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1664, for the monastery Gongra Ngesang Dorje Ling, yet without using the phrase as found in the Vinaya. Here the concern is not to do anything that would give the sponsors reason to lose faith. The Fifth Dalai Lama further demonstrates concerns about the correct performance of rituals.<sup>131</sup> In other cases, as expressed in the set of monastic guidelines for Tashi Lhunpo, the problem lay not so much with the proper way of undertaking these rituals but rather with the monks' behavior and the potential to upset laypeople: "Those who go to do rituals for the dead or the living, other than reciting the prayers they have been given to do, should not do things that will make laypeople annoyed such as drinking alcohol and laughing."<sup>132</sup>

It would have been well known among the audience of these monastic guidelines that drinking alcohol and laughing out loud were not accepted types of behavior for monks. It here appears to be reiterated out of appreciation that this would even further upset people who were often already dealing with bereavement of some sort. Elsewhere, the same author also shows concern regarding the sentiments of laypeople. Monks, he writes, are to avoid going to Kyina (sKyid na)<sup>133</sup> and to a particular religious festival.<sup>134</sup>

Whoever is there may become a real burden, and when only bad omens<sup>135</sup> occur in succession, there is a great danger that the laypeople get annoyed. Therefore, taking the welfare of sentient beings and the hardship such as the contributions offered by the dependents into account, one needs to go [there] with a motivation that combines compassion and a special intention and recite the various prayers as carefully as possible.<sup>136</sup>

This passage indicates that large groups of monks descending on a relatively small community would pose a significant burden on the resources of the locals. If, in addition, what were called bad omens would occur, the monks could be in danger of being scapegoated. Whether these omens had to do directly with the monks' behavior or whether they referred to naturally occurring phenomena is not clear here. However, as has been noted in Chapter 3, in the minds of many (Tibetan) Buddhist believers the two were intimately linked.

Elsewhere, the same text links the same phrase to issues that have more to do with decorum than with being directly sensitive to the feelings of others, such as growing garlic within the monastery and swimming in medicinal springs.<sup>137</sup> Although it can be conceded that to grow garlic is not in line with Vinaya sentiments and that to swim in medicinal waters can be seen as unacceptable behavior on many counts,<sup>138</sup> unlike the other examples the laypeople are not directly involved.

In particular in Geluk *chayik* the phrase "annoying laypeople" takes on a strong formulaic aspect, which leaves one wondering to what extent these rules pertained to actual monastic behavior. The guidelines enumerate the actions that were seen to annoy laypeople and promise that this type of behavior would receive punishment. The type of punishment is usually not specified.

The monastic guidelines for Jampa Ling in Dranang (Gra nang, Central Tibet) from 1927<sup>139</sup> state: “To jump, to swing one’s arms, have them behind your back, to cover one’s mouth with one’s upper robe: one needs to restrain oneself from doing these types of coarse behavior, which may lead toward the act of annoying laypeople.”<sup>140</sup> Some of the activities described here are in fact mentioned in the *Prātimokṣa* (part of the 253 vows), such as jumping, which is the twenty-first *śaikṣa* (*bṣlab pa*) in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*,<sup>141</sup> and swinging one’s arms, which is the twenty-fifth.

A *chayik* by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, written in the same year, mainly connects the potential offense to the monks’ attire:

Even though, in accordance with the time and place, the practice of wearing [items of clothing with] sleeves may be appropriate, it is very important to distinguish oneself from laypeople. Except for those who are exempted, one may not wear an upper garment made of serge and the like. For other items of clothing, aside from those that are suitable, all manner of clothes, which do not feature in the texts and lead to the annoyance of laypeople, are not allowed.<sup>142</sup>

Here it is exceptional that the author allows the monks of the monastery for which the monastic guidelines were written to wear clothing with sleeves in certain cases. This is in sharp contrast with many other *chayik*, which explicitly forbid sleeves. This exemption may have to do with the fact that the monastery in question was in Central Asia (Mongolia or Kalmykia), where monk garments with sleeves were (and still are) rather widespread.<sup>143</sup>

In another *chayik* by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, clothes with sleeves<sup>144</sup> are deemed to annoy laypeople. This set of monastic guidelines from 1930 was written for Rongpo Rabten monastery, a politically important Geluk monastery in Sogdzong (Sog rdzong, Central Tibet). Like the *chayik* cited above, it connects *kuladūṣaka* to the monks’ attire: “The Sangha should wear clothing properly; one is not meant to wear, either out in the open or in private, all manner of items that annoy laypeople, such as clothes with sleeves, all kinds of belts, bowl holders, Chinese shoes, meditation ropes,<sup>145</sup> knives, thumb rings, and other rings.”<sup>146</sup> Here what is seen to annoy laypeople the most is monks wearing items that are either worn by the laity or by practitioners of other schools—the meditation rope is a clear indication of the latter issue. The same author uses the phrase “to annoy laypeople” in a different manner when addressing a different monastery. In the guidelines from 1930 for a monastery in the north of Central Tibet the concept is solely connected to behavior:

For all, be they highly or lowly placed, it is important to always avoid all actions that annoy laypeople as if [such actions] were contagious diseases, by means of behavior that is careful and conscientious. Thus, one is not to engage at all in careless behavior such as fighting, singing, and playing dice and mahjong.<sup>147</sup>

A set of monastic guidelines written by the Reting regent for Kunpel Ling monastery in Central Tibet in 1934 notes the following:

Apart from a few monastic officials, the remainder may not do things, either out in the open or in private, that go against the Sangha's inner rules<sup>148</sup> and that annoy laypeople such as: wearing the insignia of a householder like clothing with sleeves, leaving hair longer than one finger-width, singing songs, playing games such as dice and mahjong, using tobacco, snuff, and cigarettes (*shig ras*), playing musical instruments at inappropriate times, and being noisy and calling each other from afar.<sup>149</sup>

Aside from the fact that this text exempts certain officials from these restrictions, the above section is also interesting because it combines notions that are very obviously Vinayic with more recent rules, such as those regarding smoking cigarettes,<sup>150</sup> for which a phonetic rendering of the English word is given.

A *chayik* from 1938 that also combines the Vinayic with issues that are more local in nature was written for Dophü Chökhör Ling monastery (Central Tibet), by the same author as the one cited above:

Not allowed are things that lead toward the annoyance of laypeople, which may be a contributing factor in others losing faith such as: to shout on top of one's own monks' residence or in the vicinity of the monastery's compound, to make noise, to jump, to throw stones [competitively], to use a slingshot, to sit in a secluded place together with a woman but without one's monk friends, to follow her and go together on the road for more than a *krośa*.<sup>151</sup>

Elsewhere in the text, he uses the phrase again and notes: "All crude behavior that annoys laypeople such as planting apricot and walnut tree seeds, beating guard dogs, wearing 'upturned hats,'<sup>152</sup> and interchanging the upper and the lower robes needs to be avoided."<sup>153</sup>

The issues mentioned here concern monks' attire, decorum, and—on one count—actual interaction with laypeople, namely being alone with women.

As mentioned above, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, *kuladūṣaka* is considered inappropriate behavior that might suggest courting behavior. Other monastic guidelines also make this connection. The monastic guidelines for Thobgyel Rabgyé Ling from 1913 comment: "The disciplinarian is to impose a fitting punishment to the annoying of laypeople—for example—by needlessly staying the night at the village after performing a personal or public task or a home ritual, or by sitting with a woman at a secluded place without monk friends or by following her."<sup>154</sup> The *chayik* for the Pabongka hermitage written in the early 1800s remarks:

It is not at all allowed to do things that annoy laypeople such as sitting at a secluded, concealed place with a woman but without virtuous monk friends or speaking placating words to a woman. If things like that are done, then there will be a punishment imposed, in accordance with the severity, which ranges from expulsion to confession.<sup>155</sup>

Here we see for the first time that more clearly defined punishments are prescribed. They resonate with the way in which infractions of the trainings are dealt

with in the Vinaya materials. It is important to note, however, that none of the mentions of *kuladūṣaka* in the *chayik* are treated according to the Vinaya rules, namely as resulting in temporary expulsion lasting six days and nights.<sup>156</sup> Rather, the phrase—merely loosely associated with the one found in the Vinaya rules—serves to denote a variety of bad behavior, which sometimes also features in the Vinaya.<sup>157</sup> When reading the *chayik* as a genre, the idiom indeed gives a general idea of the way the authors wanted the monks to represent themselves, not just to the outside world but also to each other.

Obviously, some *chayik* show more concern for actual relationships with surrounding communities, whereas others are more worried about their appearance and—by extension—the reputation of the monks among laypeople. On the basis of available sources, we can tentatively speak of a chronological development—from the phrase actually referring to dealing with laypeople, being afraid of burdening them, to using the same phrase in the context of attire and decorum, making sure one looks monkish enough, and not corrupting oneself—and the Sangha as a whole—by associating oneself with laypeople.

It is not the case, however, that a conscious reinterpretation of the Vinaya rules has taken place, but rather that the phrase, originally derived from the Vinaya, has taken on different meanings in a Tibetan context. In summary then, what—according to the *chayik*—is counted as behavior that is, or leads to, *kuladūṣaka* is the following:

- To order laypeople around
- To levy donations (and begging for alms) in an aggressive or dishonest fashion
- To be a financial burden to laypeople
- To improperly perform rituals for laypeople
- To interact with women in secret
- To not behave in a monk-like manner, whether through dress, singing, shouting, jumping, or playing games
- To argue with each other and to be careless or unscrupulous when out among laypeople

It is clear that not all texts will use “Vinayic vocabulary” to convey a similar message. It can be gleaned from the examples provided above that they are predominantly written by Geluk authors. This is, I believe, not merely due to the wider availability of Geluk *chayik*, but also because of the more extensive use of Vinaya-related terms by authors belonging to this school. While the wording in the *chayik* is occasionally formulaic, the accommodation of lay sensibilities was not merely symbolic.

Much of the contents of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* seems to have been written in reaction to criticism by laypeople, so that the Sangha was “shown as sensitive to and accommodating toward the norms and values of what they took to

be their surrounding community.”<sup>158</sup> The wording suggests the redactors of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* may not have been truly concerned with what the lay community thought of them. However, we need only remind ourselves of the presumed intended audience of Vinayic works to understand that the concern for a good reputation with nonmonastics must have been genuine, if not largely for reasons of (economic) survival. The same holds true for the Tibetan monastic guidelines.

The authors of the *chayik* show a genuine concern for the sensibilities of laypeople and the reputation that the monastery enjoyed in the area, despite the fact that in some cases their economic well-being was not necessarily dependent on the correct behavior of monks. Still, many monasteries relied on the laypeople’s opinion in one way or another. For instance, families had to be prepared to send their son to the monastery; if the institution in question had a bad reputation, they may have been less willing to do so. The prosperity and survival of a monastery were thus not always dependent solely on finances. This dependency and awareness of lay sensibilities demonstrates that—in contrast to what is sometimes argued—the relationship between the Tibetan monastery and society was not simply hegemonic, but one in which it was crucial to reach a consensus.

#### MORAL OBLIGATIONS: THE MONK AND THE SPONSOR

Perhaps in Buddhist India “monastic duties were seen as essentially oriented toward the monastic community itself,”<sup>159</sup> but to what extent is this true in the Tibetan context? Naturally, the primary goal of the monastery is to perpetuate itself and rules are made accordingly. However, the laity has an essential role to play in this continuation. As has been indicated above, monastic authors showed considerable concern for maintaining favorable relations with laypeople, although the motivations may have varied. But what were the *duties* monks actually felt they had? Goldstein claims that the monks are perceived to have “a moral obligation to attend to the spiritual needs of the lay people.”<sup>160</sup> To a lesser extent this is also asserted by Miller, who claims that the Tibetan Sangha is seen to have “at least some minimal responsibility to the lay community as well as to itself,” and that “this responsibility can be thought of as community service.”<sup>161</sup>

Much has been written about the position of Buddhist monks particularly in Theravāda communities.<sup>162</sup> The monk is described as a field of merit and thereby ascribed a somewhat passive role. Solely by keeping his vows properly, he is a source of merit for all who give to him. This notion is found in all Buddhist cultures and is eloquently vocalized by the Seventh Dalai Lama, who concludes his guidelines for Sera Je as follows: “Because the foundation of the Teachings is the purity of the rules of the Holy Vinayadharma, one needs to make sure one becomes a holy field

through which merit can be accumulated.”<sup>163</sup> This passage was probably intended as a further incentive for monks to behave well. In a similar vein, a *chayik* from 1900 notes: “Because the faithful sponsor is one who definitely can purify *dkor*,<sup>164</sup> one needs to strive to become worthy of offerings.”<sup>165</sup>

In Tibet the monk’s duty in society was seen as something more than merely being a field of merit. Naturally, monks in lay society are performers of ritual, recipients of offerings, and thereby providers of good karma. But monks have another role that is not often commented upon. The religious practitioner—which includes the monk—was seen as a pacifying force. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, this force served to keep in check potentially dangerous local spirits and demons. Just as a number of Buddhist temples were built to pin down the “supine demoness” in Imperial times,<sup>166</sup> the monks were seen to be in a position to keep harmful spirits in check. This was not only achieved by performing rituals, but also by their conduct, their practice of the Dharma, and the maintenance of their vows.

While the monastic guidelines frequently invoke the power and authority of the protector deities, who were often originally “local spirits” converted to Buddhism, they do not spell out what is thought to happen when rules are not adhered to.<sup>167</sup> A legal code for Bhutan from 1729, however, is more explicit:

By discarding the Dharma rules,<sup>168</sup> the main protectors depart into space.  
They are dispersed into the exhalations of the Samaya-corrupting demon brothers.  
By discarding the human rules,<sup>169</sup> the deities decline.  
The black devils laugh “ha ha.”<sup>170</sup>

The belief in the connection regarding adherence to rules—be they religious or not—local spirits, and the general well-being of the population was, no doubt, widespread. This meant that the local people saw themselves as having a vested interest in the general conduct of the monks in their local monastery. This further complicates the relationship between the lay and monk communities. Now, the monks are not mere fields of merit: the purity of their vows affects the local spirits and gods, who control the weather, eventually affecting the harvest. This makes the keeping of vows a matter of life and death.

It may not be entirely correct to label the monks’ obligations “moral” per se, but this perceived duty on the side of the monks presumably did have an effect on the moral behavior of the monastics. In the sixteenth-century *chayik* for Pelri Chödè, for example, the initial sponsor and political ruler of Chonggyé (‘Phyongs rgyas, where the monastery is located) was Zhabdrung Hor Sönam Dargyépa (Zhab drung Hor bSod nam Dar rgyas pa). The author, Shérab Özer (Shes rab ’od zer, 1518–1584), calls on monks to behave in an exemplary fashion and then lists a large number of ways to achieve such behavior, “in order to bring to perfection the intention of the ruler and to not let the efforts of his son, his relatives, and his ministers go to waste.”<sup>171</sup> This would invoke a sense of indebtedness toward the

sponsors, and in the likely case of important benefactors also playing some political role, a certain sense of loyalty as well.

The notion of sponsor, *sbyin bdag*, is more complex than is currently appreciated. In the eyes of many today, being a sponsor or donor does not fully *oblige* one to give: one gives out of free choice and religious fervor. The much analyzed “patron-priest relationship” (*mchod yon / mchod sbyin*)—that Tibetans found a favorable construction—may feature the word *sbyin bdag*, which is often explained in the context of political macro-narratives.<sup>172</sup> When operating on a micro-level, however, the connotation of the term appears often very similar. The relationship between a monastery and its sponsors was often not without mutual obligations, nor was “giving” entirely optional. For instance, Kvaerne, who conducted fieldwork among monks from Bon Menri monastery, notes that each college of the monastery used to have a donor, a layperson from the nomadic Jangthang area, who was “elected” by the monks in charge of revenue derived from donations.<sup>173</sup> This “rotating community sponsorship”<sup>174</sup> was also in place at Labrang monastery.<sup>175</sup> The purely “voluntary” nature of being a sponsor then is very much in doubt. Rather, we see a picture emerging of mutual obligations and duties, both in economic and religious terms. The monastic guidelines attempt to negotiate, calibrate, and maintain this fragile relationship.

#### FAMILY TIES

The most obvious and ubiquitous relationship between monks and the lay community was the family tie, which—contrary to popular perception—was *not* broken when a person became a monk. Clarke convincingly demonstrates that in Buddhist India a monk maintaining contact with his family was never directly discouraged, and that upon examining the ideals of authors and redactors of the extant Vinayas, “there seems to have been little, if any, expectation that when one left home for the religious life one would either reject one’s family or sever all family ties.”<sup>176</sup> Rather, “all extant Indian Buddhist monastic laws suggest that monks and nuns could continue to interact with family members both lay and monastic.”<sup>177</sup> The *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* even contains rulings that *made* monks look after their parents.<sup>178</sup> The *Uttaragrantha* has the Buddha order “that even a son who has entered the religious life must procure food and clothing for both father and mother.” Not to do so is an offense.<sup>179</sup> While, generally speaking, monks were expected to provide service to other monks and not to householders, forsaking one’s parents was never a requirement.<sup>180</sup>

In the case of Tibetan monasticism, we can speak of family relationships as mutually beneficial: sometimes monks would help their family, and other times the family would send food and money.<sup>181</sup> In fact, the monk often depended on his family for his upkeep in the monastery, much as would a child sent to boarding school.<sup>182</sup> Nietupski also notes this relationship between the monk and his family,

in the context of Labrang monastery. He then extrapolates that monasteries were therefore “fully integrated with lay society,”<sup>183</sup> which makes Labrang “a community-funded and community-integrated institution.”<sup>184</sup> This statement is not applicable to all types of monasteries, however, for we know that monasteries actively sought to distance themselves from the lay community and that monasteries often did not rely solely on donations from generous laypeople, but that they also owned fields, had lay dependents (or “subjects”), were engaged in trade, and sometimes were heavily dependent on government funding.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the fact that many families in pre-modern Tibet had sons in a monastery often created a bond that was more than a religious or an economic one. Furthermore, these emotional ties between the lay community and the monastery were frequently translocal. This is to say that monks would regularly join a monastery outside of their locality. As has been demonstrated in Chapter 3 several monastic guidelines even stipulate coming from an area farther away from the monastery as an entrance requirement. The ties thus created show that there was not necessarily an obvious emotional connection of the local community with the local monastery, but that there existed intricate networks of family relations that often were also economic ones, stretching throughout and beyond Tibet.<sup>185</sup> What has not been noted by researchers who work on modern-day Tibetan monasteries in the PRC is that this represents one of the biggest breaks with the past. According to current state regulations, people are only allowed to become monks at monasteries in the region in which they are registered.<sup>186</sup> This has reduced monasteries in Tibetan areas from being interregional and sometimes even international institutions to largely local establishments.<sup>187</sup>

When a person “went forth, from home to homelessness,”<sup>188</sup>—that is, became a monk—he usually was no longer a subject of the estate to which his family belonged; he could no longer lay claim to inheriting his family’s agricultural lands and, by extension, could not be held legally responsible for the debts of his family.<sup>189</sup> These changes had legal implications, but were not likely to fundamentally change the sense of responsibility a monk had for his parents. There is no doubt that monastic culture discouraged intense contact with householders, regardless of whether there was a blood relation or not. However, exceptions were always made. An example of this is found in the monastic guidelines for Mindröl Ling monastery:

Generally speaking, because the regular visiting of other people’s houses is a cause for the very bad condition of increasing worldly desire, one should not go. In the exceptional case that one needs to go, such as when parents and relatives and the like are sick and dying, one should return no later than the agreed date of return, when it is not farther than a month’s march away.<sup>190</sup>

While relationships with relatives were maintained, they were also reasonably well regulated. As we have seen in previous chapters, monks could not simply

leave without permission from the monastic authorities and often could not stay at a layperson's house for more than three nights.<sup>191</sup> Visits by family members to their sons at the monastery were equally restricted. This was particularly the case for female relatives. Mindröl Ling's guidelines are strict when it comes to women entering monastic residencies: "Except for when they come to do masonry or roof repairs in the living quarters, females, even one's mother and sisters, are not allowed."<sup>192</sup> Elsewhere, the same text extends this restriction to all relatives: "Without special permission, monks are not to allow their relatives and the like in the living quarters."<sup>193</sup>

Even more problematic was a monk helping out his kin by working on the land. In some cases, however, monks could assist their family or even fellow countrymen with agricultural work, with the notable exception of plowing. If necessary, they could even give some of their monk's income to their relatives.<sup>194</sup> These types of allowances, however, do not appear to feature in the *chayik*. In many texts all manner of agricultural labor is forbidden, such as in the Fifth Dalai Lama's guidelines for Kumbum Jampa Ling (sKu 'bum byams pa gling): "Because worldly activities, such as harvesting, contradict the holy Dharma and the Vinaya, they should not be done."<sup>195</sup> In his guidelines for Drepung, the same author also forbids monks to work in the fields, but makes an allowance for the monastery's residents who had not taken vows. They could proceed but were required to wear lay clothes while farming.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, the 1729 Bhutanese law code states that monks "who loiter should be engaged in farming work."<sup>197</sup>

While rules that regulate and restrict farmwork by monastics were in place across the board, we know that at least in more recent times these rules were often not adhered to, for a number of eyewitness accounts describe monks as helping their families and communities by providing manual labor—a scarce commodity in most Tibetan and Himalayan regions.<sup>198</sup>

#### HEALTHCARE FOR ALL?

As alluded to above, monks often took care of their ailing parents and relatives, an obligation that remained after "leaving the family." The link between the Sangha and medical care is strong in Buddhist narratives. The Buddha is repeatedly shown in the Vinaya nursing people afflicted by illness. Monks, including senior ones, are also described as caring for the ill, who in some cases were laypeople.<sup>199</sup> However, the Vinaya forbids practices that are "not soteriological" such as astrology and medicine.<sup>200</sup> The Sri Lankan *katikāvatas* state that, except for "the five coreligionists"<sup>201</sup> described in the Vinaya, no medical treatment was to be provided to others.<sup>202</sup> The reality, however, seemed to be that throughout Sri Lankan history, monks often practiced astrology and medicine.<sup>203</sup> The *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* states that ill monks needed to be taken care of and that the property of the Sangha should be used to pay for their treatment.<sup>204</sup> At the same time, workers employed

by the monastery were also meant to be looked after.<sup>205</sup> This does not necessarily contradict the prohibition on practicing medicine, as it appears to refer to the cost of healthcare.

While access to healthcare was not widely available in pre-modern Tibet and usually restricted to “urban” areas,<sup>206</sup> the study of medicine was promoted throughout the country. Initially, entry to the Chakpori (lCags po ri) medical college built in the late seventeenth century was only possible for monks.<sup>207</sup> In 1696, its founder, Desi Sangyé Gyatso (sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho), wrote the *chayik* for this college, explicitly modeled on guidelines for actual monasteries.<sup>208</sup> Similarly, a number of monasteries had colleges solely dedicated to the study of (Tibetan) medicine. For example, Labrang monastery in Amdo had a monastic college for medicine,<sup>209</sup> founded in 1784 in order to promote the study and development of Tibetan medicine.<sup>210</sup> Medicines were also often produced at monasteries.<sup>211</sup> While physicians were by no means always monks, in particular after the seventeenth century the monastic institutions and the Tibetan government increasingly staked their claim on the education of doctors and the production of medicine.<sup>212</sup>

It is not the case that healthcare was provided freely and without restrictions. How monastic guidelines deal with the ill is remarkably close to the Vinaya’s stipulations regarding the management of the financial aspects of medical care. The most common mention of ill health among monks is in the context of attending the assembly. Sick monks, along with the “very old” monks, are exempted from having to attend, while they still receive their “shares.” The 1899 monastic guidelines for Taklung Drang Mangthö Samten Ling explain: “The permanent resident *bhiksus* who are very old practitioners and the ill, who are known to have no assistance or any capital whatsoever, may only receive handouts based on the agreement from the general Sangha and the monastic administration, but they may not be given a share of ‘the continuing tea.’”<sup>213</sup> The 1947 guidelines for Tagdrag monastery give the following ruling: “If there are monks enrolled here who have been ill for a long time and whose finances have been depleted, then—in consultation with the preceptor, the chant master, and the disciplinarian—they need to be given the cost for treatment and the support for their livelihood and so on, from the general assets.”<sup>214</sup>

The monastery thus had a duty to take care of chronically ill monks, but *only* if they could not do so themselves. Equally, the Mindröl Ling guidelines report: “When someone gets ill, then he needs to be taken care of untiringly, whether or not he himself has the means [to pay for] a nurse<sup>215</sup> and necessities. If not, he receives all that is necessary, such as a suitable nurse, a physician and healing rituals.”<sup>216</sup> Here it is not stipulated who ends up paying for the medical bill, but the point made is that monks who cannot afford care should not be left to fend for themselves. The Pelri Chödë guidelines by Shérab Özer from the late sixteenth century note that monks should not only be cared for in sickness but also in death. The text stipulates what prayers needed to be done and for how long, but it does not mention any sort of remuneration for the received care.<sup>217</sup>

The Fifth Dalai Lama is more informative on this matter in his guidelines for Gongra Ngesang Dorje Ling:

When a monk without resources becomes ill, the healing rituals need to be done<sup>218</sup> with the assets of the Three Jewels or those of the Sangha. When he recuperates and he has the means, he should repay all. Also, destitute ill people who are not from here should be helped by means of things like food, clothing, medical examination, and instructions.<sup>219</sup>

Interestingly, here—unlike the rulings in the *katikāvatas*—the monks are also to help people who are not (necessarily) monks and who come from elsewhere.

The guidelines for Kongtö Dungkar monastery from 1943 state the following on the topic of illness:

Someone who is ill and without resources needs to be taken care of by means of the assets of the Sangha and the Three Jewels. Once he has recovered, if there are funds that can be taken from, for example, his own region, then the deficit of the Three Jewels assets can be replaced. But if not, his relatives and countrymen should not be held accountable. People in the vicinity who do not belong to this region, lay or ordained, who are ill, should be helped by means of assistance, food, clothing, medicine, and the like. If you have been to a place where there is a contagious disease, do not go among the general Sangha, as this will be harmful.<sup>220</sup>

This text clearly ascribes an important task to the monastery to take care of ailing laypeople and—if they are truly destitute—to pay for their treatment.

Treatment was not always entirely free, not even for poor monks. The guidelines for Ramoché monastery from the 1740s offer an interesting way to repay the medical debts:

Some ill people, who have no wealth at all, are looked after by the monastery officials and supported by the monastery. Monks who, after having been provided for by the government and the monastery due to their financial destitution, have not yet settled their debts, should be made to compensate this by doing home rituals.<sup>221</sup>

While there is no justification given, it might be argued that this rule was created in the interest of fairness—that all monks pay equally for their healthcare regardless of their level of wealth. It is more likely, however, that the encouragement to repay the costs has to do with the fact that the wealth used would (in most cases) be drawn from the Sangha's assets. We have seen in the previous chapter that the depletion of these assets was to be avoided at all cost—in the interest of karma, not of fairness.

Monasteries, aside from the medical colleges, do not appear to have made efforts to develop any type of structural healthcare<sup>222</sup> or geriatric care.<sup>223</sup> This stands in contrast with recent efforts by monasteries in exile and in Tibet alike to build public clinics, which often provide very affordable (primary) healthcare to people of all walks of life. While the history of Tibetan medicine currently receives scholarly

attention, an investigation into actual medical care (of monks and laypeople) in pre-modern Tibet still remains a desideratum.<sup>224</sup> For now, from the above it can be gleaned that, if monks were generally expected to pay for their treatments themselves, laypeople were too.

#### THE MONASTERY AND THE EDUCATION OF LAYPEOPLE

Attitudes toward education in Buddhist countries have varied a great deal throughout the centuries. According to one of the Sinhalese *katikāvatas*, it is maintained that “without intending to ordain them Bhikkhus should not teach the children of laypeople.”<sup>225</sup> Still it appears that in Sri Lanka monks were the primary educators, as they taught reading and writing as well as moral values and literature.<sup>226</sup> Spiro states that in pre-modern Burma all education was provided by monks and that children attended only the monastery school. During Spiro’s fieldwork in Burma monks continued to serve as schoolmaster in the rural areas.<sup>227</sup> In China, a temple ordinance of 1915 made all Buddhist monasteries and temples open schools that would provide a general and a religious education, but the text does specify that the educators had to be monks and nuns.<sup>228</sup>

In Tibet, the level of literacy has been traditionally comparatively low, and an educational system, comparable to modern times, only started to develop properly in the early twentieth century.<sup>229</sup> Literacy was largely in the hands of the monastics. Kawaguchi notes in this regard that only at religious schools could one obtain even “a comparatively advanced education” and—as has been alluded to in Chapter 3—the doors of those schools were, “of course, shut to those of humble origin.”<sup>230</sup> The sons of the nobility and of wealthy subjects either were sent to the monastery to get an education or tutors were hired.<sup>231</sup> These were often “retired monks”—presumably monks who did not reside at a monastery—who would live in the same house or “active monks” who would make house calls.<sup>232</sup> The educational contribution that the monastic institution made was also apparent in Spiti in the nineteenth century. The *Gazetteer of Kangra* reports:

Nearly the whole of the male population of Spiti receives some education at the monasteries; the heir to the family estate goes when a boy in the winter to the ancestral cell with his younger brothers, who are to spend their life there, and passes two or three winters there under instruction. Consequently, nearly every man can read.<sup>233</sup>

An unstructured educational arrangement as apparently once existed in Spiti could only be maintained when the monastery and the local community were a close-knit society. In Central Tibet, this was often not the case, in particular when it came to the larger monasteries. However, according to Cassinelli and Ekvall, even the poorest in the Sakya principality could get an education at a neighboring monastery. The reason given for this is that “Tibetan Buddhism implied that the

extension of literacy was beneficial because it enabled more people to participate in an additional degree of religious observance.”<sup>234</sup> Be that as it may, such notions have not resulted in any efforts to set up a well-organized educational system. Another manner in which education could be enjoyed was by sending one’s son to the monastery for just a short period of time. This is also noted by Miller, who remarks that many young novices returned to their families after having received a nominal education.<sup>235</sup>

Certain politically significant institutions did set up schools that allowed lay-people to study there. Das mentions the “boarding schools in Tashi Lhunpo” in the late nineteenth century and notes that the monastery maintained a school for the education of the advanced students, both monk and lay.<sup>236</sup> People who wanted to pass the government exams<sup>237</sup> went there; the elementary level was not taught. There were no fees, as the teachers were provided by the state. The school was not open to women, because women were not allowed in the monastery compound. Upon completion, the students were required to serve the government, and those who were unable or unwilling to do so had to pay a large sum to be exempted.<sup>238</sup>

It is important to note here that all types of education available to laymen—women were hardly ever formally educated—were dominated by Tibetan monastic culture. This means that monastic education left a mark on society that went far beyond the direct sphere of influence of the monastery. The contemporary author Rendo Senggé, a monk at Kirti monastery, notes the following: “These monasteries are the foundation on the basis of which Tibetan education, moral behavior, arts and crafts have developed and flourished. Therefore, the Tibetan system of monastic learning within the history of Tibetan education can be compared to a precious jewel rosary bead.”<sup>239</sup> While monk authors would naturally be keen to emphasize the importance of monastic education, this point is crucial when trying to understand the impact of monks and monasteries on Tibetan societies through history.<sup>240</sup>

#### THE SOCIAL POSITION OF THE MONK IN TIBETAN SOCIETY

*The bhikṣu is the best, the śrāmaṇera is in the middle, and the resident of the household is the lowest.*

—THE FIFTH DALAI LAMA (SEE NOTES)

The social position of monks fluctuated a great deal throughout history, both in Buddhist and Christian contexts.<sup>241</sup> That of the Tibetan monks seems to have been comparatively stable, largely due to the high level of religious homogeneity in Tibet. While monasteries regularly found themselves in a position of power, this did not mean that monks were seen to be infallible or above the law: there are various instances in which people are reported to have protested against the actions of monks. Miller remarks that acute dissatisfaction with the monastery’s handling

could cause the community to switch to a rival monastery. This meant that the lay community could potentially influence the monastery through its personnel and by granting or withholding funds.<sup>242</sup>

As shown in this chapter, the monastic guidelines make continuous implicit references to the danger of losing the support of the laity. In this regard, the texts function similarly to the Vinaya. Horner's remarks on early Buddhist monasticism ring equally true for the Tibetan context: "Historically, the success of the Early Buddhist experiment in monasticism must be in great part attributed to the wisdom of constantly considering the susceptibilities and criticisms of the laity."<sup>243</sup> At the same time, more mundane types of contact with laypeople were to be discouraged.<sup>244</sup> As identities needed to be kept separate, the layman tended to be portrayed as the opposite of a monk, and vice versa.<sup>245</sup> In reality, however, "the Tibetan monastic world defies both idealistic and cynical expectation: neither do we have here a world of pure spirituality nor of Machiavellian intrigue. It exists not on the community's periphery, but very much in the thick of it."<sup>246</sup>

When examining normative Tibetan works that only implicitly address social welfare, we see that for the authors, the interests of laypeople are taken seriously, without being sentimentalized. In other words, while the monastic institution in pre-modern Tibet was most definitely not a charitable institution, like other religious institutions in Europe and beyond, it had the function of "a social safety net."<sup>247</sup> However, as has been established previously, rules often had to be created only in order to right certain wrongs. Many prescriptive (and indeed proscriptive) pronouncements, often made by figures of religious authority, probably were—to a certain extent—regularly ignored by the managerial "establishment" and individual monks. These particular monks had to be continuously reminded of the laity's importance.

The importance of the monkhood for the laity is—due to lack of sources—less well documented. In this chapter, the ritual role of the Sangha has been mentioned: monks and nuns are needed to perform rituals, in the case of death, sickness, and other important life events. Significantly, the view that for the Buddhist Teachings to survive the Sangha needs to be maintained is common among both lay and ordained Buddhists. Wangchuk provides the rationale for this argument, noting that the Vinaya is part of the Buddhist Teachings and that "without monk- or nunhood the Vinaya would be dead."<sup>248</sup>

In more recent times, the monks are seen to have been given additional responsibilities toward the laity and toward "Tibetan society" as a whole. The monks interviewed by Schwartz showed a strong sense of being bearers and preservers of tradition, "serving Tibetans by setting an example."<sup>249</sup> With Tibetan traditions under threat, the monks are not just the guardians of religion, but have also become culture heroes of sorts. In addition, with the previously existing power structures having disappeared, the relationship is viewed by many Tibetans in

Tibet as a cooperative and complementary one, “where both people and resources are willingly committed by the community to the monasteries because the benefit is understood in general social terms.”<sup>250</sup> On this basis, it could be argued that political developments since the 1950s have strengthened the bond between the laity and the monkhood. In particular, the restrictions regarding religious practices and the PRC’s control over monastic affairs are seen by many Tibetans as “directly interfering with the traditional relationship between the monastic community and the laity.”<sup>251</sup>

This traditional relationship was bound to restrictions of its own. The legal and judicial aspects of this bond between the laity and the monkhood in pre-modern Tibetan Buddhist society also drastically diverge from the current circumstances. It is this, and more generally the legal position of the monastery, to which I turn next.