

Documents That Establish the Rules

The Genre of Chayik

INTRODUCTION

... a broad survey of bca'-yig ... provides what might be considered a general outline of normative monastic polity.

—ELLINGSON 1990: 207

The extent to which Indic monastic guidelines, that may have existed in either oral or written form, influenced their Tibetan counterparts is unknown. In any case, Tibetan authors never point to Indian precedents for their monastic guidelines.¹ Rather, the claim most commonly made is that the monastic guidelines address both local and contemporary issues, to which Indian precedents would not be relevant.

A *chayik* or a *chayik*-like text in its most basic form is a formal, written address directed to a group of religious practitioners and concerns the future of that group.² It may not necessarily be restricted to religious practitioners.³ The term is an abbreviation of *khriṃs su bca' ba'i yi ge*—a document that establishes rules.⁴ The most likely origins for the word *chayik* are the works mentioned in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*. Schopen notes the existence of the so-called *kriyākāraṃ*, which is found in Tibetan translations as both *khriṃs su bca' ba* and *khriṃs su bya ba*. These are texts of which both secular and clerical versions exist. Both types can be found within the vast corpus of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*.⁵

An early document that contains “regulations for the monastic community” stems from the third century and is written in Kharoṣṭhī script. It is from Central Asia and unfortunately fragmentary. The regulations for the community of monks contained in this text list the kinds of punishment that were meted out for certain types of offenses.⁶ Schopen mentions that not much research has been done

on these “monastic ordinances” and that in all likelihood they were more important to monastic communities than the canonical Vinaya.⁷ Mention of *sāṃghikaṃ kriyākāraṃ* occurs in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. In it the bodhisattva’s actions through which he would commit a fault are described, such as not rising to greet his senior.⁸

The earliest Tibetan texts that were later labeled *chayik* are still relatively late, some four hundred years after monastic Buddhism was supposed to have been introduced into Tibet. Mention of eleventh-century Kadam (*bKa’ gdams*) monastic guidelines is made in a fifteenth-century religious history.⁹ In this work, the author claims not merely to have heard of, but also to have seen, *chayik* authored by the important Kadam masters Gonpawa (dGon pa ba), Sharawa (Shar ba pa), and Potowa (Po to ba), as well as four sets of monastic guidelines for the general Sangha (*dge ’dun spyi’i bca’ yig*).¹⁰ To my knowledge, these works, which then would stem from the eleventh century, are not extant.

The oldest existing works containing instructions for religious organizations hail from the twelfth century. According to Ellingson, the first *chayik*-like text contains prescriptions for aspects of monastic governance and consists of instructions given by Lama Zhang (Zhang brtson ’grus grags pa, 1123–1193), written down and preserved in his collected works.¹¹ The tradition maintains that it was recorded as an oral testament directed to his successors at the monastery of Tsel Gungtang (’Tshal gung thang). It is said to have been spoken when Lama Zhang was on his deathbed, thus either in or before 1193.¹² Even though this text contains some valuable information on the monastic organization of the late twelfth century, the monastic guidelines did not develop into a more established genre of literature until the fourteenth century.

Interestingly, a number of *chayik* survive that were written in the Mongolian language. These texts, however, have imported various technical Tibetan terms, which are phonetically transcribed, making them difficult to understand for most Mongolian readers.¹³ Several bilingual sets of *chayik* also exist, in which the Mongolian is most likely translated from the Tibetan.¹⁴ These Tibeto-Mongolian texts merit further study.

CONSTITUTIONS, REGULATIONS, OR GUIDELINES?

The only scholar to have written on the genre of *chayik* in more general terms is Ellingson. In his article, he proposes that this genre derived from sources such as common law and traditional rights. In light of the presumed origination in Tibetan traditional “secular” law, he translates *chayik* both as “monastic constitution” and as “a monastic constitutional document.” He states: “the Tibetan *bca’ yig* are ‘constitutions’ in the sense that they are constitutional-documentary outlines of part of a more extensive body of documentary and traditional fundamentals of monastic government.”¹⁵ He does not give further information on this extensive

body of works but mentions that many of these may be oral.¹⁶ The translation of “monastic constitution” or “monastic ordinances” for the Tibetan word *chayik* is problematic, as a fair number of texts that are called *chayik* are not written for *monastic* communities. We know of *chayik* written for hermitages (*ri khrod*)¹⁷ and for communities of tantric practitioners who are not monks.¹⁸

Certain legal codes in Bhutan are also called *chayik*, although this is a more recent development.¹⁹ Another interesting occurrence of the word is in the context of modern Amdo, where in certain village communities, the term *chayik* can denote a series of rules jotted down in a notebook. These consist of rules on lay religious gatherings (such as reciting *mani* mantras) and state the monetary fines to be paid by those who fail to attend, do not wear Tibetan dress, or arrive late at the gathering.²⁰ The name *chayik* also crops up in the context of regulations for certain Himalayan communities. There is a text for the inhabitants of Pachakshiri, written by Lama Lodre Gyamtso in the early 1930s and some years later completed by Sonam Gelek Rabtan Lhawang. It gives information on the migration of people to an area and the creation of a so-called Hidden Land (*sbas yul*). The text lays down rules on correct moral behavior, the relationship between the ruler and his subjects, the establishment of law, and social and religious order. It also provides instruction on how to deal with newcomers or tribal neighbors. It can be read as a justification of Pachakshiri’s inhabitants’ rights as the chosen community.²¹ The word *chayik* appears in yet another context: a text that contains guidelines on issues such as aesthetics and punctuation for copyists of the Kanjur.²²

It is clear that *chayik* is a name for a genre of texts that address multiple audiences. However, here the word *chayik* is translated as “monastic guidelines” because the texts dealt with in this book are by and large limited to the monastic context. I use the word “guidelines,” although one might render the word *chayik* as: regulations, constitutions, rules, codes, protocols, manuals, laws, rulebooks, regulatory texts, codified rules, regimens, monastic injunctions, standards, charters, or edicts. Because *chayik* may cover a variety of topics, ranging from the details of punishments to mere spiritual advice, a translation that has a broad coverage is preferred.

MONASTIC GUIDELINES AND THE LAW

Aside from an etymological connection between the word *chayik* and the term that denotes legal documents (*rtsa tshig*),²³ another possible connection of the *chayik* with legal and secular texts is their appearance. Several pre-modern *chayik* found *in situ* in monasteries do not have the palm-leaf shape most religious texts do, but are scrolls made out of sheets of paper stuck together with glue.²⁴ They could also be scrolls made out of cloth or silk. The Mongolian author Lopzang Tamdrin (Blo bzang rta mgrin, 1867–1937), the author of the guidelines for a monastery likely

to have been established in Mongolia, explains the process of creating the guidelines: "In the midst of an assembly of old and new studying monks, I, together with friends and enemies, 'made' a big piece of paper and established regulations regarding congregating."²⁵

Law codes that were kept in the Tibetan courts had the same scroll-like shape, similar to that of many other official secular documents.²⁶ Nowadays, Tibetan monasteries in exile still keep the version of the monastic guidelines that is read out by the disciplinarian in the same format, while copies that are handed out to monks usually take the shape of a small book.

While there are indications that suggest that the format of the texts as well as the term (and subsequently the genre of) *chayik* is derived from Tibetan legal sources, the contents and vocabulary of available works that carry the word *chayik* in their title do not suggest a *direct* relationship to Tibetan "secular" law. Most of the monks I interviewed, when asked how they viewed the relationship between secular law ("lay law") and the *chayik*, find there to be considerable overlap, as the monastic rules contain "laws" that could be found in secular society, such as the rule on not killing human beings. One respondent mentioned that for this reason the monastic law²⁷ is broader in spectrum than the layperson's law, as the latter does not contain rules on religious behavior.²⁸ This indicates that (at least some) Tibetan monks think of the rules of the monastery as a parallel law.

Another respondent noted that, generally speaking, the monastic guidelines fall under state law: the contents of the guidelines can never contradict the general law.²⁹ The compilers of a book published in Tibet in the 1980s, which contains a variety of pre-modern law texts, also saw the connection, because aside from numerous important works on secular law it contains five sets of monastic guidelines and a text by the Fifth Dalai Lama that explains the *prātimokṣa* vows.³⁰ A more elaborate discussion on the role of the monastic guidelines within the monastic organization and its legal authority, as well as a more general treatment of the judicial position of the monastery, can be found in chapter 7.

MONASTIC GUIDELINES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF GOVERNMENT?

In some cases, monastic guidelines functioned as an instrument of government. At certain times, the monastic guidelines were tools of the state, or of those allied with the state. At other times, they were the instruments of local governing bodies or people whose authority was largely religious in nature. This distinction can be easily made by looking at the authors of the monastic guidelines. Some writers were the founders of the monastery for which they wrote the guidelines, others were in one way or another affiliated to the monastery but were requested to write monastic guidelines because of the charismatic authority they enjoyed among the

monastic population. Again others wrote monastic guidelines for monasteries that were far removed, both physically and “religiously,” beyond the reach of the authors’ effective power. Examples of this can be seen in the works of the Fifth Dalai Lama, who authored monastic guidelines for Bon and Nyingma (*rNying ma*) monasteries, and in those of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, the author of many *chayik*, mostly for monasteries in Kham and Amdo. These monasteries presumably already had monastic guidelines of their own, but it appears that issuing these texts was, to a large extent, a political act—a way to draw Eastern Tibetan monasteries, not well known for their allegiance to the Central Tibetan government, into the political and religious sphere of the Dalai Lama.

It is important to note that the existence of government-issued monastic guidelines at monasteries far removed from the political center is *not* proof of state control or even mere influence; rather, it should be understood to be proof of *an attempt* at state control and nothing more. While the political qualities of the monastic guidelines should never be overlooked and do merit further research, this book deals mostly with the practical usages of the monastic guidelines.

MONASTIC GUIDELINES AND THE VINAYA

Some see the monastic guidelines as additions to the existing Vinaya code³¹ or clarifications and abridged versions of it. Ellingson suggests, for example, that the *chayik* were (and still are) seen as necessary because certain rules in the Vinaya were believed to require clarification.³² Others view these types of work as presenting the practical message of the Vinaya in a more accessible way,³³ as the Vinaya texts themselves were often—not only conceptually, but even physically—inaccessible. In China, the canonical Vinaya was initially not translated, and the Vinaya texts were often not kept in the monasteries.³⁴ In Tibet, those who wished to conduct a formal study of monastic discipline were required to be *bhikṣus*.³⁵ Furthermore, in the monastic educational curriculum of the Geluk school, the Vinaya is a topic only studied for the last four years of the scholastic training that takes a total of at least sixteen years.³⁶ Moreover, the canonical Vinaya texts themselves are and were not studied in any of the Tibetan monastic educational systems. The main focus lay instead on Guṇaprabhā’s *Vinayasūtra* (*’Dul ba’i mdo rtsa ba*), a summary of the rules found in the Vinaya.³⁷

Thus, while the Vinaya was an integral part of the monastic curriculum, extensive knowledge of the contents was not a requirement for scholastic progress.³⁸ The number of studying monks in traditional Tibet was relatively small, so the vast majority of monks therefore *never* studied Vinayic texts in any detail; all their awareness of monastic regulations and guidance came through oral instruction and the monastic guidelines. Monastic life was thus directly regulated more by local monastic guidelines than by the Vinaya.³⁹

This makes it likely that, at least in Tibet, exactly because they usually addressed *all* monks who inhabited a monastery, the monastic guidelines were *not* mere appendices to Vinayic texts. As noted above, the *chayik* are seen as more comprehensive than secular law codes, and—perhaps in a similar way—they are believed to function as a means to uphold not just the *prātimokṣa*, but all the vows, which include more than just the Vinaya. A contemporary work on Pelyul (dPal yul) monastery formulates this thought in the following way: “Furthermore, the internal rules of the monastery are laid down as a foundation, so as to not go against the duties and prohibitions of the three: *prātimokṣa*, bodhisattva and tantra [vows], as well as the local and religious customs.”⁴⁰

Another way in which the monastic guidelines can be said to be more “inclusive” than the Vinaya is that although the monastic guidelines usually overtly address only the Sangha, they demonstrate that laypeople—both monastery employees and lay devotees—were often part of the “jurisdiction” of the monastic institution. In Tibet, for example, hunting on monastic property was forbidden, and a set of monastic guidelines by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama states that hunters caught in the act were forced to leave their weapons in the protectors’ chapel and to promise not to reoffend.⁴¹ This regulation thus addresses the behavior of those outside of the monastic community, something that does not occur in the Vinaya itself.

In the case of Tibetan monasteries, there was a need to supplement the general discipline with more specific documents that focused on “the practical aspects of daily life.”⁴² Such documents have on the whole little to do with clarifying the Vinaya or the *prātimokṣa* vows, but contain practical instructions that seek to regulate monastic life. One set of monastic guidelines, written by the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1664, notes in its opening verses that the text contains the means to “bring about liberation [that is] being disciplined (*dul ba’i rnam thar*) through establishing rules and morality.”⁴³ Here the author connects adhering to the rules with spiritual progress, and inserts a play on words: *dul ba* (S. *vinīta*), meaning control, ease, or being tame(d), is the end result of *dul ba*, the effort of taming, disciplining oneself, and the translation of the Sanskrit word *vinaya*. Even though the importance of adhering to certain rules is linked to one’s religious practice, the *chayik* are neither necessarily clarifications nor new standards, nor merely supplements to the Vinaya, but handbooks or guidelines.

According to the Pāli Vinaya, the first Buddhist Council decreed that the Sangha was not to alter Buddha’s laws.⁴⁴ The notion that the Vinaya, and in particular the monastic vows, cannot and should not be modified appears very much alive today. Many of the senior Tibetan monks I interviewed insisted that the rules for the monastery have no bearing on the rules contained in the Vinaya, because the monastic rules are flexible, whereas the Vinayic ones—which is to say, the *prātimokṣa* vows—are not.⁴⁵ It is perhaps for this reason that one can see the Vinaya rules and the monastic guidelines as existing—at least in theory—alongside each

other. As Smith notes: “Although bca’ yig have a close connection with the vinaya rules, the two are quite distinct. Monastic morality and individual conduct are the fundamental concerns of the vinaya literature, while institutional organization and the liturgical calendar are emphasized in bca’ yig.”⁴⁶

The literature that contains local or specific monastic rules is never presented as a commentary to Vinaya material. Nonetheless, the authors of these works regularly emphasize that they write in accordance with the contents of the Vinaya, and they sometimes add that certain Vinaya-like works have been consulted. One such example is the *chayik* for Pabongka hermitage, written in the early 1800s. Toward the end of this work, the author Yeshé Lopzang Tenpé Gonpo (Ye shes blo bzang bstan pa’i mgon po, 1760–1810) states:

In short, all manners of behavior that have been clarified in these monastic guidelines [have come about] by taking the *Vinayapiṭaka* as a witness. However, there were some slight differentiations that needed to be made due to the time and place here in this Land of Snow. This is not to meddle recklessly and take control of the Dharma, but it is [to follow] the early great and honorable scholar practitioners, in particular Tsongkhapa and his two main disciples.⁴⁷

Here then the Vinaya, or rather the notion of the Vinaya, is used to reaffirm the authority of the rules given in this text.

Several *chayik* cite extensively from Vinayic works, while others make no mention of them whatsoever. This may have to do with the intended audience of the *chayik*, which could have varied, as well as with the expertise of the author. One senior monk, the disciplinarian Ngawang Peljin, comments:

The monastic guidelines, generally speaking, contain rules pertaining to the relations within the monastic community. If it is relevant, then the Vinaya is quoted in these works, as a support. For example, if I were to say: “Hey, you are a monk, you should not drink alcohol,” then some monks will listen but others will simply say: “Well, why is that exactly?” I can then give a valid reason and say that this is the word of the Buddha, and give the appropriate citation. That often makes quoting useful.⁴⁸

It is not the case, however, that these monastic rulebooks were never in contradiction with rules found in the Vinaya corpus. In comparison, the contents of the Sri Lankan counterparts, the *katikāvata*, sometimes did deviate from the canonical law and even directly contradicted it.⁴⁹ It is, however, rare for this type of literature to display an awareness of the possibility of a contradiction between Vinaya and monastic rules.

To what extent then did monastic regulations silently “overrule” Vinaya rules rather than merely exist alongside them? Schopen notes that in Buddhist India this process was not even necessarily always silent: “Explicit instances of adaptation of monastic rule to local custom can be found in all vinayas.” He sees this preference for local values as a characteristic that also features in Indian *Dharmaśāstra*

materials, where the accepted principle appears to have been that “custom prevails over dharma.”⁵⁰

If this overruling of monastic rule by local custom were a regular occurrence, which set of rules held final authority? This brings us to the place of the Vinaya in Tibetan monasticism. As mentioned earlier, the Vinaya was a subject often only studied in the later years of one’s monastic curriculum. This did not mean, however, that Tibetan authors did not encourage monks to study the Vinaya. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama emphasizes the importance of studying the Vinaya along with its commentaries, for without it one would “become blind to correct behavior.”⁵¹ It is important to note that the relative lack of emphasis on the study of the Vinaya is not exclusively found in Tibetan Buddhist monasticism; it is equally a feature of the Theravāda tradition. Blackburn writes that in medieval Sri Lanka a monk who had not yet become an “elder” (*thera*) was unlikely to ever encounter the Vinaya. She argues that instead certain sūtras were used to teach monks about monastic discipline.⁵²

Not just in Tibet, but throughout the Buddhist world we find that the monasteries are institutions that were (and still are) ultimately pragmatic. The monastic guidelines are witness to this pragmatism. They show the efforts made by the authors to regulate the monastic community and to negotiate its position within society.

AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY

Monastic guidelines can have various purposes. I distinguish three subgenres among the *chayik*: (1) guidelines for multiple monasteries written by someone whose religious authority is acknowledged by those monasteries; (2) codes written for multiple or all monasteries of a particular region, encouraged or enforced by a political ruler; and (3) rulebooks for individual monasteries that contain references to specific situations and local practices. Often it will prove difficult or impossible to distinguish the first two. An example of this are the Sikkim monastic guidelines in which the author has religious as well as political authority.⁵³ However, the majority of the extant Tibetan Buddhist monastic guidelines are written for specific monasteries.

Most of the now available *chayik* have been written by famous Buddhist masters. It is likely that many monastic guidelines were, in fact, written by a group of people or by less illustrious monks, which therefore remained without signature. I suspect that the majority of these—as having no authorship equals having no prestige—have not survived the Cultural Revolution. Some of these “anonymous” *chayik* have, however, been preserved. The *Collection of Monastic Guidelines* (*bCa’ yig phyogs sgrig*) contains a *chayik* from 1903 written by the “office” (*yig tshang*) for Pelkor Chödè.⁵⁴ Another set of guidelines from 1900 suggests that the contents had been written by the higher monastic officials and the community of monks.⁵⁵

Monastic guidelines are in many ways comparable to any set of guidelines for a larger institution such as those of a university, which means that they do not necessarily need an author. The works were often compilations of new and previously existing rules and were even sometimes taken from the guidelines of other institutions. The role of the author becomes pivotal not with regard to the contents of the guidelines but to the way the guidelines were received, perceived, and implemented. Authorship often equaled authority, but at times authorship also *required* authority. A monk who acted as the disciplinarian at Sera Je (Se ra byes) in India some decades ago wrote a set of guidelines for his monastic college, but “when the rules were completed, many [monks] did not like them and for two nights, stones were pelted at my house, which is why . . . shutters had to be made. They did that twice in the night within a gap of about seven days.”⁵⁶ It appears that—not only in the past, but even today—monastic guidelines were more likely to be accepted by the monk body when they involved either consensus or religious authority, or both.

THE ACCESSIBILITY AND PRACTICAL USE OF THE MONASTIC GUIDELINES

The monastic guidelines were often inaccessible—to laypeople and to ordinary monks. Although all monks in the Kirti monastery in India have access to the *chayik*, in the Kirti monastery in Amdo, the text used to be restricted solely to the disciplinarian.⁵⁷ In Ganden, the *chayik* was kept by the disciplinarian or the monastery’s head and it was not disclosed to others.⁵⁸ In some monasteries, this is still the case. The texts are oftentimes equally inaccessible to researchers. During my fieldwork, my access to them was occasionally limited. Of the fifteen monasteries I visited, three did not make use of a specific set of guidelines. However, at seven of the monasteries the *chayik* were not public: only the disciplinarian had access to the text. In three cases, I was able to look at or photograph the texts. In the other four instances I was not allowed to see them. Although this is just a small sample, it does not appear to be a coincidence that all seven of these monasteries where the monastic guidelines were in some way restricted are Geluk.⁵⁹

Different informants gave me different reasons as to why these works are kept hidden. Rendo Senggé hypothesizes that the *chayik* at Kirti in Tibet is not public “because it concerns the monastery’s rules, the monks’ rules. It does not concern the general populace. It is also kept away because it is considered precious.”⁶⁰ In a similar vein, another informant, who would not let me copy the monastic guidelines, said that the *chayik* is not for everyone to see and that one is not meant to show it to laypeople. He justified this by saying that it is precious, or “holy,” and needs to be taken care of. Nevertheless, because the *chayik* in question had already been published in the author’s collected works, he did allow me to have a brief look at it. Other Geluk monks I asked simply claimed they did not know why they were

not public. The disciplinarian of Nechung monastery, who used to be a monk at Drepung ('Bras spungs) in Tibet, had also heard that monastic guidelines did not use to be public works. They were considered special—even holy—and were well guarded:

There was a very special work there called *The Great Monastic Guidelines* (*bCa' yig chen mo*), written by the Fifth Dalai Lama. This work could only be kept by the overarching disciplinarian. During the Great Prayer Festival these Drepung monastic guidelines would be "invited" to Lhasa. The disciplinarian would carry the text, accompanied by the disciplinarian's assistants and deputies, about twenty people in total. According to oral lore this text could fly. When transported to Lhasa, this text would not go underneath a particular stūpa close to the Potala. Instead, it would fly up, circumambulate the Potala, and land back into the disciplinarian's hands. For twenty-one days, during the festival, everyone would abide by the rules of the Great Prayer Festival.⁶¹ On the way back, the text would again fly. This is an anecdote; I have of course not seen this myself. I was told that before 1959, the original text was kept safe at the monastery and that a copy of it would be used for general purposes. All the versions of it must have been destroyed: when I became a monk at Drepung there was no *chayik* there at all.⁶²

Although none of the monk informants stated it explicitly, there seems to be a sacred—perhaps even a magical—element to the monastic guidelines.

There may be a parallel with the way the Vinaya was restricted to laypeople as well: "Vinaya texts were not meant for public consumption, but were strictly—very strictly—in-house documents."⁶³ A similar notion also seems to have been upheld in Sri Lanka, where the local monastic rules stipulate that the disputes settled within the monastery should not be made known to outsiders, and that members of one monastery should not meddle in the disputes of other monasteries.⁶⁴

It should be noted that the Geluk school seems to be the exception here, not the rule. As far as I am aware, none of the other schools impose explicit restrictions on access to the monastic guidelines. The Nyingma monastery Pelyul in Kham has its rules posted above the entrance to the assembly hall. All monks were meant to memorize this *chayik* for the assembly hall, which is written in verse. It is recited at all assemblies.⁶⁵ Hemis monastery, affiliated with the Drukpa Kagyü school ('*Brug pa bka' brgyud*) in Ladakh, also has a (more recent) *chayik* above the entrance of the assembly hall. One of my informants reported hearing that many monastic guidelines in Tibet used to be written on the walls of the assembly hall. Because all monks had to go there regularly, they would be reminded of the rules.⁶⁶

Most monasteries had, whether publicly accessible or not, one or more *chayik*. The mere presence of guidelines, however, does not mean that they were followed to the letter. For example, Lobzang Döndrup of Spituk monastery told me that only when things go wrong does the disciplinarian consult the text and use it to clarify the rules of the monastery. This relatively small Ladakhi monastery does not, however, hold a ceremonial reading from the monastic guidelines.⁶⁷ Sometimes the

opposite is true and then the *chayik* has a purely ceremonial purpose, even though its contents are viewed as unusable. This is the case in Tsechok Ling (Tshe mchog gling), India, where an eighteenth-century *chayik* is read aloud, but only during ceremonies. Practical rules have been added for the day-to-day management of the monastery.⁶⁸ Generally speaking, it is likely that the rules were only consulted in unusual situations, or when there was a need to support a decision with a (religious) textual authority. However, again, this appears to be more common in the Geluk monasteries than in the others.

Some parallels to this use of rules as mere tokens of authority can be found in the treatment of secular law in Tibet. According to Schuh, despite the fact that there were formal secular laws in place, so far there is little evidence that they were ever applied in practice.⁶⁹ Pirie writes that the legal code in its written form had a symbolic function and that it was only used to support the authority of the person charged with mediating two parties, not for its contents.⁷⁰ The notion of a written work that has as its main function the empowerment of the authority that has access to the work seems a pervasive one in Tibetan (and more generally, Buddhist) culture. Various sources show that the *chayik* was used as a tool to lend authority to figures in some kind of official position, in most cases that of the disciplinarian.

Gutschow writes that every year at the Geluk Karsha monastery in Zangskar a new disciplinarian is appointed. The accompanying ceremony is held on the twenty-fifth of the tenth month: the day on which the death of Tsongkhapa is commemorated (*dGa' ldan lnga mchod*). The new disciplinarian arrives at the monastery riding a horse, and is welcomed “like a new bride”—he is presented with ceremonial scarves (*kha btags*) and receives a variety of gifts. He then reads out the monastic guidelines to the congregation.⁷¹ It is likely that this has been a public event, open to monks and laypeople alike. Excerpts of a *chayik* for Amdo's Labrang (Bla brang) monastery written by the second Jamyang Zhépa ('Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, 1728–1791) were indeed read out publicly to laypeople and monks alike. Nietupski presumes that its function was “a formal recognition of authority.”⁷²

This analysis is possibly incomplete. Assuming that reading parts of the monastic guidelines aloud to an audience of laypeople, as well as monks, was indeed intentional, I believe that it served, naturally, to set a standard for the monks to live by, but also that it gave laypeople an idea of how monks were meant to live. This, in turn, would presumably inspire admiration for the monks' adherence to the rules. This admiration, paired with the general concept that donations given to worthy receivers generate more merit, would strengthen the existing religious and economic relations between monks and laypeople. In other words, making the monastery's rules known to the lay community would increase social cohesion and control. This is because laypeople perceive themselves to have a stake in the correct behavior of the monks they support—rituals and the like are believed

to be less effective when performed by monks with poor ethical discipline, and the amount of merit gained by making a donation is dependent on the religious standing of the receiver.⁷³ The reputation of the monks among the lay community is immensely important and this is corroborated by many of the monastic guidelines. In fact, it is perhaps *the* most common line of reasoning for encouraging or discouraging certain types of behavior among monks.⁷⁴

As previously mentioned, in some monasteries the *chayik* were (and are) public; in others the monastic guidelines were only ever consulted by the disciplinarians and abbots. The latter appears to be a Geluk approach, while several Geluk institutions had their *chayik* read out in public. This does not mean that all people in effect understood what was read out or that they had hands-on access to the actual texts. Although there is no direct evidence to support this hypothesis, as the traditional ways in which the individual monastic guidelines were employed are in many cases unknown or altogether lost, I suspect that the contents of the *chayik* differ according to whether they were intended to be for public or private use. Some works explicitly state that the intended audience are the monk officials,⁷⁵ whereas others are less explicit in this regard.

Close reading of the texts is a way to infer their intended audience: the voice of a *chayik* can show the extent of its “insiders’ language.” This also complicates the understanding of the contents of the monastic guidelines at certain points—they frequently make reference to things and situations only known by monks of that monastery at that particular time. It does allow us to get an idea of the intended audience of specific monastic guidelines. For example, when a *chayik* contains many more technical terms derived from the Vinaya, it seems likely that it was meant for a *specialist* audience, such as the disciplinarian, abbot, or other monastic official. When such terms are largely absent, then the text probably was directed to the general populace of monks. Certain turns of phrases in the works point to the performatory use of some *chayik*: some of these monastic guidelines most certainly were written to be read aloud. One of these, the early twentieth-century *chayik* for Pelyul Darthang (dPal yul dar thang) monastery in Golog (mGo log), Amdo, actually states that it needed to be recited monthly.⁷⁶

THE ORALITY OF THE MONASTIC GUIDELINES

Some of the longer *chayik* contain a long introduction consisting of the history of Tibet, Buddhism in Tibet, and the monastery in particular. This way of relating history is a common feature of Tibetan oral literature, prevalent in monastic as well as in nonmonastic contexts.⁷⁷ Again, this may be another indication of the performative function of the text.

Cabezón, in describing the monastic guidelines of Sera Je monastery, mentions that the text called *The Great Exhortation* (*Tshogs gtam chen mo*) is the transcription

of an oral text written down only in 1991.⁷⁸ It clearly directly addresses the audience.⁷⁹ The text is traditionally read aloud once a year to the assembly of monks at the start of the “summer doctrinal session” by the disciplinarian.⁸⁰ It is not generally available to the monks.⁸¹ Even though the monastic guidelines are now written down, when *The Great Exhortation* is performed, the disciplinarian is still at liberty to add certain things, such as proverbs. Certain monks who have misbehaved particularly badly may even be named and shamed at such an occasion.⁸² Cech notes that the Bon *chayik* for Menri (sMan ri) monastery was to be read out once a year by the steward (*gnyer pa*), but does not provide any details on its general availability.⁸³

Reading aloud the monastic guidelines was a regular occurrence, but not in all monasteries. In Kirti monastery in Tibet the *chayik* is still read out every year by the disciplinarian. Rendo Senggé describes it as a pleasant occasion: someone holds out the scroll and it is slowly unrolled as the disciplinarian reads. Its recitation does not sound like ordinary prayers or reciting other texts, since there is a specific “melody” (*dbyangs*) to it. In general, Kirti monastery has eight doctrinal sessions (*chos thog*), two for each season of the year. The *chayik* is read during one of those sessions but my informant could not remember which one. At that time, all the monks come together, but no laypeople are present. The disciplinarian reads out the *chayik* and explains the commentary (*’grel pa*) to it. If he is well educated then he also adds his own citations, which are usually from the Vinaya.⁸⁴ Thus, even in the case where the monastic guidelines are read out in public in a ritual context, they can be adapted as well as explained.

Again, it appears that the performatory aspect of the *chayik* is much stronger in the Geluk school than elsewhere. However, there is no uniformity among the Geluk monasteries when, by whom, and how often the text is “performed.” In Gyütö (rGyud stod) monastery in India it is recited on average once every three years, on an auspicious date by the head chant master (*bla ma dbu mdzad*).⁸⁵ In other monasteries it is recited only when the conduct of the monks is found wanting.

The Tibetan monastic guidelines do not tend to be concerned with the minute details of the life of a monastic inmate. Instead they largely deal with the upkeep of an institution, the organization of the monks, and the monastery’s reputation among patrons and direct neighbors. This is quite unlike the monastic regulations found in China and Japan, in which all mundane daily tasks are painstakingly prescribed. How then did Tibetan monks learn the proper way to conduct themselves, and to understand what was expected of them? From the interviews I have conducted, it has become clear that much of the information a new monk needed to know was passed on orally. A young monk would be assigned a “teacher,”⁸⁶ who would be responsible for the monk’s well-being but also ultimately for his financial situation.⁸⁷ It appears then that the day-to-day activities of ordinary monks were

fairly strictly regulated, despite the fact that detailed descriptions of these activities did not tend to get written down. Geshe Lhundup Sopa notes that everyday matters would be solved by the relevant administrators according to an oral tradition of rules.⁸⁸ The monastic guidelines then seem, in one way or the other, to be connected both to rules that had previously just been communicated orally and to “edicts” promulgated by kings or high lamas. A set of monastic guidelines written some time around 1800 by Yeshé Lopzang Tenpé Gonpo in fact states that previously rules for the community of monks at the Pabongka hermitage had solely been communicated orally and that this text was the first to commit these rules to writing. The author also promises to promulgate the rules clearly, possibly suggesting that the oral transmission may have caused certain misunderstandings.⁸⁹

WHAT MONASTIC GUIDELINES CAN CONVEY

The Tibetan monastery is often described as a micro-cosmos, in which the inhabitants follow their own rules, according to their own standards, without being overly concerned with externalities such as politics, economics, or even the local population. Because of the great variety of monastery types, this description is not entirely accurate. We are aware that there were many monasteries that did have a great deal of independence and were largely self-governing bodies that had economic, political, and judicial power within their respective domains. The monastic guidelines are unique in that they can inform us about the makeup of the monastery, its internal hierarchy, and the (perceived) roles, rights, duties, and obligations of the monks within the institution.

The modern Tibetan work *Monasteries of Tibet (Bod kyi dgon sde)* states that monastic guidelines were consulted to decide on legal matters (*gyod don*) by the disciplinarian.⁹⁰ To a certain extent, these types of documents were works that could be consulted and possibly cited as justification for their rulings, by those tasked with maintaining the discipline in the monastery. Both jural issues of an internal nature, such as monks’ behavior, and of an external nature, such the behavior of laypeople on monastery grounds, feature in these texts.

It is clear that in some cases laypeople were directly affected (and restricted) by the rules laid out in the monastic guidelines, and it is probable that they would have been made aware of their contents. This communication would likely have been oral. It is not probable that written guidelines for laypeople who moved within monastic grounds were expressly composed, although this possibility cannot be dismissed entirely. It is possible that a headman whose village was part of a monastic estate would make sure that his villagers knew the rules of the land. Furthermore, one can assume that, because monasteries in many areas had considerable power, the way that monks behaved had an influence on the inhabitants of those areas.

The mere fact that in particular situations it was deemed necessary to formulate rules tells us something about the interaction between monks and laypeople. These rules and regulations thus shed light on the value that certain people attached to specific societal phenomena. The monastic guidelines contain references, albeit unsystematic and casual ones, to the monks' perceptions of society and their role within it.

Previously I have alluded to how the contents of monastic guidelines may vary greatly from one text to another. Some explicitly contain references to things that have actually happened, while other monastic guidelines are concerned with specific organizational matters. A *chayik* for a Mongolian Geluk monastery, for instance, deals merely with the setup of formalized debating sessions at certain periods in the summer. It speaks of the times at which the debates are to take place, between which classes, and so on. It even comments on what the correct answers to give during a debate are. Such a *chayik* is thus limited to one very specific aspect of monastic organization and is of little use to us here.⁹¹

Other *chayik* give instructions that are more "spiritually" than practically oriented. *The Eighty Prohibitions* (*bCa' yig mi chog brgyad cu*) is a case in point. Written in 1918 by the head of Pelyul monastery in Kham, it contains, as the title suggests, eighty "prohibitions" written for the monks of Pelyul. Some of these are common in other sets of monastic guidelines and may be interpreted as having some direct practical purpose. Prohibition number fourteen, for example, states that one is not allowed to wear sleeves and laypeople's attire, as "one's robes are the base for the Vinaya."⁹² Other prohibitions are clearly less easy to obey, for this *chayik* regularly forbids certain mental activity, such as the last two prohibitions of the text: "It is not allowed to ever forget the instructions of one's guru, [be it during] birth, death, or the intermediate state. It is not allowed to forget the instructions for dying at the time of death."⁹³

Clearly then, not all *chayik* were contemporary reactions to the situation of the monastery on the ground. *The Eighty Prohibitions* for Pelyul monks should thus be seen as guidelines of a more spiritual nature. They are instructive when one is concerned with the conduct of the "ideal monk." For the current purpose, however, these rules are hardly relevant. It is important to appreciate that there are several reasons for listing rules in the Buddhist context. With regard to Indian monastic Buddhism, Silk has noted that "it is one of the conceits of the literature of the Buddhist monastic codes, the Vinayas, that they record case law."⁹⁴ Likewise, in the Tibetan case we need to be careful not to reify the stipulations that appear in the monastic guidelines. For just as in the case of the Indic Vinaya, in which the "world of monastic law does not appear to be a simple one of fables and fiction or half remembered 'historical' accounts, but a complex one of carefully constructed 'cases' in which concerns of power, access and economics were being or had been negotiated,"⁹⁵ the Tibetan monastic guidelines cannot simply be read as reactions to problems.

At the risk of stating the obvious, I here identify some possible motivations for writing these texts, which may help to better distinguish different types of rules: (1) to formally address actual problems and misconduct; (2) to settle organizational matters; (3) to exhaust all possible similar occurrences; (4) to give spiritual guidance. In other words, monastic rules can be firmly based on reality or on hypothetical situations, or on a combination of both. In my treatment of the *chayik* and their suitability as a source of information with respect to the societal place of Tibetan monasteries, I distinguish those texts and sections of texts that are clearly rooted in on-the-ground realities from those that mainly sketch an ideal image of the monk and the monastery. Nonetheless, separating utopian rules from real ones is not always easily achieved. It is also not always necessary, in particular, when it is the goal to examine monastic *attitudes* toward society as a whole, because in that case visions of an ideal society are just as relevant as the tackling of actual problems in the monastery.

When one takes a closer look at the monastic guidelines as a genre, the underlying reasons for which authors may have had to write a text can be summarized as follows:

1. The monastery had just been established;
2. A new building or department had been built at the monastery;
3. The monastery had been taken over by another religious school;
4. The monastery had sided with a losing political party and the winning party saw the need to reform it;
5. A change in the numbers of monks had occurred (significant increase or decrease);
6. The monastery had started a new curriculum;
7. A powerful religious (and political) figure sought to establish (strategic and moral) authority over the monastery in question;
8. Misconduct of the monks had been reported;
9. The monks' ritual practices had become "adulterated";
10. The existing regulations were seen to have become archaic, irrelevant, redundant, or deficient;
11. The economic situation of the monastery had changed.

Ortner notes that when a particular nunnery was newly founded, Lama Gulu of Tengpoche (sTeng po che) monastery was asked to write a *chayik* "to construct the temple for the nunnery."⁹⁶ With this document the nuns went from village to village to raise funds to actually build the place. The building was begun in 1925 and completed in 1928. If the composition of a *chayik* before the institution was actually set up was something that occurred more regularly elsewhere, this adds another possible purpose to the monastic guidelines, namely as an official document through which one could raise funds to build or rebuild a religious institution.

In order to understand which rulings are reactions to current situations or problems faced by the institution, it is helpful to read several *chayik* written for the same monastery. Unfortunately, in most cases, we do not have more than one *chayik*. When analyzing a *chayik*, in particular when one is looking for rulings that directly address on-the-ground issues, one needs—in addition to being aware of the possibility that certain rules and phrases were derived from Vinayic texts—to be conscious of the fact that certain rules and expressions are reiterations of (and in a sense tributes to) monastic guidelines that were written by the author's predecessors. The close reading of *chayik* composed for one monastery at different times reveals a certain level of (textual) continuity but also the changes undergone by a monastic community. These changes are highlighted by new rulings and remarks on the contemporary status of the monastery.

Generally speaking, it is safe to say that the vast majority of extant monastic guidelines do address contemporary monastic issues in a pragmatic manner. The texts themselves often explicitly state their local and contemporary purpose. An example is the *chayik* written in 1909 for all Sikkimese monasteries, which states that it is a work “in accordance with all the monasteries’ own rules, the local customs, [people’s] dispositions, capacities, and intentions.”⁹⁷ What we then can see is that when structural changes took place in a particular monastery (e.g., it changed affiliation or it had been rebuilt after it had been destroyed), the *chayik* of that monastery was seen to be in need of revision or replacement. This is not unlike the notion prevalent among the authors of the *katikāvatas*: some of these Sri Lankan monastic codes state that they were renewed in accordance with the changing times.⁹⁸

The contemporary nature of most of these works means that they can provide a great deal of information with regard to monastic life and the internal hierarchy of the monastery in general. It is imperative, however, also to stress the provisional character of these works. The monastic guidelines do not claim to be the final mandate on how the monastery should be run and how monks are to conduct themselves. Many of the monastic guidelines express their temporary nature, and this is exactly why a certain monastery can have a number of *chayik* written for it: the later harking back to, but also “overwriting,” the earlier ones. Needless to say, the contents of the *chayik* are prescriptive and normative, and it would be naïve to assume that rules in the monastery were followed to the letter. Nonetheless, when one wants to study how the monastic institution and its role in society was conceived, the *chayik* are certainly valuable sources. In the context of the pre-modern Tibetan society, it appears that the point where “philosophy touches social policy”⁹⁹ can be found in the monastic guidelines.