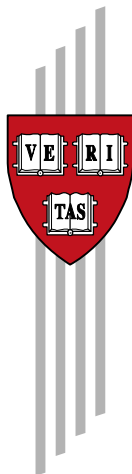


# **The Formation of the Tibetan State Religion: The Geluk School 1419-1642**

Rachel M. McCleary and Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp

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### **Abstract**

Monopolistic competition of Tibetan Buddhism by the eleventh-twelfth century allowed for many schools and sects to develop with little differentiation in religious products. The rise of the Ming dynasty (1368-1424) represented a significant shift in Yuan foreign policy toward Tibetan affairs. Ming disengagement of China in Tibet translated into a liberalization of local politics with one major pattern emerging: a shift from secular politics and clan wealth to ecclesiastical monastic institutions. The Geluk sect formed during this period, successfully introducing superior technology in its organizational characteristics (celibacy, ordained abbots, casuistical adherence, scholastic training and doctrinal orthodoxy). The club model formation of the Gelukpa distinguished it from other schools and sects, reinforcing the technological superiority of its organization. With the loss of its major Tibetan patron, the Gelukpa facing extinction by its fiercest competitor, the Karmapa, raised the stakes by introducing the incarnate position of the Dalai Lama and his labrang (financial estate). The introduction of the incarnate Dalai Lama represented a technological improvement in that the Gelukpa could now directly compete for wealthy patrons with their fiercest competitor, the Karmapa. By forming an alliance with a foreign power (Mongols), the Gelukpa were willing to use extreme violence to become the state religion.

**Keywords:** economics of religion, market structure and monopolistic competition; natural monopoly in a religion market; club-theoretic model of religious groups; Tibetan Buddhism

**JEL codes:** A11, A12, D21, D40, D42, D49, D71, D74, H19, L21, L22, Z12

**THE FORMATION OF THE TIBETAN STATE RELIGION:  
THE GELUK SCHOOL 1419-1642**

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Monopolistic competition of Tibetan Buddhism by the eleventh-twelfth century allowed for many schools and sects to develop with little differentiation in religious products. The rise of the Ming dynasty (1368-1424) represented a significant shift in Yuan foreign policy toward Tibetan affairs. Ming disengagement of China in Tibet translated into a liberalization of local politics with one major pattern emerging: a shift from secular politics and clan wealth to ecclesiastical monastic institutions. The Geluk sect formed during this period, successfully introducing superior technology in its organizational characteristics (celibacy, ordained abbots, casuistical adherence, scholastic training and doctrinal orthodoxy). The club model formation of the Gelukpa distinguished it from other schools and sects, reinforcing the technological superiority of its organization. With the loss of its major Tibetan patron, the Gelukpa facing extinction by its fiercest competitor, the Karmapa, raised the stakes by introducing the incarnate position of the Dalai Lama and his *labrang* (financial estate). The introduction of the incarnate Dalai Lama represented a technological improvement in that the Gelukpa could now directly compete for wealthy patrons with their fiercest competitor, the Karmapa. By forming an alliance with a foreign power (Mongols), the Gelukpa were willing to use violence to become the state religion.

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An analysis of Tibetan Buddhism employing social science methodology is a desideratum in the field of Tibetan Studies. The field is relatively new having become an academic discipline around 40 years ago and recently burgeoned due to the discovery, collection, and preservation of original texts.<sup>1</sup> This paper is an effort to begin to fill this niche using an economics of religion approach to explain the rise of the Geluk school into a state religion.

The Geluk school was one of the last religious groups to form in Tibet, yet it rose to become the state religion around the middle of the 17th century. This study examines conditions under which, in the absence of state intervention in the religion market, a religion monopoly develops. Using a market approach to religion with historical analysis, the argument proceeds in five steps: 1) Mahayana Buddhism formed a natural monopoly in Tibet by the 11th century. 2) The “hands off” Chinese foreign policy toward Tibet under the early Ming dynasty translated into the liberalization of local politics 3) The rise of the Gelukpa and their success was due to technological innovation in the club features of their school. 4) Facing extinction at the hands of the fiercest competitor, the Karmapa, the Gelukpas imitate their rival by introducing the incarnate position of Dalai Lama and competing directly with the Karmapa incarnates for wealthy patrons. 5) As a club, the Gelukpa were willing to engage in extreme violence to overcome their fiercest competitor, the Karmapa, to become the state religion. Having won, the Geluk sect continued to be an exclusive club, and, rather than showing religious tolerance, concentrated its resources in its institutions, to some extent, imposing its organizational structure on other religious groups.

## Theory of a Religion Monopoly

Barro and McCleary (2005) construct a formal model for the choice of a state religion. In an unregulated religion market, a natural monopoly may arise. A critical element of a natural monopoly is the presence of large fixed costs, such as those applicable to the creation and dissemination of a set of religious beliefs (for example, the construction of monasteries, patronage for the performance of merit-making rituals, the commissioning of editions of sacred texts, and the authoring of biographies). Relative to these fixed costs, the marginal costs of membership and participation are likely to be small and would not tend to be increasing. Therefore, if people view alternative religions as close substitutes, a single type of religion might prevail in equilibrium. A religion monopoly succeeds when one provider makes a profit but a second one cannot gain enough adherents to compete successfully.

Adam Smith thought that minimal state intervention (“to keep the peace”) was needed to maintain an open market in which religious groups settled their theological differences through discourse and were not permitted to persecute, abuse, or oppress one another. This minimal state intervention, coupled with impartiality toward all religious groups, created an atmosphere of “good temper and moderation” (1790: 202, 207). Such an environment, Smith thought, allowed for competition, thereby fostering a plurality of religious faiths in society. Stark and Bainbridge (1996: 94-96), following Smith’s theory, argue that a religion monopoly occurs *only* when a state engages in coercive behavior on behalf of a religion. Our theory and empirical findings discussed in this paper provide a different model for the rise of a religion monopoly.

A religion monopoly tends to arise naturally when there exists a strong concentration of adherents in a particular religion (Barro and McCleary 2005). An important contribution to this concentration is the collective nature of religious beliefs and participation (Iannaccone 1992). As larger numbers of people adhere to one religion, more people are disposed toward that religion. People not only want to belong and have a shared liturgical experience but they also want to share similar beliefs, doctrines, and world views. With many people adhering to a single faith, there is a tendency to form a religion monopoly. In particular, such concentration economizes on the fixed costs of maintaining a large variety of religion types.

Stark and Bainbridge focus on a centralized state authority, which can use its legitimate powers to enforce a monopoly (state religion) on a market that would be pluralistic if it were allowed to operate without government intervention. In this paper, we argue that there can be a natural tendency toward a religion monopoly in the absence of state intervention (regulation and subsidies) in the religion market. Contrary to Stark and Bainbridge, we maintain that in the absence of a centralized state authority, a religion monopoly can be enforced through a willingness on the part of the religion to engage in extreme violence. This type of violence is important in the rise of the Geluk school to a state religion. Furthermore, our findings corroborate the club model of Berman (2003), Berman and Iannaccone (2005), and Berman and Laitin (2007). We argue that the club-like nature of religious groups explains why some groups in Tibet were organizationally capable of generating the extreme violence that led to a monopoly outcome.

## The Rise of Competition in the Tibetan Religion Market

The second Muslim invasion in northern India reached Bihar State toward the end of the 12th century resulted in the virtual destruction of such well-known institutions of Buddhist learning such as Nalanda, Odantapuri, and Vikramashila. This destruction created a diaspora of Indian Buddhist masters, with many seeking refuge in Tibet. The destruction of the large Indian monastic centers gave rise to and consolidated a geo-religious shift, with Tibet becoming the center of the Buddhist universe, the first known documented instance of which took place in the thirteenth century (Martin 1994: 532, fig. 9; van der Kuijp 2004: 54).

During the 11th and 12th centuries, this Tibetan religion market developed. The ready availability of Indian ideas initially encouraged the formation of a diversity of Buddhist schools. The monopolistic competition of Tibetan Buddhism by the thirteenth century allowed for four schools: Old (Nyingma) and the three new schools (Kadam, Kagyü, and Sakya). The market also had room for various quasi-independent sects with some differentiation in religious products (Charts A).<sup>2</sup>

The Tibetan religion market of the 1200 and 1300s was characterized by innovation, diversification, and fluidity with easy entry into a school or sect and many competitors to choose from. The various branches of Buddhism shared a common canon of texts, but disagreement occurred on the interpretation of those texts. Monks learned from various masters, incorporating aspects of distinct intellectual and meditative traditions and lineages into their own school, all of which were authenticated by various teacher-disciple lineages of transmission. By the 13th century, and apart from popular non-institutionalized religious practices, the only aspects that differentiated the four

schools and various sects were, on a practical level, their attachments to different lineages and particular tutelary divinities. Although quite flexible, serious deviations from traditional teachings and writings became heresy, and such teachings and writings were criticized and marginalized by what had become orthodoxy.

In political economy terms, we can describe the Tibetan religion market of the 12th century as monopolistically competitive. Buddhism was the dominant religion with various schools and sects competing for patrons and novices (Charts A). In this type of market, each school would “price” their religious products above marginal and average costs. The high price meant that there was a low quantity of religion services demanded but also substantial profit. This profit encouraged other religious groups to enter the religion market.

Successful entrants to the religion market were typically those that had relatively low upfront costs. New religions have initial costs (up-front expenses) that they calculate they can pay off later. These costs were especially low for Buddhist groups, which provided a form of religion that had become familiar and popular with the majority of the population. In contrast, Islam would have had high costs of entry and, therefore, did not participate significantly in the Tibetan religion market when it had slight opportunities to do so. To be sure, next to the native Bon, Islam was the closest religion competitor to Buddhism. A plausible explanation is that Buddhism had already entered Tibet during the 8th and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even before the Mongols established the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) and exclusively patronized Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan aristocracy patronized Buddhism (Chart B). Indeed, during the late 10th and throughout the 11th century, Tibetan aristocratic families were underwriting an orthodox revival of Buddhism in Tibet.

With indigenous aristocratic support, Buddhism was the major religion in Tibet and any new religion, such as Islam, would have had considerable upfront costs to mount successful competition.

### The Liberalization of Politics in Tibet

During the early Ming dynasty, the Chinese world-view articulated a garbled version of the geo-religious shift, whereby the Tibetan cultural area, not India, was the center of Buddhism (Toh 2004: 44-58). Tibet had become “India” as the religious locus of Buddhism. The early Ming rulers continued the Yuan policy of inviting religious hierarchs of the various Tibetan religious schools to court, conferring upon them honorific titles and ranks.<sup>3</sup> No longer was Tibetan Buddhism the religion of the entire imperial court. Instead, Tibetan Buddhism was primarily reserved for the emperor and his inner court.

Deregulation of the religion market in Tibet occurred along with the liberalization of politics. The Yuan dynastic title and position of Imperial Preceptor held by Sakya hierarchs was abolished, ending their privileged access to the higher echelons of the imperial court. Sakya monastery no longer served as the administrative seat for the imperial court in Tibet, and the Ming would not replace it with another.

The early Ming military policy toward Tibet, beginning with the Yongle emperor, was one of nonintervention. Certainly, during its last years, the Yuan dynasty decreased its military and political involvement in Tibetan affairs. Yongle’s noninterventionist policy toward Tibet was a combination of concentrating resources on military campaigns in Southeast Asia, staging six large-scale naval expeditions led by the eunuch Zheng He,

and overseeing the extensive fourteen-year reconstruction of the capital of Beijing (Dreyer 1982: 173-220; Farmer 1976: 98-133). Rather than militarily subduing and occupying the troublesome border areas of Qinghai and Sichuan, Yongle's policy was one of using local tribes to maintain order.

From the perspective of Tibetan political economy, two trends emerged that transformed the political and religious landscapes. Beginning sometime in the early thirteenth century, several schools and sects developed a secular office overseeing administrative and financial matters of monasteries and their landed estates. The institution of a secular administrative office most likely had come into being to manage their economic resources, including land that was being acquired from such patronage relationships as could ensue with, for example, landed Tibetan aristocratic families and various Mongol rulers and princes of the blood. The accrual over time of monastic land holdings along with hereditary tenant families, the control of major roads that were trade routes, and the monopolization of trade by monasteries required administrative management. The increasing concentration of land and economic wealth in the monasteries gave rise to conflicts, often violent, among these institutions. The abbatial seat, held by a lay person or monk, and the secular office remained distinct and were usually kept separate. Hereditary conflicts arose when male successors were not available or several contested for the same position. When there was a dearth of male heirs, a lay abbot might hold both the ecclesiastical and secular offices so as to be free to marry and propagate the family lineage. Another option would be that a cousin or half-brother assumed the secular office.

The other trend that emerged was the disintegration of the political unity among the autonomous units. The thirteen myriarchies into which Central Tibet was divided during most of the period of direct or indirect Mongol rule, from 1240 to the early 1350s, were by and large religious aristocracies with monasteries at their centers. With the demise of Mongol control over Central Tibet (and that of its proxy), the myriarchical structure became politically irrelevant, leaving basically but a handful of main aristocratic families and their allies in its wake. They formed what amounted to an administrative civil-military system of families that, being nominally affiliated with the Phagmodru rule (1302-1493), politically and economically replaced the earlier system of myriarchies. The Phagmodru were so-called after their home-monastery by the same name. This Kagyüpa monastery and its estates were controlled by the ancient Lang family.

Families who administratively served the Phagmodru soon became themselves increasingly wealthy and militarily powerful, challenging the authority of the Phagmodru hierarchs. By the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the two trends weave themselves into one main pattern: the shift of secular politics and wealth into the ecclesiastical, monastic schools.

From these two trends came a cycle of the earlier myriarch families weakening and splintering due to internal conflicts. The families thereby became vulnerable to the rise of new aristocracies out of the administrative families that were allied with the Phagmodru. We have two examples of such families who played key administrative roles, the Zina and Rinpung. These not only intermarried with the Phagmodru but also successfully challenged their authority, one temporarily and the other more decisively.<sup>4</sup>

Integral to the rise of a new aristocracy was an affiliation with a school or sect, a connection that usually meant abandoning the sect (though not necessarily the school) of one's hegemonic clan.<sup>5</sup> As the old myriarch political system fell apart, the religion market became more fluid as some religious institutions began to break loose from their family affiliations. Thus, we now begin to witness a greater fragmentation of the almost monolithic structure of many schools, foremost of which is Sakyapa. The fragmentation began with the political and religious conflicts and subsequent schisms within the ruling families of Sakya monastery, the ancient Kön family. One of the first consequences of these internal schisms was, it can be argued, the formation of the Jonang sect (Seyfort Ruegg 1963:75-76). These conflicts and the ensuing fluidity in the religion market also made possible the rise of the Bodong sect and, indeed, the Geluk school. For the next two hundred years, Tibetan politics would be characterized by succession conflicts, inter-family wars, and the increasing concentration of wealth and authority in the schools and sects.

### The Context for the Rise of the Geluk School

During the period that the Geluk school was forming in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the religion monopolistic market was characterized by political liberalization. Its soon-to-be rival, the Karma Kagyü sect had by this time developed into a major Buddhist organization. Since it appears that the majority of sects were teaching the same religious doctrine, the only aspects differentiating them was their attachments to different lines of teachers and particular tutelary divinities, the potential for new religious groups to enter with a distinct product was great. It is unfortunate that we do not have data on how

extensively individuals switched from one sect to another and how many monks were affiliated with each sect and their levels of participation. These data would have given us a better picture as to whether the sects were providing for a variety of religious products.

Tsongkapa (1357 – 1419), the founder of the Geluk school, established himself as a charismatic teacher attracting adherents as well as the attention of the Phagmodru ruling family, which began patronizing him.<sup>6</sup> At that time, the Phagmodru, who, with their allies, were in full control of Central Tibet, were patrons of hierarchs of various sects of the Kagyü school, including the Karmapa. With the Phagmodru patronizing a number of non-hierarchs, a separation begins to take place between religion and family/clan politics. More generally, we see a tendency in hierarchs and their schools toward transitioning themselves into identities independent of the family/clan structure.

The relationship between the Phagmodru ruler and Tsongkapa continued as his popularity grew. In 1409, Tsongkapa, with the patronage of the Phagmodru ruler and his governor Ne'u Namkha Zangpo, who governed the area in and around Lhasa, participated in the *Monlam chenmo* festival in Lhasa. The *Monlam chenmo* festival would, over the years, attract a large number of participants and observers.<sup>7</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, we can perhaps discern that participating in the festival was part of a complex series of acts that furthered Tsongkapa's legitimacy in and around the religious market with Lhasa as its center. The *Monlam chenmo* also created an opportunity for patronage from Mongol tribes and nomads living to the north of Lhasa and the local landed aristocracy.

During that same year, 1409, the construction of the first of the three major Geluk monasteries, Ganden, began with the patronage of the governor of an adjacent administrative center. For many centuries, the Tibetans had recognized Lhasa not only as

a thriving trading center (Beckwith 1977; Clarke 2004: 39-40) but also as an important religious center with the oldest two temples. With the exception of the Kadam school, already on the wane in the 14th century, no other school or sect had existing monasteries so close to Lhasa and in such density.

The patronage of the governor encouraged or obliged other noble families to endow lands to the second Geluk monastery, Drepung (1415) and to send their sons to the monastery for religious training. In the absence of archival material, we can only speculate that other nobility and the rising merchant families in Central Tibet were endowing the monastery with land as well. Tsongkapa's small but thriving group was also patronized by the Yongle Emperor. Funds from the emperor as well as Ne'u Namkha zangpo were used to establish Sera monastery in 1419. During Tsongkapa's life, a formal monastic organization was beginning that would transform into what became known as the Geluk school. This monastic organization was primarily cenobitic with eremitic practices incorporated into its structure.

The construction of the first Geluk monasteries—Ganden (1409), Drepung (1415), and Sera (1419)—occurred after the other religious schools and sects were well established.<sup>8</sup> Competition for resources in terms of patrons, land, and adherents must have been strong. By locating monasteries in geographic proximity to Lhasa, the Geluk monasteries were strategically positioned to gain aristocratic patrons and resources. Another significant fact is that Phagmodru ruler outlived Tsongkapa by thirteen years. The Phagmodru ruler and his associates did not patronize the fledgling Gelukpa to the exclusion of other Buddhist schools, but it is safe to say that his largesse was mainly focused on the former. He continued his patronage of Tsongkapa's disciples, several of

whom had become the Phagmodru teachers. One activity the Phagmodru funded was the xylographic printing for some of Tsongkapa's writings. This and other funded activities assured the continued growth of the Geluk school after the death of its founder.

### Formation of the Geluk School

The Geluk school, which arose in the early 1400s, was one of the last forms of Buddhism to enter the Tibetan religion market. The Geluks sought to capitalize on the profits (patrons and adherents) that other religious schools and sects were enjoying (a more detailed explanation follows). To acquire patrons and adherents, the Geluk school had to differentiate its religion product from existing ones, while nevertheless remaining within the popular and familiar framework of Mahayana Buddhism. Existing schools and sects sought to deter the Geluk school from succeeding; that is, from taking away their patrons and adherents.

Tsongkapa and his disciples were monks trained in the Sakya school. Although he was aware that his writings were going to be controversial there is no evidence for holding that he interpreted his monastic and scholarly innovations as a schism from the Sakya school.<sup>9</sup> The religious context in the early fifteenth century, in which Tsongkapa lived, was fluid. Even though there were three main schools, each with various sub-sects, the 15th century Tibetan religion market is best described as homogeneous. Scholars such as Tsongkapa were initially itinerants studying with teachers in monasteries affiliated with various schools, sects, and lineages.<sup>10</sup> Sectarian orthodoxy began to appear with the increasing growth of monasteries in terms of patrons, wealth accumulation, and members.

Tsongkapa sought to retain what he considered to be an orthodox version of Buddhism.<sup>11</sup> He stressed intellectual rigor in religious scholarship in the tradition of the Kadampa and Sakyapa. Tsongkapa's reinterpretation of Indian sources from the first decade of the 15th century until his passing was done with the intent of retaining what was, in his view, the original Indian meaning. Although all Tibetan schools accept Nāgārjuna's formulation of the Madhyamaka, Tsongkapa's interpretation of Madhyamaka became a fully articulated system and, for the Gelukpa, the only one within this school's monasteries to capture fully the meaning of Nāgārjuna's philosophy. Tsongkapa's work became the doctrinal foundation of the Geluk school.

About twenty years after Tsongkapa's death, one of his disciples, Kedrup Geleg palzang po (1385-1438), sought to create doctrinal orthodoxy whereby dissent from what he and his colleagues considered to be Tsongkapa's opinions was not tolerated. Gyeltsab Darma rinchen (1364–1432) was chosen by his peers to succeed Tsongkapa as second abbot of Ganden monastery and Kedrup, primarily a student of Gyeltsab, became the third abbot of Ganden monastery after Gyeltsab had served a mere six years (1432-1438).

It fell to Kedrup to attempt to create a doctrinal orthodoxy, which is a hallmark (branding) of the Gelukpa school. Unlike other schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Geluk school required a level of orthodoxy and adherence to Tsongkapa's views on exoteric and esoteric Buddhism that was unprecedented in the history of Buddhism in Tibet. This orthodoxy was made possible, in part, by the adoption of a response to the increasing criticisms from the Sakyapa scholars who challenged the legitimacy of Tsongkapa's views, many of which had been formulated under the influence of a series of visions to

which he had been privy. For Tsongkapa and his followers the visions were of Manjurshree; for his opponents, they were of an evil demon.

To be sure, the demise of the Yuan dynasty meant the loss of a significant patron for the Sakyapa and their prominent position in Tibetan politics. Whereas Kedrup and the rising Geluk monasteries—Ganden, Sera, Drepung—were patronized by the Phagmodru, the financial collapse of Sakyapa and the rise of the Gelukpa represented not only a political-economic shift but a geographic one as well from Tsang, where the Sakyapa had their locus, to Ü, where the three Gelukpa monasteries were situated.

Internally, the Sakyapa were weakened by kinship rivalry for power (Petech 1990: 81-82). With a lack of capable leadership, both in its religious and political structures, the Sakyapa could no longer exert intellectual or political control over Kedrup and his immediate disciples. Kedrup and the Gandenpas (as they were called) successfully differentiated themselves from the Sakyapa and created a new school.

### Club Model Characteristics of the Geluk School

Several organizational aspects of the Geluk school differentiated it from the other religious schools and sects. These characteristics introduced technological innovation into the Tibetan religion market and monastic system.<sup>12</sup> The characteristics reinforced each other to strengthen the Geluk school: (1) ordained abbots, never lay abbots; (2) an emphasis on monastic discipline, casuistical (vinaya) adherence, and scholastic training; and (3) mass monasticism created a competitive advantage in an already crowded and competitive religious market. The primary advantage of these structural features combined is that the Geluk school focused on religious goods, minimizing its

organizational involvement in clan politics, particularly conflicts over hereditary leadership.

Unlike the other religious schools, the Gelukpa adhered strictly to the practice of ecclesiastical abbots (no lay abbots). This institutional feature did not prohibit clan affiliation of an abbot from playing out in the administration of a monastery. However, institutionally the degree of intermingling of secular clan interests with ecclesiastical ones, as found in the other schools, was not the situation in Gelukpa monasteries. It does not appear that abbatial seats of Gelukpa monasteries were directly controlled by clan politics. In contrast, in the other schools, the abbatial seat and secular head could be held by the same person, as occurred three times with the Phagmodru. The consequence of this organizational structure was that clan politics and succession conflicts were inherent to monastic life and politics. In contrast, the Gelukpa institutional feature of ecclesiastical abbot tended to reinforce an institutional focus on religious activities and the development of the monastic community.

The practice of cenobitic mass monasticism by the schools and sects permitted their growth to become more inclusive. Certainly Gelukpa monasteries grew to be very inclusive once Gelukpa religious practice became the religion monopoly as well as the state bureaucracy, with the state sanctioned policy of mass monasticism. At the time the Geluk school was growing, there were many other well-established schools competing for adherents. In theory, all the schools were practicing mass monasticism. That is, they were accepting any male child admitted to the monastery, except in a few cases. These practices made competition strong for novices.<sup>13</sup> The Gelukpa school required its monks, eventually including the Dalai Lama, to belong to a monastery and participate in daily

communal activities. Monastic life was a form of community with collective religious activities performed in the great hall at least once a day and twice daily during festivals. Communal enforcement restricted outside activities that were not in conformity with the sect's practices. Similar to other sects, the Gelukpa monks maintained kinship ties especially if they were scholars who could not work and therefore relied on their families for substantial support (Tsybikov 1952-3: 151).

Unlike European medieval monastic organizations, the Tibetan monastic system retained kinship as the basic unit of social organization in Tibet. Sons were placed in a neighboring monastery so that family ties were maintained. Although celibate like European monks, Tibetan monks visited their families and their families came to the monastery to visit their sons. Families of nobility purchased rooms for their sons at the local monasteries and underwrote their expenses. Monks of peasant families returned home during harvest season to work in the fields (Tsybikov 1952-3: 151).

Celibacy was a high cost not only for each male who joined the monastery but for society in terms of economic productivity and reproduction. This sacrifice was offset by the social prestige and salvific merit earned by parents for having a son as a monk. The family further reinforced the monastic system by disinheriting the son who became a monk (Goldstein and Tsarong 1985: 16). By entering the monastery as pre-pubescent boys (between the ages of 7 and 12), celibacy provided credibility that the religious product was genuine. The monks were engaged in religious activities rather than distracted by worldly ones. Celibacy also ensured that the wealth of the school remained within the school. When the Gelukpa school adopted the idea of reincarnating hierarchs,

the combination of celibacy and reincarnation were mutually reinforcing, concentrating wealth in an incarnate's office (*labrang* or financial estate).

Applying the club model, we can see that by not requiring an optimal monastery size but rather permitting the maximum number of monks, the majority of monks became religiously lax in their participation, though not necessarily in their religious beliefs. The Gelukpa monastic system may have encouraged this laxness by having low selective criteria for novices (if any), by not making a significant financial commitment to the novices and monks, and only punishing the worst offenses (homicide, larceny, and heterosexual sex) (Goldstein 1998: 19). Monks received tea and food at the communal prayer assemblies and from the different monastic colleges within the monastery (Murphy 1961: 440; Goldstein 1989: 34). Monks also received a share of the funds donated to the monastery. The majority of monks were an economic asset to the monastery in that they provided an inexpensive form of labor.

The result of mass monasticism was a two-tiered class of monks. The smaller group comprised monks who pursued academic training (*pechawa*). The larger group consisted of monks (*tramang* or *tragyü*) who did not engage in scholarly study but rather assumed practical tasks (cooks, financial officers, security force) within the monastic community.<sup>14</sup> The scholar monks received a small stipend from their seminary and financial support from their families. As their reputations grew in the seminary, the monastery, and later as itinerants engaged in public debates, they received gifts and acquired patrons. All monks were taught basic reading (not writing) as part of their religious obligations to recite prayers. Monks participated in general assemblies in the

morning and evening, where prayers were recited. Only a select group of monks were trained in tantric rituals.

Monastic house codes (*cayig*) could stipulate sets of rules that regulated the life of monks living in a community. Just as the *Regula Magistri* (ca. 480) and the *Regula Benedictine* (ca. 530-560) provided for the institutional structure and discipline of European monastic life (regulating the spiritual and practical life of a cenobitic community), so, too, Tibetan monasteries had their constitutions. Similarly, monastic constitutions proliferated during early Medieval Europe as in Tibet from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward. However, in Europe the monastic constitutions, although many and diverse, originated in a common root culture that created homogeneity in monastic organization. This was not the situation in Tibet until the Geluk school in the seventeenth century became the state religion and may have imposed its monastic organizational characteristics on the other schools. In addition, in Europe a shift from a gift to a profit economy occurred in the early Middle Ages, coming into maturation with the Cistercian order in the twelfth century.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the Tibetan economy remained an agrarian, feudal one, based on gift exchange (accompanied by merit making) with commercial activity mainly taking place in the form of bartering. The consequence of this system was factionalism and constant warfare over landed estates.

The imposition of Gelukpa doctrinal orthodoxy might have been made possible, in part, by the adoption of xylographic printing by Tsongkapa and his disciples. Xylographic printing began in China in the eighth century, and it quickly spread with Buddhism as its vehicle to Korea and Japan in the eighth century and Vietnam in the eleventh century. (Needham 1985: 322, 336-7, 350). The earliest notice of Tibetan

xylographic texts date from the first decade of the 13th century; the earliest available xylograph derives from blocks carved in 1284. During Tsongkapa's life, the early Ming dynasty continued printing activity much as it had under the Yuan with two printing centers employing 107 families (Needham 1985: 172). These printings were for merit-making, not for reading (a similar situation to the Phagmodu ruler funding the xylographic printing of Tsongkapa's writings.) Xylographic printing had an advantage over calligraphy in that a standard text could be mass produced and distributed to monastic communities. In this sense, xylographic printing could have played a role in the establishment of Gelukpa orthodoxy.<sup>16</sup> Lacking archival evidence, we can only hypothesize that Kedrup, as abbot of Ganden, exercised the religious and political authority to ensure the proliferation of Tsongkapa's writings while banning the printing of the writings of other disciples of Tsongkapa. Kedrup's successors (part of his transmission lineage) would continue the work of consolidating the Gelukpa "canon" by censoring the works of other Gelukpa scholars.

The manuals (*yig cha*) for the three major monasteries—Ganden, Drepung, and Sera—were being written at the same time as the disciples of Tsongkapa were consolidating the orthodoxy of the school (Dreyfus 2003: 124-5; 143; 282). These monastic manuals are compilations of the Gelukpa's scholasticism from the particular intellectual perspective of the monastery. To consolidate the curriculum, certain texts from other schools were banned from the Gelukpa monasteries. Further doctrinal unification of the Geluk school occurred with the revising of the monastic manuals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In summary, those structural features unique to the Geluk school—ordained abbots, an emphasis on monastic discipline (celibacy), casuistical (vinaya) adherence, scholastic training, and doctrinal orthodoxy were an organizational technological innovation, creating a competitive advantage in an already crowded and competitive religious market. The uniformity of doctrinal orthodoxy, to the degree that no deviation was allowed, might have been possible due the adaptation of xylographic printing, another technological innovation used by the Gelukpas.

### Competition and Consolidation to State Religion

In 1432, an internal succession struggle with the Phagmodru began. At this time, Phagmodru were the established hegemony in Central Tibet. However, the family had intermarried with several landed families that held high positions in their governance of Central Tibet, among them the Rinping family, who now sought political control. Two changes in social and economic structures allowed for the rise of new families such as the Rinping. First, the practice of family allegiance to one school had been weakened by the Phagmodru, who patronized hierarchs of several schools, not just one. Second, landholdings and tenant peasants were bequeathed to monasteries, thereby increasing the economic position of monasteries at the expense of the family/clan structure. Already by the mid-1300s and perhaps even earlier, monasteries had become significant agrarian organizations with extensive landholdings. In addition, hierarchs of the schools had benefited from the generosity of the Yuan and Ming courts, significantly increasing the wealth of their *labrang*s. This shift in resource locus from Tibetan families to the

religious schools was important for the rising political power of new families such as the Rinpung.

After 1432, a new succession pattern began to emerge whereby the abbotship of the monastery of the Phagmodru was occupied, and the position of Supreme Ruler (*gong ma*) remained vacant. The solution proposed was to permit the abbot to marry, have offspring, and provide heirs. The Rinpung quickly took advantage of this change in political succession. The heir in line to become Supreme Ruler was a minor, and the Rinpung promoted the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar incarnate (1453-1524) of the Kagyü's Karma sect as the boy's regent. The practice of incarnates began with the Karma sect in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. One of the benefits of having incarnates is that they command higher prices for religious products (performance of rituals, blessings). The 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar was a well-known charismatic hierarch, who had been the student of the Phagmodru court hierarchs. In 1485, the Rinpung family, having no male heirs as monks, began patronizing the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar. In 1493, the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar abbot of Phagmodru monastery Densatel, with the backing of the Rinpung family, assumed the position of regent of the Phagmodru. The 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar held both the ecclesiastical and political positions until his death in 1524.<sup>17</sup>

The appointment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar as both abbot and Supreme Ruler of the Phagmodru signaled a radical shift in political power. The Rinpung, through the abbot, now controlled the Phagmodru hegemony in Central Tibet. We cannot tell from archival material how politically involved the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar was in ruling the Phagmodru. However, the mere fact that the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar assumed the position of Phagmodru Supreme Ruler was significant. He was an outsider, not a member of the Phagmodru clan. By assuming political office as well as being abbot, the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhamar politicized his religious sect, and in

so doing gained political leverage and access to resources. By 1498, he and his Rinpung supporters politically controlled Central Tibet. In the late 1400s, a patron of the Karmapa sect attempted to build a monastery in Lhasa but the administrator refused permission. In defiance, the patron built the monastery outside Lhasa but it was quickly destroyed by Gelukpa monks from Sera and Drepung monasteries. The Rinpung retaliated and captured several small districts. The conflict between the Karmapa and Gelukpa continued with Lhasa being overrun in 1498 by the Rinpung. Troops were stationed so that Sera and Drepung monasteries could not communicate with each other, nor could Gelukpa monks enter Lhasa to celebrate the annual prayer festival *Monlam*. This shows inter alia that the use of violence was not the province of the Gelukpa alone! This was a religious offense as well as an economic disaster as *Monlam* was a major source of revenue for the Gelukpa monks and monasteries. To check the activities of Sera and Drepung monasteries, Yangpachen monastery was constructed (1503), which henceforth became the seat of the Zhamar incarnation line. He together with the 6<sup>th</sup> Zhanag incarnate lama and their supporters took control of the area around Lhasa, in effect blocking the movements of the Gelukpa monks in their three major monasteries. The Ne'u family, supporters of the Gelukpa, had lost their political authority over the region. From 1498 until 1517, Gendün Gyatso, posthumously the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dalai Lama, abbot of Drepung monastery, remained an itinerant monk, traveling from monastery to monastery in western Tibet.

The Geluk school assumption of the re-embodiment notion (so actively current in their rival Karmapa) was instituted by a disciple of Gendundrub (1391-1474), who proposed Gendün Gyatso as Gendundrub's re-embodiment. The Gelukpa adoption of

incarnates was an attempt to compete directly with the Karmapas. The increasingly hierarchical structure of Tibetan Buddhism meant that incarnates could command higher prices than other types of monks for their religious services. Thus, by taking on a unique feature of the Karmapa, the Gelukpa were benefiting from the prestige and economic success of the Karmapa incarnates. The Tshurpu monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Zhanag incarnate, is geographically near Lhasa. During the 15th century, precisely the time period that the Gelukpas instituted incarnates, the 7th Zhanag around this time tried to create a number of other incarnation series in his sect.

In terms of economics, the institution of an incarnate allowed for wealth to be concentrated in his personal estate (*labrang*), thus accumulating from one reincarnation to the next. The birth of an incarnate outside the aristocracy triggered the circulation of land and hereditary households into religious institutions. *Labrangs* were corporate entities that upon the death of an incarnate were managed by stewards until the reincarnation was identified.

The policy implication of this system was that land was no longer concentrated in the aristocracy but rather circulated into the estates of incarnates, monasteries, and, later on, the families of the Dalai lamas who were recipients of estates. This automatically entailed that they became members of the new aristocracy. It has been said that the consequence of the land tenure system, once the Geluk school had consolidated its monopoly over Tibet, was that by the middle of the eighteenth century, when the institution of the Dalai Lama had evolved into a powerful political force, all land was in principal owned by the institution. This may have been the case in theory, but it was certainly not the case in practice. The institution bequeathed as well as rescinded property

rights. From a market perspective, imitating the practice of incarnate hierarchs by the Geluk school was an act of homogeneity, in other words, becoming like the Karmapa sect. By adopting the practice of incarnates, the Gelukpa could now compete directly with the Karmapa for wealthy patrons.

By the mid-1500s, the political situation in Central Tibet was unstable, marred by civil warring. In the absence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dalai Lama (Gendün Gyatso) from his monastic seat, the Rinpung broadened their alliance to include the Kagyü's Drigung sect. In 1542, the last year of the 2nd Dalai Lama's life, Brigung monastery attacked Ganden monastery but was held back. Nevertheless, Brigung monastery successfully incorporated eighteen Gelukpa monasteries and their estates under its jurisdiction (Ya 1991: 21; Shakabpa 1967: 92). Even though the Gelukpa school continued with the support of the Phagmodru Lang family, it was severely weakened as a political power by internal family fighting. These disputes left the Geluk vulnerable. The Rinpung, with hegemonic aspirations, made an alliance with the 5<sup>th</sup> Zhamar incarnate. Sönam gyatso (1543-88), one of two main incarnate hierarchs of Drepung monastery and soon to be given the title of (3<sup>rd</sup>) Dalai Lama, with his landed property under siege and his aristocratic patrons in demise, fortuitously was able to turn to a foreign patron.

Sönam gyatso accepted an invitation from Altan Khan, chief of the Tümed Mongols. The visit took place in June 1579. It was primarily a strategic political move under the guise of religious proselytizing. The Mongol chief converted to Gelukpa Buddhism and conferred upon Sönam gyatso the title of "Vajradhara Dalai Lama" (van der Kuijp 2005: 14-31). There are many questions that still need answers: Why was Sönam gyatso invited and not some other Tibetan religious hierarch? Why would these

Mongols wish to support these celibate monks? Why were these Mongols intent on the Geluk product and not on the products of the other schools or sects? Sönam gyatso conferred upon the Mongol Khan the title, “Religious King, Divine, Great Brahma”. The old pattern of patron-lama was re-established, thereby ensuring the economic support of the Mongols for the Dalai Lama’s *labrang*. The 3rd Dalai Lama (Sönam gyatso) spent ten years engaged in missionary activity in Inner Mongolia, proselytizing among the various tribes (Ya 1991: 26; Shakabpa 1967: 94-95). His effectiveness in converting the Mongol tribes to his brand of Buddhism allowed him to garner in a short span of time the devotion of most of the Tümed, Chahar, and Khalkha Mongols (Richardson 1958: 155; 1962: 41).

The religious following of the Gelukpa among the various Mongol chiefs and their tribes was critical to building their political base. These contacts with Mongols, however, increased tensions with the Karmapas. For the time being the Karmapa sect attacked the Phagmodru, which supported the Gelukpa. For his part, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dalai Lama continued to consolidate his political relationship with the Mongols.

The rebirth of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dalai Lama in a great-grandson of Altan Khan raised the political-religious stakes. In 1603, the 4<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Yönten gyatso (1589-1616), was brought at around the age of 14 or 15 from Inner Mongolia to Drepung monastery by a large Mongol escort. It appears that the Mongols were reluctant to have the Dalai Lama live in Tibet, but the abbots of the Geluk monasteries were concerned over the Lama’s education and his potential deviation from monastic celibacy. Realizing the increasing political-military strength of the Gelukpa school and its ties to several Mongol tribes, the 10<sup>th</sup> Zhanag (1604-74) decided to accept invitations from certain Mongol chiefs. But the

10<sup>th</sup> Zhanag, who maintained relations with the Chinese Emperor and a Mongol chief, could not compete with the 3rd Dalai Lama's revival of Buddhism among the Mongol tribes. Why this was so still needs to be investigated. By contrast, the ruling family in Shigatse, the so-called Tsangpa dynasty, and its political supporters, in particular the 6<sup>th</sup> Zhamar incarnate (1584-1635), took steps to consolidate its authority over Central Tibet. From 1603 to 1621, Tibetan politics deteriorated into a civil war. The origins of this war that actually only came to an end in 1642 are as yet far from clear. The Tsangpa and their supporters were temporarily held back by the Phagmodru. Perhaps taking advantage of the death of the highly ineffectual and to some degree tragic 4th Dalai Lama in 1615, the Tsangpa armies invaded Central Tibet, and this time they were successful, killing several thousand monks at Sera and Drepung monasteries.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that many of these men had temporarily relinquished their monastic vows so as to be able to take up arms to become militia fighters.

By 1618, the Tsangpa, had established itself over Central Tibet and virtually installed the abbot of Tsurphu monastery, that is, the 10<sup>th</sup> Zhanag, awarded them control over Central Tibet, though this hardly fell within his competence. Sera and Drepung monasteries remained surrounded by Tsangpa troops. At first, the Tsangpa banned the search for the reincarnate of the 4<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. But the Tümed Mongols, supporters of the Geluk school, reclaimed Lhasa and the province of Ü. *A status quo ante bellum* peace was established (Ahmad 1970: 106).

In 1622, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama Ngawang lobzang gyatso (1617-82) was identified and brought to Drepung monastery. Mongol pilgrims and troops traveled in and out of Lhasa frequently over the next few years. Their presence unsettled the Karma sect of the

Kagyüpa and their Tsangpa supporters as the Mongol Tümed and Ölöts were followers of Gelukpa. Perhaps as a result of this, the Tsangpa leadership actively stepped up its attacks on Gelukpa institutions and its landed holdings, but not just in Central Tibet. It also made an alliance with the Khalkha Mongols who had conquered northwestern Tibet (Amdo), and now prepared to send 10,000 troops into Tibet to eradicate the political and economic aspirations of the Geluk hierarchs. The institution of the Dalai Lama, his *labrang*, was led by the very clever and ambitious Gendün compel (Ahmad 1970: 116-8). He was its chief financial officer (*chamdzö*). Arslang was charged by his father Choghtu, Khan of the Khalkha Mongols, to eliminate the Gelukpas. But instead of fulfilling his filial promise, he redirected his large army to attack the Tsangpa and the Kagyüpa, apparently killing the 6<sup>th</sup> Zhamar incarnate. It is as yet not known why he went against his father's wishes. Was he impressed by the young Dalai Lama? Was he bribed? However, his forces were defeated by the Tsangpa.

Realizing the precariousness of the situation, the Gelukpa hierarch informed Gushri Khan, the chieftain of the Ölöts, who, after approximately 18 months of fighting, defeated the Chahar Mongols, who had been persuaded by the Khalkha Khan to fight for the Karmapas. Finally, turning to Central Tibet, a combination of Gushri Khan's and Drepung's troops headed by finally defeated the Tsang dynasty, with its seat in Shigatse, thereby completing the military conquest of Tibet (Ahmad 1970: 13-4).

In 1642, with the defeat of the Tsang dynasty and her Mongol and Tibetan allies – the latter included the Karma sect of the Kagyü school as well as the Sakya school— Gushri Khan turned the governance of Tibet over to the 5th Dalai Lama and his right-

hand man Gendün chomphel (Shakabpa 1967: 112-113; Petech 1972: 8). The Mongols occasionally returned to Lhasa during the winter to reside at Kangda.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama quickly moved to consolidate the religious monopoly of the Geluk school. He stripped the 10<sup>th</sup> Zhanag of his authority as well as his monastery of Tsurpu and his *labrang*, much of the contents of which were taken to the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The 10<sup>th</sup> Zhanag left or fled Central Tibet and lived his remaining years in exile on the Tibetan marches. However, he was apparently able to reach some sort of an agreement with the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama whereby most of the monasteries were restored to his sect. At the same time, a representative of the Dalai Lama's ecclesiastical court was stationed at the Karmapa's seat of Tsurpu.

The Jonang sect, loyal supporters of the Tsangpa and an offshoot of the Sakya, was terminated in 1642 with its main monastery Tagten phuntsholing being converted into a Gelukpa one (Seyfort Ruegg 1963: 78-79). The Sakya sect itself was allowed to continue as were the older religions, Bon and Nyingmapa, but their wealth, lands, and political influence diminished. The hierarch of the Sakya sect, which historically had been hereditary, was now under the authority of the Dalai Lama and selected by the Oracle of his government (Carrasco 1959: 79).

In the end, a strategic alliance—with the right Mongolian faction—and military victory were keys to the ascendancy of the Geluk school in Tibet. They reacted to this triumph by consolidating their religious authority. In particular, only the Geluk school was permitted to have monasteries in and around Lhasa. This triumph was not only due to the two main players, Gushri Khan and Gendün chompel. The Khan's troops were seriously weakened when they were unable to take the Shigatse fortress after a siege

lasting several months, for it was only when Gendün compel arrived with a military force from Drepung that Shigatse fell.

### Empirical Evidence on the Growth of the Geluk School

Once the Gelukpa were victorious over the Karmapa, the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and his abbots set about consolidating their sect's religious-political supremacy. Regional Gelukpa monasteries in various parts of Tibet were established and eventually brought into an institutional network of the "three seats" coinciding with the concentration of political power of the abbots of Sera, Drepung, and Ganden in a central government.<sup>19</sup> The three Gelukpa monasteries—Ganden, Sera, and Drepung—developed a national network drawing upon the resources of monasteries around Tibet and centralizing them in Lhasa (Dreyfus 2003: 47; Miller 1961: 201). Eventually, these three monasteries would concentrate considerable national political power in their structures and abbots. Empirical evidence bears out this process of sectarian consolidation in the Geluk school, which was rapidly evolving into a state religion (Table 1).

Lacking data from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when the Geluk sect came into power, one can only guess that over the course of 300 years the Geluk sect concentrated its authority in the monastic system. Records of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) show that in 1694 there were 97,528 monks in Tibet (Goldstein 1989: 21). In 1733, the Gelukpa had 3,477 monasteries with 316,230 residing monks. 3,150 of these monasteries with 302,560 monks were under the authority of the Dalai Lama. 121,438 households (five serfs to each household) supported the Dalai Lama's monasteries. This meant that, including the monasteries and households assigned to the Panchen Lama, 640,000

peasants supported the Gelukpa monasteries in 1733. Goldstein (1989: 21) estimates that based on a population of about 2.5 million, in 1733, 13 percent of the total population and 26 percent of the male population were monks.

Rockhill (1891a: 295-6), interpreting a 1737 Qing census, estimated the entire Tibetan population to be approximately 1,168,362 with 316,200 of them monks.<sup>20</sup> The 1737 census recorded 3,150 monasteries under the authority of the Dalai Lama and 327 monasteries under the Panchen Lama (Rockhill 1891b: 259, footnote 3). Huang (1985:264), relying on the same 1737 census, estimates the Tibetan population under monastic authority to be 957,150 with the total Tibetan population at 1,340,000. Clearly, Goldstein's estimate of the total Tibetan population is high. What is apparent is that the total number of Tibetans under monastic control was significant.

In 1842, a Chinese source recorded 3,487 monasteries in Tibet (Rockhill 1891b: 259, footnote 3). In 1882, the Lhasa government recorded 1,026 monasteries of the Gelukpa, with 491,242 monks. That means that in 149 years, the Gelukpa lost 2,451 monasteries but had close to a 50 percent increase in monks. In other words the sect was concentrating its monks in fewer monasteries. A slightly larger number of monasteries belonged to all the other 17 sects. Thus, the total number of monasteries in Tibet by 1882 was 2,500 with an estimated 760,000 monks.

In 1917, it is estimated that 42 percent of the land was owned by monasteries, 37 percent by the central government, and 21 percent by the aristocracy (Carrasco 1959: 86). Although accurate data are not available, one Tibetan scholar claims that 37 to 50 percent of arable land in Tibet was in the possession of monasteries in 1959 (Goldstein 1998: 19).

Due to lack of reliable data, it is difficult to ascertain if land ownership was becoming increasingly concentrated in monastic entities.

The Geluk school secured its hold on the religion market through government subsidies to its monasteries and special privileges, such as the Dalai Lama permitting monasteries to conscript children of hereditary households, especially when the monastery needed novices (Goldstein 1989: 2). For smaller monasteries with few agricultural resources, the Dalai Lama instituted state subsidies in barley, butter, and tea (Goldstein 1989: 2). For the New Year's celebrations in Lhasa, the Tibetan government supplied the monks with tea, butter, and cash.

Chapman claims that in the early twentieth century, half of state revenues were allocated to the maintenance of the Geluk monasteries (1936: 206). Because a monopoly religion has a "captive audience" so to speak, its major concern is not in attracting new members but in getting income (tithing) to maintain itself. As we have seen the Mongols, the Yuan and Ming emperors were sources of income, and so were the Chinese Ambans who, up until their expulsion by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in 1913, actively subsidized the Geluk monasteries to gain their support.

Although the supremacy of the Geluk school as the religious monopoly firm was established, the struggle for political sovereignty over Tibet would continue. It soon began with the 6th Dalai Lama, whose legitimacy was questioned by the Mongol Khan, with the backing of the Manchu emperor. The Gelukpa's control of the state would be continually challenged by foreign political entities. Eventually, the 7th Dalai Lama would consolidate in his office both religious and secular authority, having been given the opportunity to do so by the Manchu court in Beijing.

## Conclusion

The economics of religion approach to Tibetan Buddhism provides a potentially rewarding model for explaining how the Geluk school was able to become a state religion in a highly competitive market, albeit with more than a little help from their Mongolian friends. The success of the Geluk school was a combination of religious orthodoxy coupled with a willingness to resort to violence as a means of self-determination. The Tsangpa rulers by contrast were laymen, and their violence did not evolve from a natural extension of the economic and political aspirations of one or more *labrang*-s. Clearly, Drepung monastery was the focal point of the organized violence performed by the Gelukpas and their Mongol allies whereas the seat of the Kagyüpa violence was the Tsangpa secular administration. Religious groups which function on a club model will become violence to protect their membership. Rather than a state engaging in violence on behalf of the religion, the religious “club” is willing to become violent to uphold and maintain its monopoly position. The policy implication of this paradigm is that once a religious group becomes a state monopoly, it must continue to use repressive means to maintain its monopolistic position. Rather than showing religious tolerance, the Geluk school retained its exclusionary club nature, concentrating political and economic resources in its religion monopoly.

Other aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the evolution of monastic institutions, the nature of their corporate *labrang*-s, etc., can also be analyzed with principles and concepts that derive from economic theory. Of course, in so doing we are faced with a serious dilemma. To date, very few archival documents have been published that throw

light on the different kinds of financial transactions involving members of this school. The Lhasa Archives contains several million documents, many of which relate to these kinds of economic activities. Only when a good number of these are published and carefully studied will we be able to pursue in depth the kind of research motivated by this preliminary study. At that point, our understanding of the Tibetan religion market will have the opportunity to dramatically increase and improve.

## Chart A: Historical Development of Sarma, Lineages, Schools, and Sects in Tibet

### Sakyapa School

Naropa (?-1040)

Drogmi Shakya yeshe (ca. 993-1077)

Kon Kochog gyelpo (1034-1102). Built Sakya monastery in 1073

#### *Zhalupa Sect*

Buton Rinchen drup (1290-1364)

#### *Jonangpa Sect*

Dolpopa Sherab gyeltsen (1291-1362)

Jonangpa were terminated by the 5th Dalai Lama after 1642

#### *Ngorpa Sect*

Ngorchen Kunga sangpo (1382-1456)

#### *Dzongpa Sect*

Thegchen Tashi pelsangpo (1349-1425)

#### *Tsharpa Sect*

Tsarchen Logsal gyatso (1502-66)

3<sup>rd</sup> Dalai Lama was among his disciples

### Kadampa School

Naropa

Atisha (ca. 982-1054) arrives in Tibet in 1042

Dromston Gyelway jungne (1004/5-63/4). Built Radreng monastery in 1056/7

### Gelukpa School

Tsongkapa (1357-1419). Built Ganden Monastery in 1409

Gendundrub (1<sup>st</sup> Dalai Lama)

Gendün Gyatso (2<sup>nd</sup> Dalai Lama)

Sönam gyatso (3<sup>rd</sup> Dalai Lama)

Yönten gyatso (4<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama)

Ngawang lobsang gyatso (5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama)

### Kagyü School

Naropa and his disciple Maitripa

Marpa Lotsawa (?1012-?1097)

Milarepa (1038-1123)

Gampopa (1079-1153)

#### *Tshal pa Sect*

Lama Zhang (1123-93). Built Tshal monastery (1175) and Gung thang (1187)

*Karma Sect*

[1<sup>st</sup> Zhanag] Dusum khyenpa (1110-93). Built Tshurphu monastery in 1187.

Zhanag incarnations series

2<sup>nd</sup> Zhanag Karma pakshi (1204-83)

3<sup>rd</sup> Zhanag Rangjung dorje (1284-1339)

Zhamar incarnation series

1<sup>st</sup> Zhamar Dragpa sengge (1283-1349)

2<sup>nd</sup> Zhamar Kacho wangpo (1350-1405)

3<sup>rd</sup> Zhamar Chopel yeshe (1406-52)

*Barom Sect*

Darma wangchuk (1127-99). Built Barom monastery in (?).

*Phagmodru Sect*

Phagmodru Dorje gyelpo (1110-1170). Built Densatel monastery in 1158.

a. *Drigung Sect*

Jigten gonpo (1143-1217). Built Drigungtel monastery in 1179.

b. *Staglung Sect*

Tashipel (1143-1210). Built Taglung monastery in 1178/80.

c. *Trophu Sect*

Gyatsa Kunga shesdrab (1118-95). Built Trophu monastery in ?1178.

d. *Drugpa Sect*

Lingraypa (1128-95). Built Ralung monastery in 1180.

e. *Marpa Sect*

Sherab sengge (1135-1203). Built Sho monastery in 1165.

f. *Yelpa Sect*

Sanggay yelpa (1134-94). Built Tana monastery in 1188.

g. *Yabsang Sect*

Kelden yeshe sengge (d. 1207). Built Zara monastery. His disciple Chokyi monlam (1169-1233) built Yabsang monastery in 1206.

h. *Shugseb Sect*

Yergom chenpo (?-?)

### **Chart B. Brief Chronology of Tibetan History**

d. 649	King Songtsen gampo, founder of the Tibetan empire
d. 742	King Treede tsugtsen, great-great grandson of Songtsen gampo
742-ca.797	Reign of Treesong detsen; elevation of Indian Buddhism to a state religion; beginning of translation activity of Sanskrit, Chinese, Khotanese and Gilgit Buddhist texts
787-97/8	Reign of Mune tsenpo
d. 817	Reign of Sadnaleg
817-841	Reign of Ralpacen
841-2	Reign of Langdarma; collapse of the empire and fragmentation into different chiefdoms ruled by members of the imperial families
970s	Resurgence of Indian Buddhism patronized by members of the ruling families of western Tibet; translation activity of Indian Buddhist texts resumes
958-1055	The great translator Rincen sangpo
1042	The scholar Atiṣa arrives in western Tibet at the invitation of the ruling families of western Tibet
11 – 12th Centuries	Rise of different branches of Buddhism with subsequent splintering into sects and sub-sects
1235-80	Lama Phagpa of the Sakya school
1240	Mongol invasion of Tibet
1240-ca. 1264	The Kagyü monastery of Drigungtel ruled over Central Tibet by proxy
1246	Sakya Pandita becomes court chaplain of Mongol prince Goden
1264	Qubilai Khan delegates political authority over Central Tibet to Lama Phagpa

- 1264-1358 Sakya ecclesiastical-political authority in Tibet with the backing of the Mongolian imperial family of the Yuan Dynasty (China)
- 1357-1419 Tsongkapa is born in 1357 and dies in 1419
- 1358 The beginning of the Phagmodru (Kagyü) dynasty in Tibet
- 1391-1474 Gendundrub, a student of Tsongkapa and posthumously recognized as 1<sup>st</sup> Dalai Lama
- 1409 Tsongkapa founds Ganden monastery [not far from Lhasa] as the seat of Gelukpa Buddhism. Tsongkapa reintroduces strict monastic ethics; promotes adherence to strict celibacy and utter abstinence from alcohol; introduces a new liturgy known as the Great Prayer Day as part of New Year celebrations and restores the Jokang temple
- 1416 The Gelukpa monastery of Drepung [in Lhasa] is founded by Jamyang chojay (1379-1449), a disciple of Tsongkapa
- 1420 The Gelukpa monastery of Sera [in Lhasa] is founded by Jamcen chojay (1352-1435), a disciple of Tsongkapa. First visited the Ming court in China, in 1408, where the Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty gave him the title of National Preceptor. Returned to the court in 1424 and was given the same title by the Xuande Emperor
- 1434/5 Civil war and political setback for the Phagmodru dynasty; Central Tibet is conquered by their in-laws the Rinpungpa who support the Karma sect of the Kagyü school and the Sakya school.
- 1445 Gendundrub founds Tashilunpo monastery in Shigatse.
- 1476-1542 Gendün Gyatso; recognized as reincarnation of Gendundrub and posthumously recognized as 2<sup>nd</sup> Dalai Lama; occupies the Ganden podrang residence of Drepung monastery.
- 1490s Conflicts between the Gelukpa and Karma Kagyü escalate; the Karma sect and the Phagmodru occupy Lhasa and forbid the *Monlam chenmo* prayer festival.
- 1543-1588 Sönam gyatso (3<sup>rd</sup> Dalai Lama); reincarnation of Gendün Gyatso
- 1565 Karma Kagyü receives the patronage of the Tsangpa dynasty of Shigatse which has overthrown the Rinpung dynasty.

- 1578 Altan Khan, king of the Tümed Mongols, grants Sönam gyatso the title of Dalai Lama [3<sup>rd</sup> Dalai Lama] and the Khan converts to Gelukpa Buddhism
- 1589-1616 Yönten gyatso, 4<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, great-grandson of Altan Khan
- 1617-1682 Ngawang lobsang gyatso, 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama
- 1611-1642 Civil war between the Tsangpa and the Geluk school and its allies
- 1642 The armies of Gushri Khan (1582-1654) of the Ólöt Mongols and Gendün chompel (1595-1657), the financial secretary of the Ganden podrang of Drepung monastery and the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's right-hand man, take Shigatse and defeat the Tsangpa dynasty; the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama is declared religious ruler and the *de facto* temporal ruler of Tibet.

**Table I**

	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Monks</b>	<b>Monasteries</b>
1268A.D.	1.25-3 million	c. 22,000 Total (Das 1904b) c.153,000 bKa-rguda-pa c. 70,000 Sa-skya c. 80,000 Shangs-pa	
1694		97,528	(Gelukpa)
1733/37	1.168 - 2.5 million	316,230 (Gelupa)	3,477 (Gelukpa)
1842			3487 total
1882	3.5 million	491,242 (Gelukpa) 28,000 all other	1,026 (Gelukpa) 2,500 all other
1899	3 million		
1904-5	2.5 - 3 million		3,100 total

Sources: Rockhill (1891a; 1891b), Petech (1990); Goldstein (1989); Huang (1986)  
Both Goldstein (1981) and Richardson (1962) are of the view that the Tibetan population was substantially larger during the centuries leading up to the Gelukpa monopoly.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For a major source of Tibetan language documents see, [www.tbrc.org](http://www.tbrc.org).

<sup>2</sup> David Germano with Ronald M. Davidson define a “sect” as having the following characteristics: a clearly identified founder; a distinctive body of literature specific to it; statements of identity separate from other religious movements; centers with permanent structures; a shared administrative hierarchy; common ritual activities such as pilgrimages and festival events. See Germano, ed. 2007. Although traditionally, scholars refer to “schools” and “sects”, the classification has more to do with cultural valuation than organizational structure.

<sup>3</sup> These were Sakyapa and Kagyüpa—Karmapa, Drigung, and Phagmodru—hierarchs; see, Sperling 1979, 280-289, especially 280; Sperling 1983, 348, footnote 43; Toh 2004, 51.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief analysis of how the Zina family attempted to overthrow the Phagmodru rule in 1373 see, van der Kuijp 2001, 57- 76. The second case, the Rinpung family, is discussed later on this paper as it has direct bearing on the rise of the Geluk school into a state religion. Elliot Sperling discusses the inter-marriage of the Kyura family of the Drigung with the Lang family of the Phagmodru leading to a peaceful alliance of these once antagonistic families, see Sperling 1987, 40-41.

<sup>5</sup> It is unclear whether families primarily switched religious affiliations among sects within schools as opposed to across schools. This is a topic that requires further study.

<sup>6</sup> It must be remembered that at this time, Tsongkapa was viewed by his contemporaries as a Sakyapa monk and not the founder of a nascent sect. The relationship between the

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Phagmodru ruler, the secular political authority, and Tsongkapa, the religious teacher, was a personal one between preceptor and donor; see Seyfort Ruegg 2003, 362-372, especially 366-368.

<sup>7</sup> Although the initiation of the *Monlam chenmo* New Year's festival is attributed to Tsongkapa, there is evidence that the Karmapa (and perhaps also other religious hierarchs) celebrated a festival with the very same name in the fifteenth century.

<sup>8</sup> The exception to this pattern is Tashilunpo monastery in Shigatse. It was founded in 1445 by Gendündrup (1381-1471), who was posthumously recognized as the 1<sup>st</sup> Dalai Lama.

<sup>9</sup> Schisms tend not to occur because a reformer, such as Tsongkapa, intentionally seeks to break away from a school or denomination. Rather, a schism is possible because the innovator seeks to reform from within the school of which he is a member. We can find salient examples in Christianity. For example, Martin Luther sought to reform the Roman Catholic Church, not to break away from it and create a new Christian religious entity. John Wesley sought to revitalize the Church of England, but instead revolutionized Protestantism with his "methods."

<sup>10</sup> For a list of Tsongkapa's teachers and in whose lineages he is registered, see Seyfort Ruegg 2000, 60-64, and 88f.

<sup>11</sup> D. Seyfort Ruegg explains how Tsongkapa can be both a "conservative traditionalist" and a "creative restorer/renovator/innovator" see, Seyfort Ruegg 2004, 321-343.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of organizational technological innovation are the Ford assembly line and the Wal-Mart retail system, see Charles I. Jones (1998): 72.

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<sup>13</sup> Mass monasticism was not unique to the Geluk school. However, the Gelukpa would come to have the largest monasteries in Tibet and perhaps in the world. There are no systematic treatments of the monastic system going back to 1409. Some authors suggest that children with physical deformities and handicaps were not admitted, see Hugh E. Richardson 1951: 112-122; and Goldstein contends that illiterate monks were admitted and tolerated 1989: 22.

<sup>14</sup> Goldstein estimates that prior to 1951, 10 percent of the monks at Drepung monastery were engaged in scholarly studies. See Goldstein 1998 15-52; especially 20-22.

<sup>15</sup> The *Regula Magistri* prohibited monks from working (RM 86). Then, during the early Middle Ages in Europe the *Regula Benedictine* (although based on the *Regula Magistri*) required monks to work as part of their daily activities and did not forbid but rather encouraged manual labor in the fields as an imitation of the apostles and fathers (RB 48). This paradigmatic shift occurred as a function of the necessity to survive. The monasteries were not generating enough income through gifts. And, they realized the profit opportunity that resulted from the work of the monks offset this. This process, however, pulled the monks too much from prayer and other liturgical services. In the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, another class of monks was introduced known as the *conversi* (lay brothers) who primarily engaged in manual labor. *Conversi* were also a function of a labor shortage due to the Black Death, see, Fry 1981.

<sup>16</sup> The initial start-up costs of setting up a printing shop would have to be off-set by the economies of scale. Also, if manual transcription of texts was relatively cheap, there would be no market incentive to introduce a printery. What we are suggesting is that in the case of establishing Geluk orthodoxy through a uniform monastic curriculum,

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xylographic printing would have had an advantage over calligraphy in that the printing could have been done more expediently, on a mass scale, and thereby ensured the use of uniform Geluk texts in all the monasteries. We hypothesize that this did not occur in Tibet due to the tenuous authority during the fifteenth century that the abbot of Ganden had over the other Geluk monasteries, the geographically localized nature of the monasteries, the continued intent on the part of the hierarchs to retain a monopoly over printing (rather than increasing the demand for texts by printing large numbers).

Historically, the Geluk monastic system remained decentralized in the sense that no single authority exerted exclusive, supreme authority over the three major monasteries—Sera, Drepung, and Ganden. As Melvyn C. Goldstein expresses it, “The Three Seats thus had no qualms about challenging the government [Dalai Lama] when they felt their interests were at stake, for in their view they were more important than Ganden Photrang, the government headed by the Dalai lamas.” See Goldstein 1990, 231 – 47, especially 245.

<sup>17</sup>The Zhamar incarnates are second to the Zhanag incarnates. The 1st Zhamar Dragpa sengge (1283-1349) was a contemporary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Zhanag incarnate hierarch.

<sup>18</sup> Luciano Petech is of the view that the feud between the Karmapas and the Geluk was a “purely political” rivalry. One might argue that it was a combination of seeking political supremacy coupled with establishing one’s school as the state religion. Part and parcel of becoming a state religion would be the acquisition of land and household labor. See, Petech 1972, 53-54.

<sup>19</sup> Kun dga’ blo gros, Sa skya’i gdung rabs ngo mtshar bang mdzod kyi kha skong, 366 ff.

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20. Rockhill (1891b: 215) states that “the country of Tibet for over a century figured on the official census tables (as a part of the empire).” Rockhill obtained his data from the Chinese source *Ta-Ch’ing hui-tien*, Imperial Ch’ing statutes and precedent, 1818.