Buddhism and Politics in the Tibetan Cultural Area

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Which major forms of Buddhist governance have developed over time in the Tibetan cultural area since the introduction of Buddhism in the 7th century in Tibet?[1] How have distinctions and differentiations between the societal spheres of religion and politics manifested themselves?[2] Finally, which general Buddhist conceptions may be considered essential in the different forms of governance? This article provides a chronological overview of the major forms of Buddhist governments in the Tibetan cultural area while also touching on various underlying conceptions of Buddhist governance relevant to the process of conceptual distinction and social differentiation.[3]

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1   As the Tibetan cultural area is considered to comprise regions that have significant populations either speaking the Tibetan language and its vernaculars or practising Tibetan Buddhism as their religion. This at times roughly included Northern Pakistan, parts of Central Asia, Mongolia, the Tibetan Autonomous Region, parts of the Western Chinese provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu, Bhutan, parts of the Indian Himalayas, such as Ladakh and Sikkim, and parts of Nepal, such as Mustang and Dölpo; see also Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetans* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1–2.

2   In accordance with the 'multiple secularities' approach, I understand the term 'secularity' as an analytical term and a heuristic concept that serves as a "modality of making distinctions [and differentiations]"; see Christoph Kleine and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Research Programme of the HCAS 'Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities,'" *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 1 (Leipzig University, 2016), 8. Distinction (conceptual) and differentiation (institutional) between societal spheres at a given point in time – in this overview, between the religious and the political – are also understood in a non-evaluating sense.

3   The historical overview is based mainly on Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, and Sam van Schaik, *Tibet: A History* (London: Yale University Press, 2011). In addition, the dates for historical events in Tibet follow the chronological overview in Kurtis Schaeffer and Gray Tuttle, eds., *The Tibetan History Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), xv–xxiii. For Bhutan, see Karma Phuntsho, *History of Bhutan* (Noida: Random House, India, 2013); for Sikkim, respectively, see John A. Ardussi, "Formation of the State of Bhutan ('Brug gzhung) in the 17th Century and its Tibetan Antecedents," *Journal of Bhutan Studies* 11, no. 2 (2004).

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Tibet turned into a significant political player in Central Asia and China after the unification of Central Tibet in the 7th century and the following expansion of the Tibetan Empire until the 9th century under the rule of the three so-called "Dharma Kings", "Buddhist Kings" (Tibetan: *chos rgyal*; Sanskrit: *dharmarāja*). In later Tibetan Buddhist sources, the three Dharma Kings of the Tibetan Empire were considered emanations of three great Buddhist Bodhisattvas: (1) Songtsen Gampo (d. 650) represented Avalokiteśvara, (2) Trisong Detsen (d. 797) appeared as Mañjuśrī, (3) and Tri Ttsugdetsen/Relpachen (d. 838) embodied Vajrapāṇi.

Furthermore, the reign of these kings was interpreted as the ideal of just Buddhist rule and political ethos, which followed earlier Indian conceptions of Buddhist kingship, societal order and cosmology, along with associated codes of ethical conduct. The 'Buddhanised' historiographical depiction of the rule of the three Dharma Kings and their royal cult became the point of reference for later rulers throughout Tibet's history. For instance, a symbolic, or, even better, actual descent from these kings' imperial court members or reincarnation of former important religious figures, remained crucial for legitimisation of rule.

More specifically, the three Dharma Kings were from the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty that dated back to the 2nd century BCE starting with the first mythological king Nyatri Tsenpo. These kings were said to have been connected by a 'dæmon cord' to heaven and, as a result, left no physical body behind when they died. However, this 'dæmon cord' was cut with the 8th King Drigum Tsenpo. This dynasty had its geographic origin in the Yarlung valley in Southern Tibet, and its kings were considered to hold special power over the sacred landscape of Tibet and the spirits and deities said to be living in it.[4] This particularly applied to the spirits and deities of the mountains which were mainly connected to the control of waters.[5] Therefore, during

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4   For the online database of an ongoing interdisciplinary research project (Austrian Science Fund, FWF) that also deals with the grave sites of the Yarlung dynasty, see Guntram Hazod, "The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet: A Historical-anthropological Study and Documentation of the Tumulus Tradition of Early Central Tibet (4th–10th century CE)," accessed August 27, 2019, https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/home/.

5   Various myths as to the origin of the Yarlung dynasty circulated that either attributed to it a divine or worldly descent, such as stemming from the Indian Śākya clan, the clan to which the historical Buddha Siddhārtha Gautama had belonged.

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the subsequent institutionalisation of Buddhism, the earlier Indian Buddhist (partially even non-Buddhist) ideas of sacred kingship met and merged with indigenous conceptions of sacral kingship and the cosmological and societal order.

In fact, the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet was a more gradual process than is usually depicted in Buddhist historiography – for example, with successes from pro-Buddhist factions of priests and set-backs from anti-Buddhist factions in charge of pre-Buddhist religious rites at the imperial court in Lhasa, called 'Bön' in several early Tibetan sources.[6] While the first Dharma King Songtsen Gampo's stance towards Buddhism appears to have been somewhat ambivalent, as at least his funeral rites clearly followed the earlier pre-Buddhist tradition of Bön priests customary at the imperial court, the second Dharma King Trisong Detsen began to institutionalise Buddhism more systematically after his conversion in 762. His edict, which is found on a stele in front of Tibet's first Buddhist monastery, Samye, states that Buddhism should be followed at all times by the people of Tibet. Future kings, their sons, and the ministers at the imperial court were supposed to swear an oath to follow Buddhism, and the Buddhist institutions in Tibet should receive all necessary material support – an important moment in the religious history of the Tibetan cultural area.[7]

Subsequently, Indian Buddhist masters such as Śāntarakṣita as well as the 'Second Buddha' Padmasambhava/Guru Rinpoche from Oḍḍiyāna, the founding figure of the first of four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma ('old' school), were invited to the imperial court. Besides using the newly developed Tibetan script

Introduction and institutionalisation of Buddhism in Tibet: 'Earlier dissemination' of Buddhism

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6   This article is not concerned with other pre-Buddhist religious traditions in Tibet. However, it is noteworthy that the development of 'Bön' as a specific religious tradition in its later institutionalised form with its pre-Buddhist roots should not be equated with the sum of earlier pre-Buddhist Tibetan belief systems per se. Pre-Buddhist belief systems in Tibet constitute a complex field of study in their own right – not least due to the lack of early textual evidence and reliance on archaeological artefacts, and the problem of applying the terminology of 'religion'. For an overview of various terminologies for 'doctrine', 'practice system', and 'identification of belonging' to the religious group of Bön specifically, see Ulrike Roesler, "Die Lehre, der Weg und die namenlose Religion: Mögliche Äquivalente eines Religionsbegriffs in der tibetischen Kultur," in *Religion in Asien? Studien zur Anwendbarkeit des Religionsbegriffs,* ed. Peter Schalk (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2013).

7   For the translation of the edict, see Kurtis Schaeffer, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 60–64.

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for the administration of the vast empire, religious literature from different Buddhist languages was now translated into Tibetan on a massive scale. In the following century, translation processes and terminologies were standardised, religious scriptures disseminated, and monastic institutions established. The reign of the three Dharma Kings is traditionally associated with the 'earlier dissemination' of Buddhism from India to Tibet and the beginnings of the Nyingma school, which was then institutionalised as a separate tradition from the 11th century onwards. It identifies its origins and transmissions of Tantric teachings and lineages largely with this earlier period.

'Samye debate'

Another crucial moment in religious history took place when, in reaction to strife over various forms and interpretations of Buddhism that were taught in Tibet at that time, the 'Samye debate' was called by Trisong Detsen. The debate had the purpose of clarifying, once and for all, what interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine should be followed in Tibet. Details of this debate are reported differently in the much later Tibetan writings from the 11th century onwards, and even the historicity of the debate itself has been called into question. Nevertheless, the longstanding impact of the narrative of the 'Samye debate' (792–94) is amply demonstrated in later Tibetan Buddhist historiographical, doxographical, polemic, and doctrinal writing, and it was decisive for the form of Buddhism that took shape in the following centuries in Tibet.

In brief, later Tibetan historiographical accounts report that the Indian Buddhist scholar and disciple of Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, who promoted a gradual path towards enlightenment, defeated the Chinese Chan meditation master Heshang Moheyan, who was the proponent of a 'sudden' or 'instantaneous' approach towards enlightenment. Therefore, Indian as opposed to Chinese Buddhism officially served as the authoritative source for Buddhism in Tibet from then onwards. In the later polemic exchanges between Tibetan Buddhist schools that lasted many centuries, accusing the opponent of following Heshang Moheyan's tradition of 'Chinese Buddhism' became a common trope. The definition of what exactly was meant by this would differ from one Buddhist master to another and often lacked credible historicity. When the Tibetan schools were closely associated with different local hegemonies later in history, these polemics also entered into the political arena.

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With the disintegration of the Tibetan Empire from the mid-9th century onwards, institutional support of Buddhism came to a halt with King Langdarma's rule (d. 842). However, local Buddhist practices in monastic communities and by Tantric practitioners alike persisted, and the male monastic lineage was kept intact in the Amdo region of Eastern Tibet. In sum, Tibetan historiographical sources refer to this period without functioning Buddhist institutions or royal patronage as the 'age of fragmentation'.

Renewed institutional support of Buddhism only took place from the middle of the 10th century onwards during the 'later dissemination' of Buddhism from India to Tibet. Buddhism was systematically reformed and promoted in Western Tibet in the Kingdom of Guge Puhrang with Buddhist monk rulers, such as Yeshe Ö (c. 959–c. 1036) and his successors. These rulers were deeply devoted to Buddhism but at the same time followed a solid agenda of 'purifying' the Buddhist doctrine and practices from any heresy, in particular, Tantric heretical aspects which, from their perspective, had been mushrooming in Tibet since the fall of the Tibetan Empire.

The Buddhist monk rulers' activities included the massive sponsorship of translation projects from Sanskrit to Tibetan that were executed in teams comprising an Indian scholar and a Tibetan translator. Indian Buddhist masters, such as the famous Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, were invited to transmit the 'authentic Indian Buddhist' teachings and tantric cycles to Tibetan Buddhist masters and accordingly start Tibetan Buddhist lineages which later led to the formation of the different new Tibetan Buddhist schools. These Indian and Tibetan Buddhist masters also composed numerous new works, such as commentaries, to contribute to the fast-growing Tibetan Buddhist literature and exegesis of Buddhist doctrines in Tibet. In summary, they influenced how Indian Buddhism was received and transformed in this period in Tibet and thereby had a lasting impact on Tibet's intellectual history. However, Tibetan Buddhist masters also travelled extensively back and forth to India, where Buddhism was in decline, to receive Buddhist scriptures and transmissions. Royal patronage also enabled the building of temples and the establishment of monastic institutions in Tibet.

Moreover, disciples of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna founded a Tibetan Buddhist school, the Kadampa, which later merged with the other 'new' Tibetan Buddhist schools. As Tibetan Buddhism spread

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later on, three 'new' schools – the Kagyü, Sakya and Geluk – were founded which branched out in many different sub-schools over the following centuries.[8]

Along the silk road, the Tanguts, an ethnic group from North-Western China, had built a significant multi-ethnic kingdom. They had not come under the rule of the Tibetan Empire, and after the fall of the Tibetan Empire, they moved southwards. Subsequently, charismatic Tibetan Buddhist masters, in particular those from the Sakya and Kagyü school, were able to obtain their royal patronage. The Tangut rulers awarded these Tibetan Buddhist masters the title of "imperial/state preceptor" (Tibetan: *ti shrī*; Chinese: *dìshī* 帝師) and in return, were recognised as Buddhist "Universal Ruler" (Tibetan: *'khor los sgyur ba'i rgyal po*; Sanskrit: *cakravartin*). The Tangut Kingdom of Xixia lasted for just two centuries (1038–1227) until the arrival of the Mongols, but their form of religious patronage persistently influenced later Mongolian rulers. In summary, in the formation of Buddhist governments in the Tibetan cultural area, particularly charismatic Tantric Buddhist masters and their relations often played a significant role. A further example of the relevance of personal charisma among Buddhist Tantric masters is Lama Zhang Tselpa (1123–94), who was briefly able to rule over territories in Central Tibet by exercising military and political power.[9]

Incidentally, a brief reflection on Tibetan emic conceptions that address the societal spheres of religion and politics in the Tibetan cultural area seems crucial. Pre-modern textual sources, such as legal codes, religious histories, and advisory literature for Buddhist rulers

Tangut Kingdom and Lama Zhang Tselpa

Intermission: Emic conceptions of religion and politics

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8   A 'Tibetan Buddhist school or tradition' is considered a relatively demarcated tradition that transmits specific texts and meditations practices through specific Buddhist lineage masters following Indian Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism and possesses an exegetical and commentarial tradition resulting in a specific textual corpus and standardised canon as well as separate institutions with differing characteristics and rituals. Most of the Tibetan standard doxographic works follow a division into four major Tibetan schools, the Nyingma, Kagyü, Sakya, and Geluk, including their manifold sub-schools. However, there are alternative categorisations such as the 'eight practice lineages'. In general, consideration should be given to the somewhat contrived nature of such fixed categories when the reality is one of more fluid religious practices, since Tibetan Buddhist masters often received (and still receive) transmissions from various schools and lineages.

9   See Schaik, *Tibet: A History*, 75–76; see also Karl Debreczeny, "Faith and Empire: An Overview," accessed August 14, 2019, http://asianart.com/articles/faith-empire/index.html.

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explicitly addressed an emic distinction between "politics/mundane affairs" (Tibetan: *srid*) and "religion/transcending the mundane" (Tibetan: *chos*).[10] In these textual sources, ideal forms of distinction and differentiation between the societal spheres of religion and politics, embedded in the cosmological order of Tantric Buddhism, were formulated. These ideals included conceptions about a specific societal order which was, for example, laid out in codes of conduct as a form of reciprocal contractual ethics. Accordingly, different forms of functional and structural differentiation were subsequently institutionalised in the respective Buddhist forms of governance in the Tibetan cultural area over the centuries. These ultimately culminated in a form of government with a twofold religious and political structure under a Buddhist master or king (Tibetan: *chos srid zung 'brel/chos srid gnyis 'brel/chos srid zung 'jug/chos srid gnyis ldan*; hereafter: 'Joint Twofold System of Governance').

Moreover, different modes of succession and legitimisation of Buddhist rule in the Tibetan cultural area co-existed but also competed with each other. Besides abbatial, hereditary, and meritocratic succession, incarnation of a former important religious lineage holder (Tibetan: *sprul sku*) was first officially introduced as a form of succession in the 13th century in the Kagyü school with the 'Second Karmapa' Karma Pakshi.

Modes of succession and legitimisation of Buddhist rule

Then, an initial, more elaborate form of the explicitly twofold governmental structure was institutionalised in 1264. Mongol-Sakya rule was established between the Yuan emperor Khubilai Khan and a Tibetan Buddhist master from the Sakya school, Chögyel Pakpa, who was appointed as 'imperial/state preceptor'. This Tibetan and Central Asian form of division of responsibilities and power between rulers and their Buddhist teachers – the lay "ruler-donor" (Tibetan: *yon bdag*) and his religious "counsellor-donée" (Tibetan: *mchod gnas*) respectively – was referred to as a "preceptor-donor" relationship (Tibetan: *yon mchod/mchod yon*).[11] In the case of the Mongol-Sakya rule, authority was conferred by and shared with a foreign power, the Mon-

Mongol-Sakya rule

10 Several early Tibetan sources going back to the Tibetan Empire, including Dunhuang sources, mention and discuss the conceptual dyad of religion (Tibetan: *chos*) and politics (Tibetan: *srid*). For textual references, see Ardussi, "Formation of the State of Bhutan," 26, n. iii.

11 In the English translation of the Tibetan emic terms, I follow David Seyfort Ruegg. For a detailed discussion of the respective emic conceptions and terminologies, and

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gols. Accordingly, Buddhist masters from the Sakya school took charge of the administration of the religious and political affairs within Tibet. In general, the political reality was that these complex relations often involved conflicting interests and were difficult to handle, and Mongol-Sakya rule declined after just one century in 1354.

Two observations regarding boundaries between the societal spheres of religion and politics in the conceptualisation of the 'preceptor-donor' relationship seem noteworthy. First, this relationship did not merely represent and demarcate the societal spheres of religion and politics respectively, since Tibetan Buddhist masters also exercised administrative, political and military functions, albeit in varying degrees. Second, the hierarchy between both parties in the 'preceptor-donor' relationship could vary significantly depending on the personal, spiritual, political, and socio-economic circumstances.

After the Mongol-Sakya rule, for about two hundred years from the middle of the 14th century onwards, local clan lineages successively established rather short-lived hegemonies in Central Tibet. First, the **Local hegemonies** Pakmodrupa (1354–1435), a sub-branch of the Kagyü school under the lead of Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen, challenged and defeated the already weakened Sakya hegemony. Accordingly, Jangchup Gyeltsen received the title of "Chief Minister" (Tibetan: *ta'i si tu*; Chinese: *dà sītú* 大司徒) from the Mongols. Afterwards, the Rinpungpa gradually seized power (1435–1565) followed by the Tsangpa (1565–1642).

These hegemonies shared common characteristics: first, descent from an influential family clan or religious lineage connected to the Tibetan Empire and, second, a close relationship with and patronage of one (or more) of the 'new' Tibetan Buddhist schools that were established during the 'later dissemination' of Buddhism to Tibet. The Pakmodrupa were mainly associated with the Kagyü school, but also supported the newly formed Geluk school, and in particular

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the complex relationships between the spheres of religion and politics in the Tibetan cultural area, see David Seyfort Ruegg, "The Preceptor-Donor (*yon mchod*) Relation in Thirteenth-Century Tibetan Society and Polity, Its Inner Asian Precursors and Indian Models," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz, 1995*, 2 vols., ed. Helmut Krasser, Michael T. Much, and Ernst Steinkellner (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997); and David Seyfort Ruegg, "Introductory Remarks on the Spiritual and Temporal Orders," in *The relationship between religion and state (chos srid zung 'brel) in traditional Tibet: Proceedings of a seminar held in Lumbini, Nepal, March 2000*, ed. Christoph Cüppers (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2004).

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its founding figure, Tsongkapa. The Rinpungpa and Tsangpa were supporters of the Kagyü tradition; nevertheless, the Rinpungpa also supported the Jonang school.

Although the rulers of these hegemonies are usually not strictly associated with the institutionalisation of the 'Joint Twofold System of Governance', textual sources from that time, such as legal codes and administrative documents, demonstrate that these Buddhist concepts of rule, political ethos, and cosmological and societal order were important in their self-perception.

At the same time, sectarian strife and sharp polemics between the religious masters of the Tibetan Buddhist schools intensified. However, these controversial and heated debates brought forth a glut of writings and served to refine philosophical-doctrinal positions that strictly differentiated the respective Tibetan Buddhist schools.

In the first half of the 17th century, three major Buddhist governments characterised by the 'Joint Twofold System of Governance' were established in the Tibetan cultural area, although with a significant difference in their self-perception, institutionalisation, and relationship with nearby governments.[12]

First, in 1625/26 Bhutan, which had not yet come under any central political authority, was united through the charismatic Tibetan Buddhist master Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel from a sub-branch of the Kagyü school, the Drukpa Kagyü. Under Zhabdrung's authority, two branches in the government were institutionalised. A "regent" (Tibetan: *'brug sde srid*) exercised political-administrative power while the religious institutions were overseen by the "Chief Abbot" (Tibetan: *'brug rje mkhan po*), the head of the Bhutanese Drukpa Kagyü school.[13]

Second, in 1642, the Ganden Podrang Government of the fifth

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12 Several Buddhist kingdoms in other parts of the Himalayan region, such as Mustang and Ladakh, developed different arrangements between religion (Tibetan: *chos*) and politics (Tibetan: *srid*). The earlier Buddhist Gungtang Kingdom that lasted from the 13th to the 17th century is also noteworthy in this respect; see, for example (in German), Dieter Schuh, "Srid ohne Chos? Reflektionen zum Verhältnis von Buddhismus und säkularer Herrschaft im tibetischen Kulturraum," *Zentralasiatische Studien des Seminars für Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaften Zentralasiens der Universität Bonn* 33 (2004); Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain. Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet. A Study of Tshal Gung-thang* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007).

13 On the relationship between the societal spheres of religion and politics in

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Dalai Lama Ngawang Lopsang Gyatso, the 'Great Fifth', successfully arose out of the political and military power struggle with the Tsang rulers in Tibet with the support of the Koshut Mongols – becoming the most prominent among the Buddhist governments in the Tibetan cultural area. The Mongol Koshut prince Gushri Khan conferred religious and administrative authority on the Geluk school under the fifth Dalai Lama together with a "regent" (Tibetan: *sde srid*). As a result, the system of lay 'ruler-donor' and his religious 'counsellor-donée' from the earlier Mongol-Sakya rule was renewed, and the power of the Geluk school in Tibet from the 17th to 20th centuries was in varying degrees dependent on alliances and negotiations with the Mongol and later Manchu rulers. The title of "Dalai Lama" (Tibetan: *ta la'i bla ma*; Mongolian: *dalaiyin qan/dalaiin khan*) was first awarded by Altan Khan from the Tümed Mongols to the third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso. The two predecessors in Sonam Gyatso's religious lineage were retrospectively acknowledged as the first two 'Dalai Lamas'. In addition, the Dalai Lamas are considered emanations of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Third, at the same time in 1642, the Namgyel dynasty with its first 'Dharma King', the Chögyel Puntsok Namgyel, was established in Sikkim and affiliated with the Tibetan Buddhist Nyingma school. After 1889, the Kingdom of Sikkim became a princely state of the British Raj.

Derge Kingdom in Eastern Tibet

Far away from the influence of the Central Tibetan Ganden Podrang Government, in Eastern Tibet, several smaller kingdoms competed over local hegemony, most prominent among them the Derge Kingdom in Kham that had already been in existence since the 13th century. Their rulers were fervent patrons of Tibetan Buddhism, associated initially with the Sakya school, but, in general, religiously tolerant towards all Tibetan Buddhist confessions. Their patronage contributed significantly to a cultural and intellectual revival of Buddhism in Eastern Tibet.

It is particularly worth noting the 19th-century non-sectarian "Rime" (Tibetan: *ris med*) movement which had prominent masters from the Sakya, Nyingma and Kagyü schools, such as Jamyang

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pre-modern and modern Bhutan, see Dagmar Schwerk, "Drawing Lines in a Maṇḍala: A Sketch of Boundaries Between Religion and Politics in Bhutan," *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 12 (Leipzig University, 2019).

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Khyentse Wangpo and Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé. These Buddhist masters desperately wanted to end the sectarian strife between the different Tibetan Buddhist confessions at that time and systematically set out to collect, preserve, and transmit the vast quantity of scriptures of the Tibetan Buddhist schools which partially were at risk of being lost.

From the three major Buddhist governments that institutionalised the 'Joint Twofold System of Governance' in the 17th century in the Tibetan cultural area, Bhutan is the only one still in existence today, but has been transformed. In 1907, an absolute hereditary monarchy was established under the First King, Ugyen Wangchuck, with the result that the position of the 'regent' ceased to exist. The next significant change in Bhutan occurred in 2008 when a constitutional monarchy was introduced under the Fifth King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. At the same time, the 'Joint Twofold System of Governance' was renewed in the *Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan* represented by the King of Bhutan as head of state. With the occupation of Tibet through the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) from 1950 onwards and the flight of the current fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935) into Indian exile in 1959, the traditional Ganden Podrang government in Tibet came to an abrupt end.[14] Sikkim, on the contrary, first kept its protectorate status within the Republic of India after independence in 1947. However, the reign of the Chögyels of Sikkim ended as well in 1975 with the twelfth Chögyel Pelden Tondup Namgyel when Sikkim was incorporated as a new state into the Indian Union through a referendum, and Buddhist kingship was abolished against his will.

In summary, since the gradual adaptation of Buddhism in Tibet beginning in the 7th century, a kaleidoscopic variety of pre-modern Buddhist forms of government have been institutionalised in the

'Joint Twofold System of Governance' in Bhutan only

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14 During the revision of the *Charter of the Tibetans in Exile* in 1991, heated discussions about the term "union of religion and politics" (Tibetan: *chos srid zung 'brel*) took place with the result that it was kept in the revised version of the charter. In general, members of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in exile, the Tibetan exile communities and Tibetan intellectuals within China have debated topics such as newly defining the 'Joint Twofold System of Governance' or the place of religion in the public domain. For an overview of the different positions in these discourses and the newly formed semantic fields of Tibetan emic terms, see Holly Gayley and Nicole Willock, "Introduction. Theorizing the Secular in Tibetan Cultural Worlds," *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 36, no. 1 (2016).

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Tibetan cultural area along with complex relationships between the societal spheres of religion and politics. From the Tibetan Empire to the Kingdom of Guge Puhrang with Buddhist monk rulers, to the different local hegemonies strongly associated with different Tibetan Buddhist schools and lineages, and finally, at the zenith, to the 'Joint Twofold System of Governance' institutionalised in three major cases in the 17th century, each case demonstrates how Tibet's cultural encounters with diverse forms of foreign governments influenced the adaptation and transformation of emic conceptions of Buddhist rule over time. As a result, Tibetan Buddhist governments in the different pre-modern periods subsequently developed varying functional and structural differentiations: 'secularities'.

In conclusion, areas of interest that point towards boundaries between the societal spheres of religion and politics along with negotiations concerning them are crucial in analysing the 'secularities' of the Tibetan cultural area in different respective periods. These areas of interest include, for example, the 'preceptor-donor' relationship, functions in the relevant societal spheres of religion, politics (and economics), and the legitimisation of Buddhist rule.[15] In Bhutan, the 'Joint Twofold System of Governance' as a pre-modern form of secularity is continued in a transformed and modernised way and provides a unique case in point for research into further processes of social distinction and differentiation in the Tibetan cultural area.

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15 For the applicability of these areas of interest to indicate either merely conceptualised or institutionalised boundaries between the societal spheres of religion and politics based on the case of Bhutan, see Schwerk, "Drawing Lines in a Maṇḍala," 39–44.

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Please cite as:

Schwerk, Dagmar. "Buddhism and Politics in the Tibetan Cultural Area." In *Companion to the Study of Secularity*. Edited by HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities." Leipzig University, 2019. www.multiple-securalities.de/media/css_schwerk_tibetanculturalarea.pdf

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