

Buddhism in Central Asia III

Impacts of Non-Buddhist Influences, Doctrines

Edited by

Lewis Doney
Carmen Meinert
Henrik H. Sørensen
Yukiyo Kasai



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Lewis Doney, Carmen Meinert, Henrik H. Sørensen, and Yukiyo Kasai

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People, Places, Texts, and Topics: Another Look at the Larger Context of the Spread of Chan Buddhism in Eastern Central Asia during the Tibetan Imperial and Post-Imperial Period (7th–10th C.)

Carmen Meinert

Abstract

The region east of the Blue Lake, which was part of the Tibetan Empire (ca. 8th c. to 842, Tib. Bod chen po) and later the Tangut Empire (ca. 1038–1227, in Chinese sources known as Xixia 西夏), was an important multicultural area connecting the equally diverse oasis towns of the Hexi Corridor (Chin. Hexi zoulang 河西走廊) and the Tarim Basin with Sinitic and Tibetan cultural areas. The present chapter explores the development of the contested space between these cultures in a broader historical context. It also discusses religion, especially Chan in both its Chinese form and as adapted into Tibetan, its links to the famous Samyé Debate, and its use in a power struggle during the ninth and tenth centuries that relates to the well-known Tibetan master Gongpa Rapsel (892–975, Tib. dGongs pa Rab gsal). This expands our picture of how Chan masters, Buddhist works, and religious themes might have interacted on the micro-historical level through local and transregional exchanges in Eastern Central Asia. The chapter thereby brings together information on people, places, texts, and topics related to Chan Buddhism in order to actually locate them in geographical space in the contested region east of the Blue Lake.

1 Introduction to a Contested Space: The Tibetan-Chinese Border Region between the 7th and 10th Centuries¹

Religious trends not only travel with trade and along trade routes,² but also expand into new territories as political powers grow or migrate and thus integrate newly conquered lands into their dominion—regions which often remain also religiously contested spaces for longer periods of time. The Tibetan-Chinese border region around the Blue Lake (Tib. mTsho sngon po, Mong. Köke nayur, in Western literature often referred to as Lake Kokonor, a designation which was introduced under Mongol rule, whereas the modern Chinese designation is Qinghai hu 青海湖) certainly remained such a (religiously) contested space between the seventh and tenth centuries—long after the Tibetan Empire (ca. 7th c. to 842, Tib. Bod chen po) had integrated the territory of the former multicultural and multi-ethnic state of the Azha (Tib. 'A zha)/Tuyuhun (吐谷渾) (284–670)³ into the Tibetan realm (map 8.1). A network of local trade routes in this region connected the three cultural units of Tibet, Southern China, and Eastern Central Asia (with the Tarim Basin and Hexi Corridor) and facilitated religious exchange across linguistic and cultural boundaries (fig. 8.1).

The multicultural and multi-ethnic reality which the Tibetan Empire faced at its north-eastern fringes around the Tarim Basin and the Blue Lake is well illustrated in the famous fresco on the northern wall of Mogao Cave (莫高窟) 158,

1 I am indebted to Henrik H. Sørensen, Lewis Doney, Dylan Esler, and an anonymous reviewer for very valuable suggestions on how to improve an earlier draft of this chapter. I would also like to thank Jürgen Schörflinger for kindly preparing the maps for the ERC project *BuddhistRoad*. All remaining mistakes are my own.

2 Peter Wick and Volker Rabens, ed., *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

3 In a geographically strategically important location, the Azha/Tuyuhun State developed a network of local trade routes, namely a further extension of the so-called Silk Roads, or more appropriate for our context, Buddhist Roads. These connected the region to the north-east through the Tsaidam Basin with the multicultural oasis towns Dunhuang and Khotan, to the north with the Hexi Corridor across the Qilian Mountain Range (Chin. Qilian shan 祁連山), and to the south-east with the Sichuan Basin and thus south-western Sinitic cultures. Mátyás Balogh, “On the Emergence of the Qinghai Sections of the Silk Road,” *Chronica* 18 (2019): 31. The Azha/Tuyuhun administration followed a Chinese model, although certain chiefs started to adopt the title *qaghan* (Chin. *kekan* 可汗) instead of emperor (Chin. *wang* 王), probably as a way of countering Chinese influence, sometime during the early fifth century. Julia Escher, “New Information on the Degree of ‘Sinicization’ of the Tuyuhun Clan during Tang Times through Their Marriage Alliances: A Case Study Based on the Epitaphs of Two Chinese Princesses,” *Journal of Asian History* 53.1 (2019): 56; Yihong Pan, “Locating Advantages. The Survival of the Tuyuhun State on the Edge, 300–ca. 580,” *T'oung Pao* 99.4–5 (2013): 287–288.

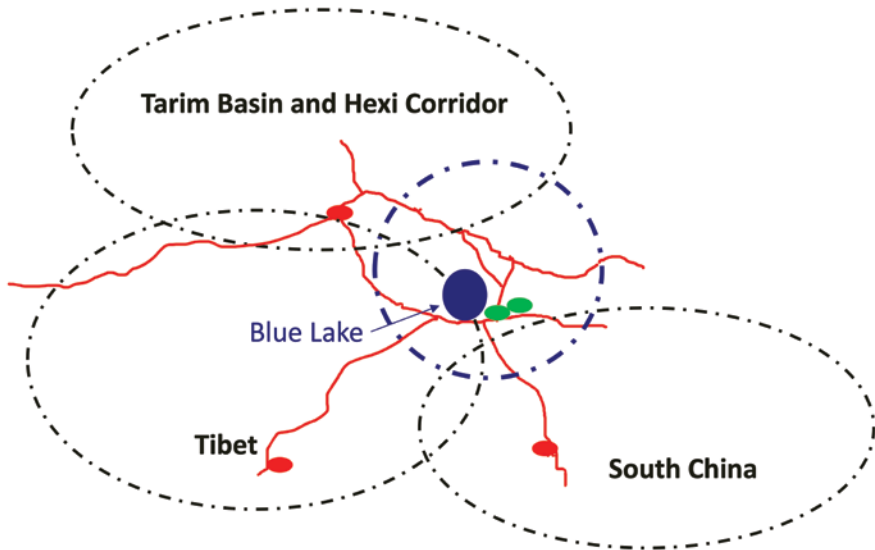


FIGURE 8.1 Exchange routes traversing cultural units in contested Tibetan-Chinese border region

SKETCH BY CARMEN MEINERT

dated to the late eighth to mid-ninth century—a time when the oasis town of Dunhuang (敦煌) was under Tibetan rule (fig. 8.2). The fresco depicts the *parinirvāṇa* scene with a congregation headed by the Tibetan emperor (depicted with a halo between two trees to the left side of the fresco), followed by the Chinese emperor (also depicted with a halo, but smaller in size and placed to the right of the Tibetan emperor), as well as various other princes and local people of Azha/Tuyuhun, Khotanese, Tangut (Tib. *Mi nyag*, Chin. *Dangxiang* 党项), or Uyghur provenance. Thus, this fresco provides us with a window into the eighth-/ninth-century multicultural reality at the northern and north-eastern fringes of the Tibetan Empire, an area referred to as the Pacified Region or *Dégam/Dékham* (Tib. *bDe gams/khams*)⁴ or sometimes simply *Kham* (Tib. *Khams*)—something which does not always make identification easy—and which was governed by a pacification officer (Tib. *bde blon*).⁵

4 I wonder whether the Tibetan term *Dégam* or *Pacified Region* was inspired by the Chinese term ‘Protectorate to Pacify the West’ (640–ca. 790, Chin. *Anxi du hu fu* 安西都護府), which was established by the Tang Dynasty in 640 to control the newly conquered lands in the Tarim Basin. See Michael R. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 103–104, n. 19.

5 The establishment of the *Pacified Region* is mentioned in P. T. 1287, ll. 383–384, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. The passage is found in Jacques Bacot, Frederick W. Thomas, and Charles-



MAP 8.1 Network of Buddhist nodes in Eastern Central Asia
MAP BY JÜRGEN SCHÖRFLINGER

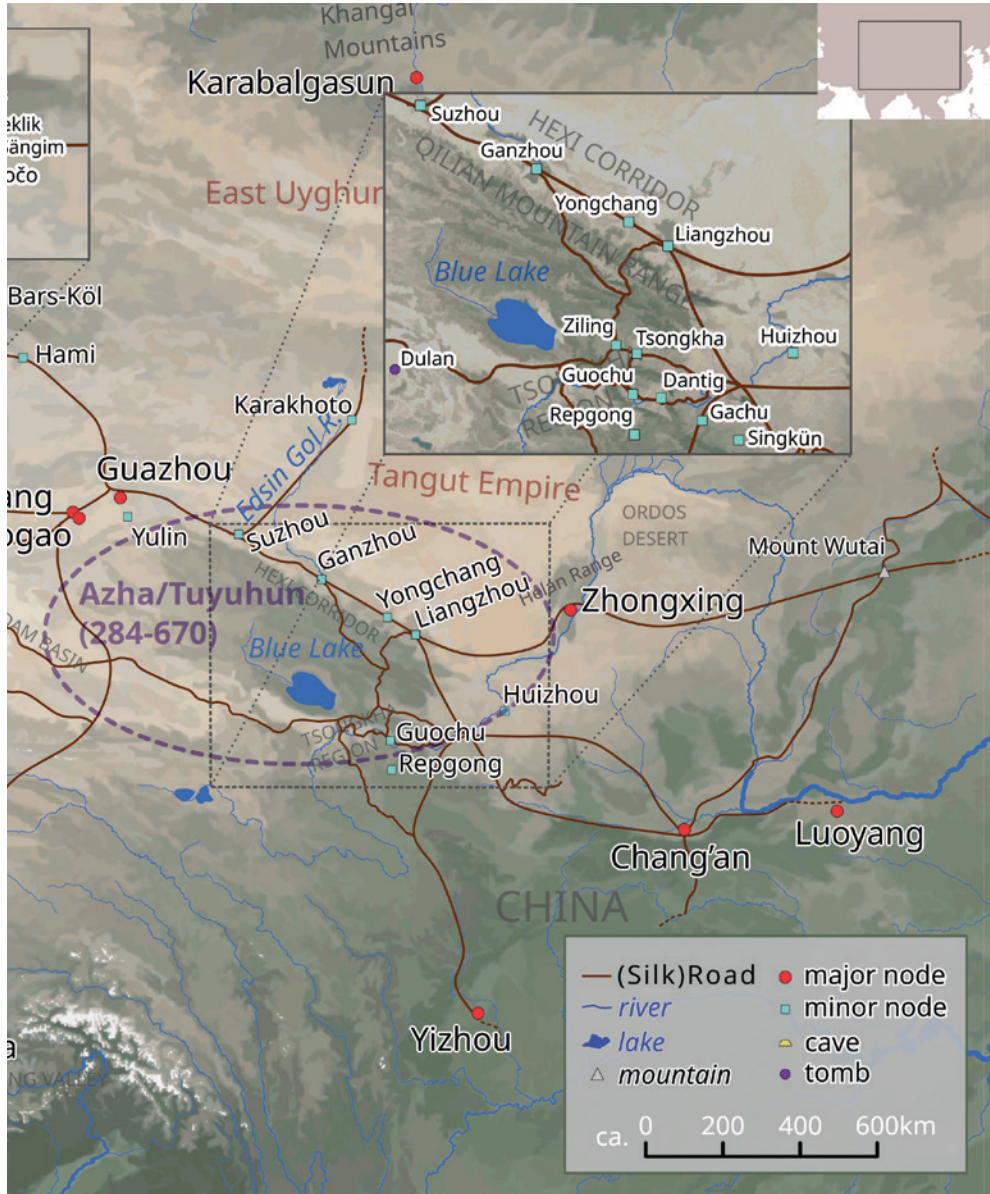




FIGURE 8.2 Mourning scene upon the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, featuring the Tibetan emperor, the Chinese emperor, and other local princes. Dunhuang, end of 8th to mid-9th c. Mogao Cave 158, northern wall. Photograph taken by Paul Pelliot at the beginning of the 20th c.

PELLIOT, *LES GROTTES DE TOUEN-HOUANG: PEINTURES ET SCULPTURES BOUDDHIQUES DES EPOQUES DES WEI, DES T'ANG ET DES SONG. TOME PREMIER, GROTTES 1 A 30, PL. 64*

Along with the multitude of cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the region came a variety of Buddhist orientations, as well as non-Buddhist ones.⁶ One of the prevailing Buddhist trends was Chinese Chan Buddhism.

For a long time after the publication of Paul Demiéville's *Le Concile de Lhasa* in 1952,⁷ the academic study of Chan Buddhism in the Tibetan cultural and religious sphere centered on a single event: The Samyé (Tib. bSam yas) Debate, which presumably took place in the late eighth century between the Dunhuang-based Chan master Moheyan (fl. second half of 8th c., 摩訶衍) and the Indian scholar Kamalaśīla (ca. 740–ca. 795). It was an imperially organised discourse on simultaneist versus gradual approaches towards meditation practice and realisation, allegedly leading to the expulsion of Chinese monks from Tibetan lands. With the recovery of Chan manuscripts from Mogao Cave 17 in Dunhuang, this narrative has been challenged by various scholars over the last decades.⁸ However, there is still a need to re-contextualise the spread of Chan Buddhism within a larger historical and geographical setting, which is the aim of this chapter. To look at the area east of the Blue Lake and adjacent regions from a network approach is helpful to provide new insights into the spread of Chinese Chan Buddhism in the Tibetan sphere. To this end, it is useful to begin the investigation with an overview of important historical events relevant to the contested space, the region east of the Blue Lake, since the Tang (618–907, 唐) and Yarlung dynasties' conquests in the seventh century (fig. 8.3 sketches the relevant events in a timeline).

Following a phase of centralisation of power by the Yarlung Dynasty, a phase of consolidation and one of decentralisation occurred between the seventh and tenth centuries in all parts of Tibetan-conquered lands.⁹ With the

Gustave Toussaint, *Documents de Touen-Houang relatifs à l'histoire du Tibet* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1940), 154. See also Hugh E. Richardson, "The Province of the Bde-blon of the Tibetan Empire, Eighth to Ninth Centuries," in *High Peaks Pure Earth*, ed. Michael Aris (London: Serindia, 1990), 167–176.

6 An example of non-Buddhist influences is discussed by Daniel Berounský in his chapter in this volume.

7 Paul Demiéville, *Le concile de Lhasa* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale de France, 1952).

8 Some of the relevant scholarship is quoted throughout this chapter.

9 In a forthcoming co-authored publication, Dylan Esler and I discuss developments of Buddhism in Tibet during the so-called period of early propagation (7th–9th c., Tib. *snga dar*) and time of fragmentation (9th–10th c., Tib. *sil bu'i dus*). However, we prefer to describe these developments using the terms 'centralisation', 'consolidation', and 'decentralisation', since we feel that this value-neutral terminology might allow at once for a broader perspective and for a more fine-grained analysis of the processes involved. See Carmen Meinert and Dylan Esler, "The History of Buddhism in Tibet (7th–10th C.): Early Contacts, Imperial Period, and Early Post-Imperial Period," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism. Volume Four: History*, ed. Jonathan A. Silk et al. (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

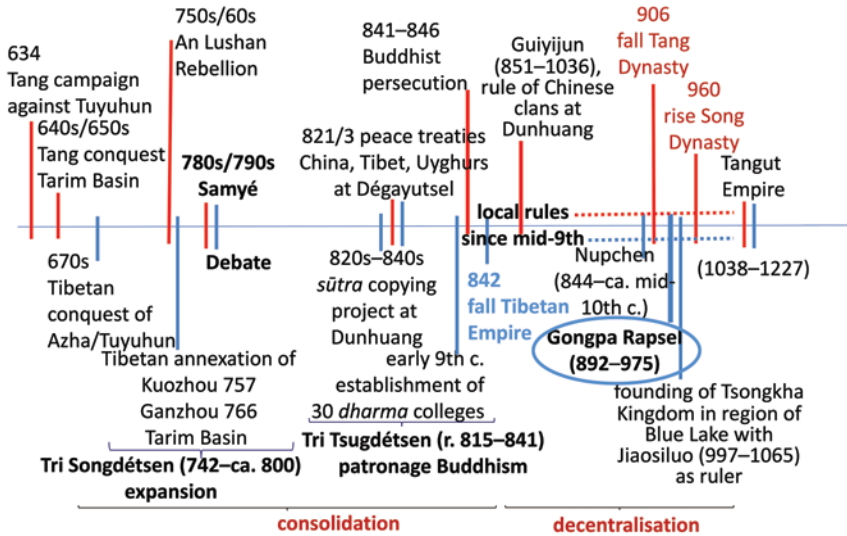


FIGURE 8.3 Timeline relevant to the Tibetan-Chinese border region, 7th–11th c.

SKETCH BY CARMEN MEINERT

Tibetan expansion eastward, the Azha/Tuyuhun state played an important role in the power struggle between Tibet and Tang China, first on a military and then on an ideological level, with the local elites in the region splitting into pro-Tibetan and pro-Tang factions. The Tang needed a buffer zone in the conflict against Tibet in order to secure access to the oasis towns in the Tarim Basin, and so started a military campaign in the region in 634. This resulted in the Azha/Tuyuhun temporarily accepting a tributary status to the Tang.¹⁰

Eventually, the Tibetans took over the region in the 670/680s as the result of the battle at Jima Gol or Dafei River (Chin. Dafei chuan 大非川),¹¹ where Tibetan and local troops apparently defeated 100,000 Tang troops.¹² The Azha

10 Escher, “New Information on the Degree of ‘Sinicization’ of the Tuyuhun Clan during Tang Times,” 67–68.

11 Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 33. In n. 109 Beckwith mentions that the name Jima Gol seems to be an Azha name of Mongolic origin meaning ‘not big river’ which was literally translated into Chinese as ‘Dafei chuan’.

12 David A. Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300–900* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), 206; Denis Twitchett, “Tibet in Tang’s Grand Strategy,” in *Warfare in Chinese History*, ed. Hans van de Ven (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 126–130. Denis Twitchett provides some figures from Chinese historical records, in particular from the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [Old Book of the Tang Dynasty] (196A) and the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [New Book of the Tang Dynasty]

became a vassal state (Tib. *rgyal phran*) of the Yarlung Dynasty and ritually reinforced their submission to the Tibetan emperor through the regular performance of rites linked to the spiritual counterpart of the emperor (Tib. *sku bla*), despite retaining a certain degree of autonomy.¹³ A second Tibetan campaign started after the Tang Dynasty was weakened by the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763, Chin. An Lushan zhi luan 安祿山之亂). It led to the final Tibetan annexation of Guochu (Tib. Guo cu') / Kuozhou (廓州) and the region in the vicinity of Dantig (Tib. Dan tig shan or lDan tig shel gyi dgon/lha khang, Chin. Dandou si 丹斗寺) in 757—places all relevant for the discussion further below. Then the Tibetans annexed the Tarim Basin, including Dunhuang, and finally Kamchu (Tib. Kam bcu) / Ganzhou (甘州) in the Hexi Corridor on the northern side of the Qilian Mountains in 766 (see maps 8.1).¹⁴

Therefore, it is really only from the second half of the eighth century that we can expect a strong Tibetan presence in the region. One can only assume that after the Tang defeat some Chinese military, who had been stationed in the region before it fell, probably left behind families or offspring or retired military personnel to be then governed by the Tibetans. In fact, even in the dialogues of the mid-eighth-century Chinese Chan master Wuzhu (714–774, 無住) (well known from Tibetan and Chinese Dunhuang manuscripts on Chan Buddhism) from the Baotang (保唐) school in Yizhou (益州, in the Jiannan Circuit 劍南道, south-west China, see maps 8.1), we know that some of his

(216A), and notes (ibid., 128, n. 29): “The figures given for armies and casualties [in Chinese sources] are dubious approximations, and often clearly exaggerated. [...] But in many campaigns the numbers of troops were very large [...] and give some impression of the scale of hostilities.”

13 Nathan W. Hill, “The Sku Bla in Imperial Tibetan Religion,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 24 (2015): 58.

14 For a new dating of the Tibetan conquest of Dunhuang/Shazhou between the late 750s and early 760s, see Bianca Horlemann, “A Re-Evaluation of the Tibetan Conquest of Eighth-Century Shazhou/ Dunhuang,” in *Tibet, Past and Present: Tibetan Studies I, PIATS 2000*, ed. Henk Blezer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 49–66, particularly the conclusion on p. 64. Her re-evaluation of the existing sources refutes the former assumption in scholarship that the Tibetan dominion of Dunhuang started only in 781 or 787 (as suggested in Paul Demiéville, *Le concile de Lhasa, 172–177*). It argues that when China was troubled internally by the An Lushan Rebellion from 755 onwards, the Tibetans took the opportunity to fill the power vacuum in the Hexi region. They conquered the economically attractive oasis of Dunhuang from the south, from the Tsaidam Basin, eventually conquering the whole Hexi region from west to east. See also the maps in Horlemann, “A Re-Evaluation of the Tibetan Conquest of Eighth-Century Shazhou/Dunhuang,” 66.

disciples acted as military officers and fought in the contested region in the second half of the eighth century.¹⁵

In reality, it is only after the military power struggle in the contested region was settled in favour of the Tibetans that the ideological power struggle began—one in which Chinese Chan Buddhism played an important role. This should come as no surprise given the strong Chinese influence and historical presence in the region. The Samyé Debate, mentioned above, presumably took place in the late eighth century between the Dunhuang-based Chan master Moheyan and the Indian scholar Kamalaśīla. It was an imperially organised discourse on simultaneist versus gradual approaches towards meditation practice and realisation. Allegedly it was held in the hope of solving the problem of competing Buddhist discourses at court level. According to Tibetan sources, it led to the expulsion of Chinese Chan masters from Tibetan lands, including also the frontier region. The historical facticity of this narrative, however, is certainly questionable.

On the local level the ideological battle in the region began under the rule of Tri Tsugdésen (r. 815–841, Tib. Khri gTsug lde brtsan), known as Relpachen (Tib. Ral pa can). During his reign three important ideological activities of negotiation or pacification took place which impacted our contested region—so it is only during the first half of the ninth century that specific measures were taken to enforce Tibetan presence on the religious level (see fig. 8.3). These were: (1) the founding of Dégayutsel (Tib. De ga g.yu 'tsal) Monastery in Gachu (Tib. (')Ga cu) / Hezhou (河州) (close to Dantig) in order to commemorate the Tibetan peace treaty with the Tang, the Uyghurs, and the Nanzhao Kingdom (738–902, 南詔) in 821/823;¹⁶ (2) the *sūtra* copying project at Dunhuang that

15 Wendi L. Adamek, *The Teachings of Master Wuzhu-Zen and Religion of No-Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 57, 112–114, 118, 123; esp. *ibid.*, section 19, p. 112ff: *Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記 [Record of the Dharma-Jewel Through the Generations], in T. 51.2075, 187c7–188b21. The most important reference to Wuzhu among the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts is in P. T. 116.6b, fols. 164.1–168.2, where he is mentioned as part of a local(ly perceived and/or constructed?) Chan lineage. I discussed this lineage in Carmen Meinert, “The Legend of *Cig car ba* Criticism in Tibet: A List of Six *Cig car ba* Titles in the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po* of Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer (12th Century),” in *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis: Studies in Its Formative Period, 900–1400*. PIATS 2003, ed. Ronald Davidson and Christian K. Wedemeyer (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 31–54.

16 The relevant Dunhuang manuscripts, P. T. 16/101 Tib J 751, have been studied by many scholars, including Matthew T. Kapstein, “The Treaty Temple of the Turquoise Grove,” in *Buddhism between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 21–72; Kapstein revised his former identification of the place Dégayutsel with Yulin Cave 25 (Matthew T. Kapstein, “The Treaty Temple of De Ga g.Yu Tshal: Reconsiderations,” *Journal of Tibetology* 10 (2014): 32–34) on the basis of the correct identification of the place as Hezhou by Xie Jisheng 謝繼勝 and Huang Weizhou 黃

took place from the 820s to 840s;¹⁷ (3) and the establishment of thirty *dharma* colleges (Tib. *chos grwa*) in the early ninth century (more about the latter further below).¹⁸

This consolidation of power ended abruptly with the fall of the Yarlung Dynasty in 842; shortly afterwards the Uyghur Khaganate fell in 840, and Tang China was hit by Buddhist persecution during the Huichang era (840–845, 會昌). The disintegration of large parts of East and Central Asia in the ninth/early tenth century led to the establishment of local rules everywhere in East and Central Asia, not just in Tibet. For Dunhuang, it is interesting that with the local rule of the Chinese Guiyijun regime (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army) began a phase of unprecedented local patronage and a veritable ‘Buddhist golden age.’¹⁹ Something similar also took place to the east of the Blue Lake—if we are to take seriously references to the activities of Gongpa Rapsel (ca. 892–ca. 975, Tib. dGongs pa Rab gsal),²⁰ who was active in the region east of the Blue Lake in the century following the demise of the Tibetan Empire. According to later historical sources, he is said to have countered the activities of local proponents of Chan Buddhism there (see section 3 below).

We may regard the activities of his contemporary Nupchen Sangyé Yéshé (ca. 844 to mid-10th c., Tib. gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes) (fig. 8.3), who was one of the first Tibetan doxographers and was active in Central Tibet, as a first strong voice of counter-reaction to the developments taking place in the Tibetan-Chinese border area. Through differentiating Chinese Chan and Tibetan Dzogchen (Tib. *rdzogs chen*), he was reacting to a perceived

維忠, “Yulin ku di 25 ku bihua zangwen tiji xiedu 榆林窟第 25 窟壁畫藏文題記釈讀 [A Textual Research on the Tibetan Inscription on the Fresco of Yulin Cave 25],” *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Artefacts] 4 (2007): 70.

- 17 Kazushi Iwao, “The Purpose of Sūtra Copying in Dunhuang under the Tibetan Rule,” in *Dunhuang Studies: Prospects and Problems for the Coming Second Century of Research*, ed. Irina Popova and Liu Yi (St. Petersburg: Slavica, 2012), 102–105.
- 18 Helga Uebach, “On Dharma-Colleges and Their Teachers in the Ninth Century Tibetan Empire,” in *Indo-Sinica-Tibetica: Studi in Onore Di Lucian Petech*, ed. Paolo Daffina (Rome: Bardi Editore, 1990), 393–418.
- 19 Henrik H. Sørensen, “Donors and Esoteric Buddhism in Dunhuang During the Reign of the Guiyijun,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia 1—Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 91–122; Henrik H. Sørensen, “Guiyijun and Buddhism at Dunhuang: A Year by Year Chronicle,” *BuddhistRoad Paper* 4.2 (2019).
- 20 For the dates of Gongpa Rapsel, Roberto Vitali suggested 832–915, one 60-year cycle earlier. See Roberto Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet* (London: Serindia, 1990), 62, n. 1.

amalgamation of different strands of Buddhist practice that was popular in these regions.²¹

Gongpa Rapsel lived at a time when Sinitic territories did not belong to a unified empire and before the region east of the Blue Lake had come under the local rule of the Tsongkha (Tib. Tsong kha) confederation under the leadership of Jiaosiluo (997–1065, 角厮囉), an apparent descendent of the former Tibetan imperial rulers, enthroned in Guochu (Tib. Guo cu’)/Kuozhou. We can therefore imagine that it was a time allowing for religious creativity and innovation without official censorship in a multicultural environment in which Buddhists of different ethnic backgrounds coexisted harmoniously.²² In fact, a collection of texts by a Chinese pilgrim travelling through the region in the 960s on his way from Mt. Wutai (Chin. Wutai shan 五臺山, Five-Peak-Mountain) to Nālandā in India, the so-called Daozhao (道昭) manuscript (10L Tib J 754) (named as such after the personal name Daozhao mentioned in a colophon), includes five letters of passage which provide evidence that Tibetan and Chinese monks and officials equally assisted the Chinese pilgrim during his travels in the region.²³

The period of decentralisation (see fig. 8.3) only came temporarily to an end once the region around the Blue Lake had been incorporated into the territory of the Tangut Empire (ca. 1038–1227, in Chinese sources known as Xixia 西夏), which stretched from Dunhuang to the Ordos bend. This empire enjoyed an unprecedented royal patronage of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism from the mid-12th century on, a development that attests to the eastward move of Tibetan Buddhism which I discussed elsewhere.²⁴

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- 21 In a previous study I have argued that we may see the early Tibetan doxographical work, the *bSam gtan mig sgron* [Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation] by Nupchen as a starting point for the creation of a legend about Tibetan criticism of Chinese Chan Buddhists. See Meinert, “The Legend of *Cig car ba* Criticism in Tibet.” I further suggest that Nupchen certainly had developments in the Tibetan-Chinese frontier region in mind, which was, after all, even during his lifetime still a region with a strong Sinitic influence.
- 22 Bianca Horlemann, “The Relations of the Eleventh-Century Tsong kha Tribal Confederation to Its Neighbour States on the Silk Road,” in *Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Brandon Dotson (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 79–102; Bianca Horlemann, “On the Origin of Jiaosiluo, the First Ruler of the Tsong kha Tribal Confederation in Eleventh Century A mdo,” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 34 (2005): 127–154.
- 23 The Daozhao manuscript is analysed and contextualised in detail in an exemplary study by Imre Galambos and Sam van Schaik, *Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-Century Buddhist Pilgrim* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 150, 161–162. 10L Tib J 754, Tibetan letter 2, l. 8–9 (ibid., 161–162): “Up to this point [in the monk’s journey] both Chinese and Tibetans have [treated him] honourably [...] and conducted him stage by stage.” (Tib. *’di man chad rgya bod byin gyis kyang gar [...] (chad) [...] (s.ching.g) dang/su skyal rimpar ba gyi’s pa lags so/*)
- 24 For the spread of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism eastward to the Tangut Empire, see my following articles: Carmen Meinert, “Embodying the Divine in Tantric Ritual Practice: Examples

With this historical sketch in the background, in the following I shall firstly focus on some Buddhist activities during the Tibetan Empire in the region east of the Blue Lake in order to contextualise the position of Chan Buddhism on a micro-historical level. Secondly, I shall locate people, places, texts, and topics mentioned in some Dunhuang manuscripts in this region, in order to gain a new perspective on the spread of Chan Buddhism along a network of trade routes. Thirdly, I shall situate Gongpa Rapsel, a cultural hero according to later Tibetan historiography, in this multicultural contested space.

2 Negotiating Territory through Religion: Buddhist Activities in the Tibetan-Chinese Border Region

What was the role of Buddhism in the region east of the Blue Lake before the Tibetans conquered this contested realm? According to the *Liangshu* 梁書 [The History of the Liang Dynasty]—the annals of a Chinese state bordering to the south of the Azha/Tuyuhuan and under the rule of Emperor Wudi of the Liang (r. 502–549, 梁武帝), a fervent supporter of Buddhism—the Azha/Tuyuhun elite and travelling merchants had close economic exchanges with the Liang state and were also Buddhists (fig. 8.1). In 514 they even requested permission of the Liang to establish a nine-storeyed Buddhist pagoda in Yizhou (present-day

from the Chinese Karakhoto Manuscripts from the Tangut Empire (ca. 1038–1227),” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 50 (2019): 56–72; Carmen Meinert, “Creation of Tantric Sacred Spaces in Eastern Central Asia,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia I—Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 244–171; Carmen Meinert, “Production of Tantric Buddhist Texts in the Tangut Empire (11th to 13th C.): Insights from Reading Karakhoto Manuscript ϕ 249 ϕ 327 金剛亥母修習儀 *Jingang haimu xiuxi yi* [The Ritual of the Yogic Practice of Vajravārāhī] in Comparison with Other Tantric Ritual Texts,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 44 (2021): 441–484; Carmen Meinert, “Beyond Spatial and Temporal Contingencies: Tantric Rituals in Eastern Central Asia under Tangut Rule, 11th–13th C.,” in *Buddhism in Central Asia II—Practices and Rituals, Visual and Material Transfer*, ed. Yukiyo Kasai and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 313–365. I published a map of the territory of the Tangut Empire, showing that it included the region east of the Blue Lake, in Meinert, “Creation of Tantric Sacred Spaces in Eastern Central Asia,” 253–254. It is also available on the *BuddhistRoad* website here: <https://buddhistroad.ceres.rub.de/en/visual-aids/>.

The relationship between the kings of the Tangut Empire and the Tanguts living under Azha/Tuyuhun and then Tibetan rule in the region east of the Blue Lake between the third and ninth centuries has not, to the best of my knowledge, been researched so far. Understanding this relationship would certainly shed further light on the process by which Tibetan masters were invited to the Tangut court to spread Tantric Buddhism. I would not be surprised if we were to discover that they were actually connected to the region around the Blue Lake.

Chengdu 成都) (map 8.1).²⁵ Moreover, in the region under discussion Buddhist sites have emerged from as early as the turn of the common era. By the time of the Tibetan-Tang Battle at Dafei River in the 670s, we witness quite a high density of Buddhist sites (map 8.2),²⁶ including sites that developed through exchanges with the Sinitic world. Hence, the contested Tibetan-Chinese border region was a large area that had been subject to Buddhist influence for an extended period of time.

One of the pacification strategies instrumentalising Buddhism under the reign of Tri Tsugdétsen is particularly relevant to the present discussion, namely the above-mentioned founding of *dharma* colleges (fig. 8.3). Helga Uebach, who studied the relevant sources, has shown how monastic education was integrated into the organisation of the Tibetan state in the first half of the ninth century. More importantly for our discussion, these *dharma* colleges were used as institutions of Tibetan civilisation in the contested region on the north-eastern fringes of the Tibetan Empire: twenty out of a total of thirty were established in the east, that is ten in the north-east, in Dégam, and ten in the south-east, in Dokham (mDo 'khams) / Domé (Tib. mDo smad).²⁷

The list of *dharma* colleges from 1283 in Nelpa Paṇḍita Drakpa Mönlam Lodrö's (fl. 13th c., Tib. Nel pa paNDi ta Grags pa sMon lam blo gros) chronicle *sNgon gyi gtam me tog phreng ba* [Account of the Early [Events] Called the Garland of Flowers] is probably the most complete one; two earlier lists are found in the mid-12th-century *lDe'u chos 'byung* [Déu Religious History] by

25 Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Liangshu* 梁書 [The Book of the Liang] 54 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 810. Pan, "Locating Advantages," 297.

26 The toponyms of the Buddhist sites included in map 8.2 were first identified in Bianca Horlemann, "Buddhist Sites in Amdo and Former Longyou from the 8th to the 13th Century," in *Old Tibetan Studies: Dedicated to the Memory of R.E. Emmerick. Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS*, 2003, ed. Christina Scherrer-Schaub (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 119–157. I list here the Tibetan and/or Chinese equivalents of the Buddhist sites mentioned in map 8.2 in alphabetical order: Baojue Monastery (Chin. Baojue si 宝觉寺), Dangpö zima Monastery (Tib. Dang po'i gzi ma dgon, Chin. Dange yima si 当格乙麻寺), Dulan Tombs (Chin. Dulan 都蘭, Tib. Tu'u lan), Dratsang Monastery (Tib. Grwa tshang dgon, Chin. Zhazang si 扎藏寺), Ganglong Caves (Chin. Ganglong shiku 崗龍石窟), Haizang Monastery (Chin. Haizang si 海藏寺), Hongzang Monastery (Chin. Hongzang si 弘宏藏寺), Jampa bumling Cave (Tib. Byams pa 'bum gling, Chin. Longxingsi 龍興寺, better known under its Ming Dynasty name Bingling si 炳靈寺), Longquan Monastery (Chin. Longquan si 龍泉寺), Mt. Haixin (Tib. mTsho snying mahādeva, Chin. Haixin shan 海心山), Shengrong Monastery (Chin. Shengrong si 圣容寺), Tajé Monastery (Tib. rTa rjes dgon, Chin. Mati si 馬蹄寺), Tiantishan Cave (Chin. Tiantishan shiku 天梯山石窟), Tuloushan Caves (Chin. Tuloushan shiku 土樓山石窟), Wanshou Monastery (Chin. Wanshou si 万寿寺), and Xifengwo Monastery (Chin. Xifengwo si 西蜂窩寺).

27 Uebach, "On Dharma-Colleges and their Teachers in the Ninth Century Tibetan Empire."

Déu José (1085–1171, Tib. lDe'u Jo sras) and in the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscript 10L Tib J 689 (I will return to this below).²⁸ In each of the three regions (Central Tibet (Tib. dBus, which is not mentioned in my chart below), Dégam (NE), and Dokham (SE)) we find four teaching colleges, two *vinaya* colleges, and four meditation colleges (fig. 8.4).²⁹ Thanks to Bianca Horlemann's identification of many of the toponyms in the Tibetan-Chinese border region,³⁰ we are now able to locate five specific sites (in black script in the list below) in Dégam, east of the Blue Lake on the map. Among them are four meditation centres.

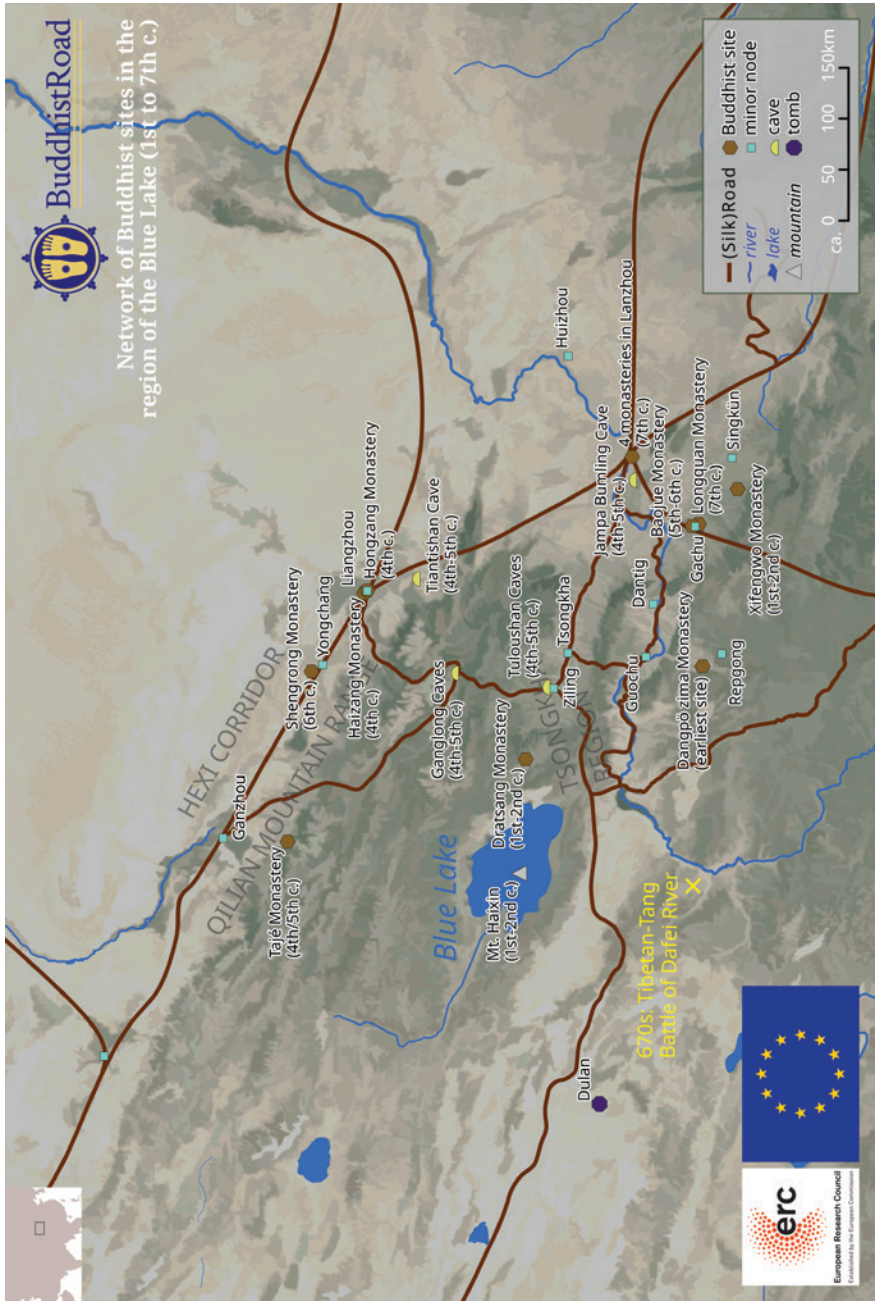
The identifiable *dharma* colleges are a *vinaya* college in Gachu/Hezhou situated on the site where Dégayutse Monastery was founded to commemorate the above-mentioned 821-peace treaty; and four meditation colleges: one at Dantig (where Gongpa Rapsel was active nearly one century later) and three around Trikha (Tib. Khri kha, Chin. Guide 貴德). Moreover, the Dunhuang manuscript 10L Tib J 689 provides further information about various lineages of masters at additional *dharma* colleges: Nem Ganden Jangchup (fl. 9th/10th c., Tib. Nem dGa' ldan byang chub), the tantric master of Gongpa Rapsel, is mentioned for a Dogam (Tib. mDo gams, apparently a spelling mistake for bDe gams) lineage. Moreover, the list of masters at the *dharma* college at Guochu (here: Tib. Gog cu) / Kuozhou mentions masters of multiple ethnic backgrounds, namely two Tibetans from the Nyang (Tib. Myang) and Go (Tib. 'Go) clans, possibly one Azha/Tuyunhun teacher (Tib. za ?), and one Tangut one (Tib. 'grent).³¹ This shows that there was another *dharma* college in Guochu/Kuozhou (fig. 8.5) with a multi-ethnic group of masters. All of these places in the contested region are located downstream of the Ma (Tib. rMa) or Yellow River, not too far from the 670s battle fields at Dafei River (map 8.3).

28 The sources and variations in the lists are discussed in Uebach, "On Dharma-Colleges and their Teachers in the Ninth Century Tibetan Empire," 394–400.

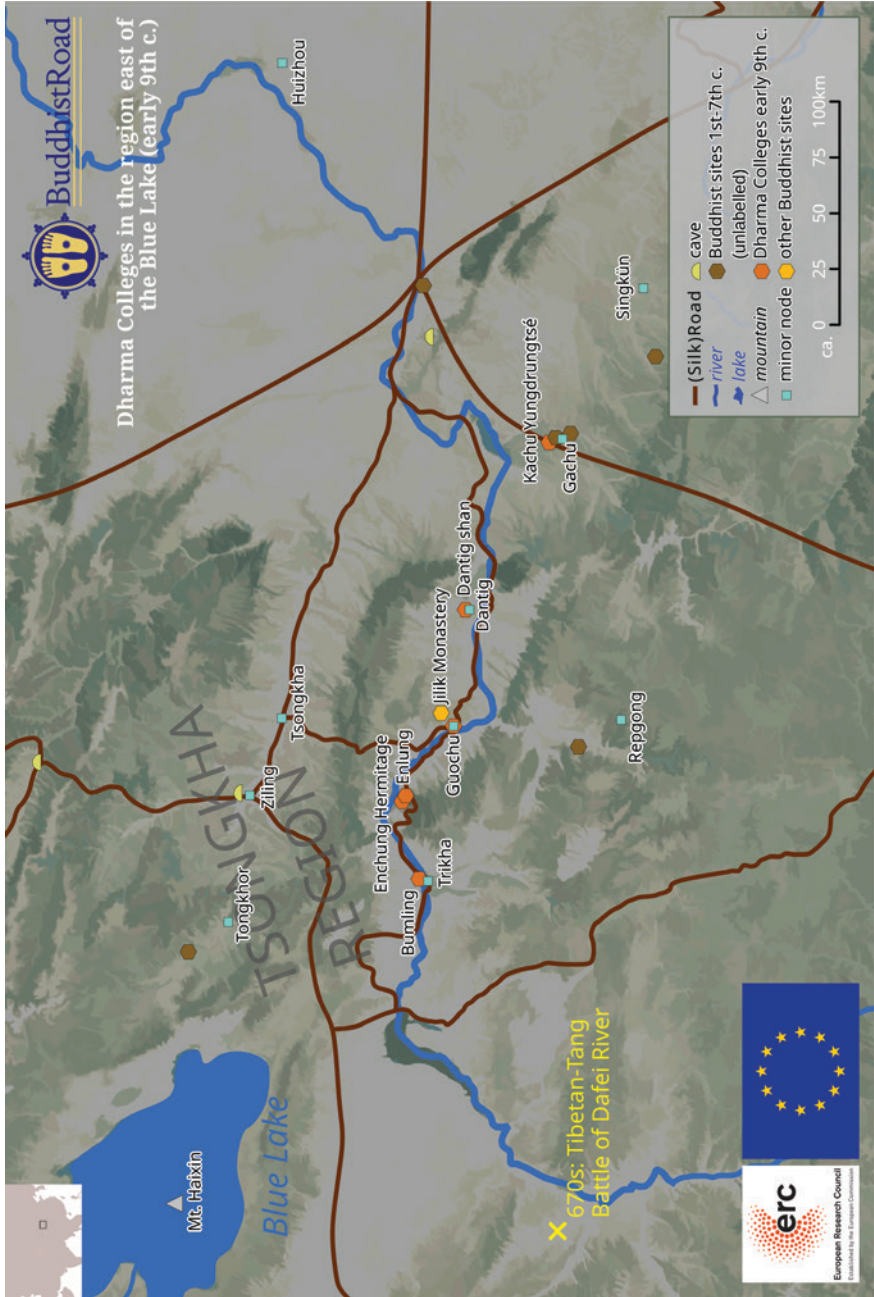
29 Zhé Orjé (Tib. Zha'i 'Or bye), Zhé Bega (Tib. Zha'i Berga), Khyélungshö (Tib. Khya'i rlung shod), Kachu Yungdrungtsé (Tib. Ka chu gYung drung rce), Gagön Tukjélhündrup (Tib. Ga gon Thugs rje lhun grub), Dantig shan (Tib. Dan ti[g] shan), Bumling (Tib. 'Bum gling), Enlung (Tib. An lung), Enchung (Tib. An chung), Jingga Rago (Tib. 'Jing gi Ra 'go), Tré Kadrak (Tib. Tre'i Ka brag), Kamgyi Ngangmodrin (Tib. sKam gyi Ngang mo 'grin), Chitik Tringka (Tib. Pyi tig Pring ka), Gongtang Jiktendrol (Tib. Gong thang 'Jig rten sgröl), Arum Jamnyom (Tib. 'O rum Byams snyoms), Lingtang Aryélung (Tib. Gling thang Arya'i lung), Mershö Sergingwenné (Tib. Mer shod Ser 'ging dben gnas), Jingi Gyajéwenné (Tib. 'Jin gi rGya bya'i dben gnas), and Lenyülgyi Dra-utok (Tib. Glan yul gyi sGra'u tog).

30 Bianca Horlemann, "Buddhist Sites in Amdo and Former Longyou."

31 Uebach, "On Dharma-Colleges and their Teachers in the Ninth Century Tibetan Empire," 408–411.



MAP 8.2 Network of Buddhist sites in the region of the Blue Lake before the Chinese and Tibetan conquests (1st–7th c.)
 MAP BY JÜRGEN SCHÖRFLINGER



MAP 8.3 Location of *dharma* colleges (orange hexagons) in the region east of the Blue Lake established in the early 9th c. through Tibetan imperial patronage
 MAP BY JÜRGEN SCHÖRFLINGER

	Dégam, NE	Dokham/Domé, SE
categories		
(1) teaching colleges	Zhé Orjé Zhé Bega Khyélung shö ---	Jinggi Rago Tré Kadrak Kamgyi Ngangmodrin Chitik Tringka
(2) <i>vinaya</i> colleges	Kachu Yungdrungtsé Gagön Tukjélhündrup	Gongtang Jiktendröl Arum Jamnyom
(3) meditation colleges	Dantig shan Bumling Enlung Enchung	Lingtang Aryélung Mershö Sergingwenné Jingi Gyajéwenné Lenyülgyi Dra'utok

FIGURE 8.4 List of 20 *dharma* colleges established on the eastern fringes of the Tibetan Empire, 9th c., according to Nelpa Paṇḍita
INFORMATION EXTRACTED BY AUTHOR FROM UEBACH, "ON DHARMA-COLLEGES AND THEIR TEACHERS IN THE NINTH CENTURY TIBETAN EMPIRE," 397, TABLE II

3 Interconnection of People, Places, Texts, and Topics

Is it possible to locate people, places, texts, and topics related to Chan Buddhism in this inter-cultural contested space? So far, one significant piece of information has escaped the attention of modern scholars, this author included (when I first worked on the Dunhuang manuscript 10L Tib J 689 many years ago).³² Namely, that the description of lineages of *dharma* colleges in Dégam mentioned in the manuscript is written on the verso side of the second folio of an important short Chan text: a text quoted in Nupchen's tenth-century doxographical work *Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* under the title *Lung chung* [Small Treatise].³³

32 Carmen Meinert, "The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought: Reflections on the Tibetan Dunhuang Manuscripts 10L Tib J 689-1 and PT 699," in *Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein and Brandon Dotson (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 239–301.

33 Meinert, "The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought," 242, see also *ibid.*, 243, n. 14–16; gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, *gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes rin po ches mdzad pa'i sgom gyi gnang gsal bar phye ba bSam gtan mig sgron ces bya ba* [Lamp of the Eye of Contemplation Explaining [the Meaning] of Meditation, Composed

The tiny cut at the right side of the folio (fig. 8.5, yellow square to the right) is indeed a proof that it is the verso side and not a random other folio.³⁴ The lineage text is obviously written by a different hand in a more cursive script. The Chan text on the recto side is a short meditation instruction of how to enter into a non-conceptual state, leading to the following experience: “Non-conceptuality is vividly clear, and [even this] lucidness is not conceptualised. This is the primordial gnosis of intrinsic awareness, which cannot be designated as ‘this’ [existing entity].” (IOL Tib J 689, fol. 116r.3–4). Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos have analysed the so-called Dazhao manuscript (IOL Tib J 754) mentioned above, which is a collection of texts gathered by a pilgrim travelling through our region in the 960s. The authors have shown how different texts of one manuscript are interconnected and how an object we now refer to as one manuscript was gradually built up. I suggest something similar for the present case. It is not coincidental that we find a list of masters at the *dharma* colleges in Dégam on the verso of the important Chan text commonly known as the *Small Treatise*. We may wonder whether it could even be a text that was taught in those institutions as well. After all, the *dharma* colleges along the Ma or Yellow River were far away from the imperial administrative hub in Central Tibet, and knowledge circulating in them might not have been so easily controlled or managed. In my previous publication mentioned above, I also suggested to view the Dunhuang manuscript P. T. 699, which is an apparently locally produced commentary to the short root text IOL Tib J 689, as a hybrid Chan-Dzogchen text.³⁵ In the comment to the section on non-conceptuality it is stated that masters of Atiyoga, that is Dzogchen, are like a *garuḍa*, instantaneously illuminating all Buddhist vehicles without exception, whereas those who teach according to the *sūtras* are like a young goat clumsily climbing the rocks, expounding the teachings in a complicated manner (P. T. 699, fol. 5r6–8).

Ueyama Daishun (上山大峻) suggested in a paper delivered in 1983 a relatively simple stratification to classify Dunhuang Chan manuscripts dating from (1) the period of Chinese cultural influence (750–780), through (2) the period of Tibetan rule and its aftermath (780–ca. 860), to (3) the period of the Chinese local rule of the Guiyijun (since 900) (fig. 8.6 correlates the second and third strata to events discussed in this chapter). Based on Ueyama’s periodisation, Jeffrey L. Broughton in *The Bodhidharma Anthology* compiled lists

by gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes Rinpoche], reproduced from a manuscript made presumably from an Eastern Tibetan print by 'Khor gdon gter sprul 'Chi med rig dzin (Leh: Smantsis shesrig spendzod, vol. 74, 1974), 144.4, 160.1, 172.2–3.

34 Sam van Schaik kindly confirmed this information from having handled the manuscript (personal communication 13 March, 2022).

35 Meinert, “The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought.”

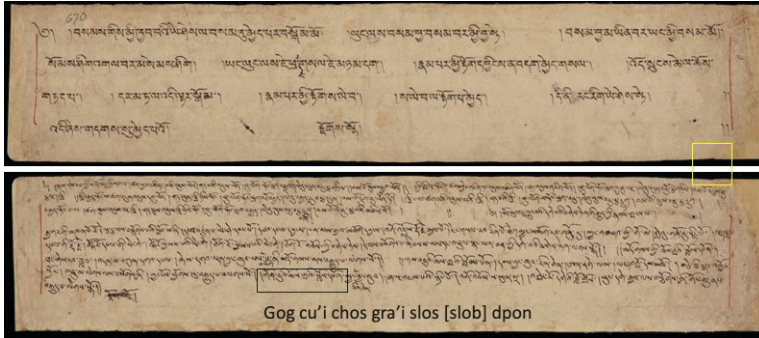


FIGURE 8.5 Chan text Lung chung [Small Treatise] (upper folio) and description of lineages of *dharma* colleges (bottom folio). Dunhuang, 9th c. IOL TIB J 689, FOL. 116V AND R (ADDITIONS BY AUTHOR), BL

of Chinese and Tibetan Chan-related texts found within the Dunhuang manuscript corpus,³⁶ a selection of which is provided below (fig. 8.7). However, he did not include the manuscripts revisited in the present chapter.

I suggest that IOL Tib J 689, containing the lineage of masters at the various *dharma* colleges, was produced during the period of Tibetan rule over Dégam, namely the ninth century; and that the commentary P. T. 699 is a local creation maybe even produced in the surroundings of the *dharma* colleges in the region east of the Blue Lake in the Tibetan post-imperial period, probably in the tenth century, when censorship was a thing of the past (fig. 8.7). The former appears to be a relatively straightforward translation from a Chinese source text, and I would qualify it as a Chinese Chan text in Tibetan language. The

36 I have not had access to the paper delivered by Ueyama Daishun (“A Chronological Stratification of the Tun-huang Ch’an Manuscripts,” paper delivered at the CISHAAN Tun-huang/Turfan Seminar, Kyoto, Japan, 2 September 1983). For the compilation of the lists see Jeffrey L. Broughton, *The Bodhidharma Anthology: The Earliest Records of Zen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 98–104.

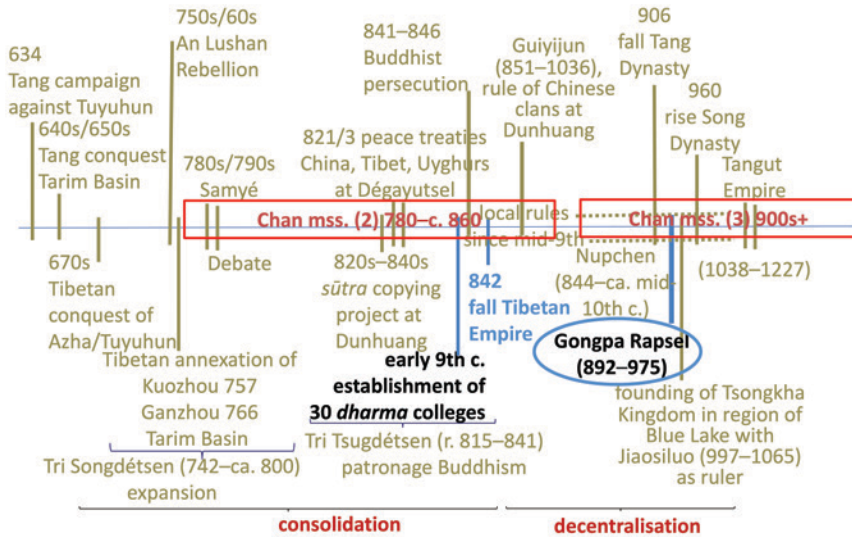


FIGURE 8.6 Phases of production of Dunhuang Chan manuscripts

SKETCH BY CARMEN MEINERT

latter, however, is a local interpretation and appropriation of Chinese Chan thought.³⁷

I would equally place another manuscript in this third phase of production of Chan manuscripts, namely the well-studied manuscript P. T. 996, which is also of immediate relevance to the topic of the contested Tibetan-Chinese frontier region with its spread of Chan Buddhism. People, places, texts, and topics were, in fact, interconnected and circulated within the larger Buddhist network. Whereas transregional exchanges are clearly evident in the above-mentioned Dazhao manuscript 10L Tib J 754 studied by Imre Galambos and Sam van Schaik, P. T. 996, first studied by Macelle Lalou in 1939,³⁸ on the other hand, is an exceptional example of a regional exchange and the local

37 In his book *Tibetan Zen*, van Schaik did not differentiate between the two categories in the same way but simply refers to all Tibetan language Chan texts as Tibetan Zen: “It might be more accurate to refer to the Chinese traditions as *Chan* and the Korean as *Son*, while the Tibetans used their translation of the Sanskrit, *Samten* (*bsam brtan*). However, *Zen* is used here across these linguistic distinctions for the sake of simplicity. [...] On the other hand, the use of the single term *Zen* should not be taken to imply a single tradition unchanging across time and space.” See Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen—Discovering a Lost Tradition* (Boston, London: Snow Lion, 2015), 193, n. 1.

38 Marcelle Lalou, “Document Tibétain sur l’expansion du Dhyāna Chinois,” *Journal Asiatique* 231 (1939): 505–523.

- (1) 750-780, period of Chinese cultural influence in Dunhuang
- (2) 780-ca. 860, period of Tibetan rule of Dunhuang and aftermath
- P. chin 4646 (account to Debate of Samyé)
 - P. chin 2125 and many other copies of the *Lidai fabao ji* (Wuzhu 714-774, founder of Baotang School), composed shortly after 774
 - P. chin. 2885 and others *Jueguan lun* (Niotou/Oxhead School)
 - PT 116
 - IOL Tib J 689
- (3) 900s+, period of local rule in Dunhuang (Guiyijun) of Chinese families
- PT 699
 - PT 996

FIGURE 8.7 Selected list of Dunhuang Chan manuscripts according to phases of production (fig. 8.6)

LIST BY CARMEN MEINERT ON THE BASIS OF BROUGHTON, *THE BODHIDHARMA ANTHOLOGY*, 98–104

impact exerted by the Tibetan Chan practitioner Tsiktsa Namké Nyingpo (fl. early 9th c., name spelled as Tib. Tshig tsa Nam ka'i snying po in the text).³⁹ According to P. T. 996, he was connected to a Chan lineage that stretched from Kuča in the Turfan oasis, through Shachu (Tib. Sha cu) / Shazhou (沙州) or Dunhuang, Kamchu/Ganzhou, Seuchu (Tib. Se'u cu) / Suzhou (肅州), to the region east of the Blue Lake (see map 8.1). Namké Nyingpo met his own teacher, the Chinese master Man (fl. late 8th / early 9th c., Tib. Man Hva shang), in Tsongkha (spelled Tib. Tsong ka in the text) and passed away a little further to the south in a hermitage in Trikha (Tib. Khri ka)—close to Dantig—probably in the first half of the ninth century (see map 8.3).⁴⁰ According to the manuscript, he is said to have shown many miracles of light at the moment of death. These miracles were said to have been witnessed by the *saṃgha* superior Pelgyi Gyeltsen (fl. 9th c., Tib. dPal gyi rgyal mtshan) of Jilik (Tib. 'Byi lig) or Mile (Chin. Mi le 彌勒, Skt. Maitreya) Monastery at Guochu (Tib. Guo cu) /

39 Tsiktsa Namké Nyingpo is to be distinguished from the famous disciple of Padmasambhava, a namesake with a different clan name: Nup Namké Nyingpo (late 8th c., Tib. gNubs Nam ka'i snying po). The latter is, in fact, mentioned in P. T. 699, fol. 2r7. See the discussion in Meinert, "The Conjunction of Chinese Chan and Tibetan rDzogs chen Thought," 264–265, n. 97.

40 Lalou, "Document Tibétain sur l'expansion du Dhyāna Chinois," 510–513.

Kuozhou, who paid homage to the accomplished Chan master at the site of the miracle (for the location of the places, see above map 8.3).⁴¹ I would read this as a classical Tibetan miracle story and as such would also contextualise it as an early narrative account of the attainment of a rainbow body, the dissolution of the physical body at the moment of death, the highest accomplishment within the Dzogchen teachings.⁴² Thus, with Namké Nyingpo we have a historical personality who is said by tradition to have embodied doctrinal openness in a multicultural and multi-ethnic region, practising meditation according to the Chan teachings passed on to him by his Chinese teacher Master Man.⁴³

41 For the identification of the place and monastic site, see Kazushi Iwao, “Gog Cu as Tibetan Buddhist Site of the North-Eastern Amdo Area during the Post-Imperial Period,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 60 (2021): 161–173. I wonder whether Jilik Monastery could be identical with the *dharma* college at Guochu mentioned in 10L Tib J 689, fol. 116r (fig. 8.5 and discussion of the manuscript above).

42 In his intriguing article on the experience of luminosity in Buddhist traditions, Matthew Kapstein came to the same conclusion. See Matthew T. Kapstein, “The Strange Death of Pema the Demon Tamer,” in *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 138–139. Sam van Schaik also tried to put this in the local Chinese context. See Sam van Schaik, *Tibetan Zen*, 166.

After having completed the writing of this paper, I asked myself how we could know whether the light experience during the death of Namké Nyingpo would be a result of Dzogchen practice in the Buddhist Nyingma tradition or the non-Buddhist tradition of Bön (Tib. *bon*). After all, the presence of followers of Bön is even attested for the narrative accounts about Gongpa Rapsel in 1283 by Nelpa Paṇḍita. See my discussion further below. This is certainly a topic deserving further investigation.

43 It is worth mentioning that according to P. T. 996, Chinese Chan Master Man and his Tibetan disciple Namké Nyingpo had a political connection as well. Master Man is said to have met with the Tibetan military leader and pacification officer (Tib. *bde blon*) Zhang Tri Sumjé (fl. 8th/9th c., Tib. Zhang Khri sum rje, Chin. Shang Qilixin'er 尚起律心兒), who was responsible for the Tibetan conquests of Eastern Central Asia. The passage in question (P. T. 996, fols. 1v7–2r3) reads: “Thirty years later [master Man] wished to go to China. The pacification officer Zhang Tri Sumjé Marbu invited him to eat. He gave him presents and asked: ‘After the departure of the master, who will be able to teach the Buddhist path?’ [Master Man] answered: ‘My disciple Tsiktsa Namk[é Nyingpo] knows the Buddhist meaning. He is able to teach the path and the practices of the Buddhist path. Ask him there’. Having instructed him [in this way], he went to China.” (Tib. */de nas lo sum cu lon te rgya yul du gshegs kar/ bde blon zhang khri sum rje mar bus hva shang bshos// gsol/ yon phul nas gsol pa/ hva shang gshegs pa’I slad na/ chos lam ston nus pa su mchIs/ smras dpa’/ bdag gI slob ma tshI g tsa nam ka chos kyi don rig ste/ lam ston nus kyIs chos lam spyod pa nam s kyIs der drIs shI g/ ces bstan nas rgya yul du gshegs so/*.) See also Lalou, “Document Tibétain sur l’expansion du Dhyāna Chinois,” 511. Thus, Zhang Tri Sumjé is a good example for the faction at the Tibetan court apparently in support of Chinese Chan Buddhism, a fact that is often denied in scholarship. Another Chinese Dunhuang manuscript, Yu (𑖦𑖧) 77, which consists of three prayers recorded on the occasion of three

He is said to have meditated in a hermitage which was situated close to three *dharma* colleges. Even more precisely, these were meditation colleges established during the early ninth century under Tibetan imperial patronage, so maybe even during his lifetime. I have suggested above the idea that a Chan text like the *Small Treatise* (IOL Tib J 689), to which was attached a record of a teaching lineage associated with local *dharma* colleges, could have been propagated in such an institution. I would like to invite the reader to consider the possibility that Namké Nyingpo could also have been (perhaps loosely?) affiliated to such a meditation college in his own area of activity, yet without necessarily following a narrow doctrinal or sectarian outlook. In any event, I would suggest that the sectarian perspective is the result of a later development, one that was first formulated in a systematic manner with Nupchen Sangyé Yéshé in his *Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* in the early tenth century (fig. 8.6). In his doxographical work he deliberately differentiates Chan from Dzogchen meditation practice.

4 The Later Tibetan Historiographical Tradition

The above description of this interesting yet understudied region sheds light on a contemporary of Nupchen Sangyé Yéshé, named Gongpa Rapsel (ca. 892–ca. 975). He was active in the Blue Lake area, particularly around Dantig, and proved to be of great importance to later Tibetan historiography. In fact, his example shows that religious life on the eastern fringes of the former Tibetan Empire continued after its demise and even provided the basis for a religious revival in Central Tibet.

Gongpa Rapsel is said to have been connected to the revival of the *vinaya* tradition in the course of the so-called rekindling of the flame (Tib. *me ro 'bar*) from the late tenth century onwards. In fact, his own ordination was witnessed by six Tibetan monks from Central Tibet and by the two local Chinese monks Kévang (Tib. Ke vang) and Gyimpak (Tib. Gyim phag) from a place called

prayer festivals held in Dunhuang in 818, informs us that Zhang Tri Sumjé wished to resign from office to devote his life to Buddhist service; in fact, he presided over the building of Shengguang Temple (Chin. Shengguang si 聖光寺) in Dunhuang in his later years. See Ma De 馬德, "Tubo guoxiang Hexiner shiji bushu: Yi Dunhuang ben Yu 77 hao wei zhongxin 吐蕃國相尚絃心兒事跡補述—以敦煌本羽 77 號為中心. [Supplemental Narration to Story of Zhang Khri sum rje, a Prime Minister of Tibetan Court: Centered on Dunhuang Text Yu 77]," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 4 (2011): 36–44.

Bayen (Tib. Ba yan), close to Dantig.⁴⁴ Moreover, he was equally known as an artist and temple builder.⁴⁵ In the 15th-century Tibetan historiographical work *Deb ther sngon po* [Blue Annals] by Gö Lotsaba Zhönnupel (1392–1481, Tib. Gos lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal), the following narrative episode is attached to him:

Then given [the presence of] many *yogins* of the simultaneist approach [(Tib. *cig char ba 'jug pa'i rnal 'byor pa*)] who held wrong views not the least oriented towards virtue, this great being [i.e., Gongpa Rapsel] built uncountable temples and *stūpas* in order to inhibit their [activities].⁴⁶

The '*yogins* of the simultaneist approach',⁴⁷ the so-called Cigcarbas (Tib. *cig car ba*), usually refer to Chinese Chan Buddhist practitioners and were often

44 Géza Uray, "The Structure and Genesis of the Old Tibetan Chronicle of Dunhuang," in *Turfan and Tun-Huang Studies*, ed. Alfred Cadonna (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1992), 123–141. The earliest mention of Gongpa Rapsel in connection with the monks who brought Buddhism back to Central Tibet is by Nyangrel Nyima Özer (1124–1192, Tib. Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer), *Chos 'byung me tog snying po dbrang rts'i bcud* [Religious History the Essence of Honey, which is the Essence of Flowers] (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1988), 450. Nelpa Paṇḍita continues this mention in his 1283 historical work; see Helga Uebach, *Nel-pa Paṇḍitas Chronik Me-tog phren-ba: Handschrift der Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. Tibetischer Text in Faksimile, Transkription und Übersetzung* (Munich: Kommission für Zentralasiatische Studien, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), 126–131. Moreover, the two Chinese monks Kévang and Gyimpak participating in Gongpa Rapsel's ordination are mentioned here too; see Uebach, *Nel-pa Paṇḍitas Chronik Me-tog phren-ba*, 124–127. It is said that Gongpa Rapsel met them in the marketplace Bayen (Tib. Ba yan chong [= tshong] 'dus), a place probably referring to Bayenkhār (Tib. Ba yan mkhar), a little northwest of Dantig; see Bianca Horlemann, "Buddhist Sites in Amdo and Former Longyou," 129, no. 16.

45 For Gongpa Rapsel and his artistic activities, see Heather Stoddard, "Early Tibetan Paintings: Sources and Styles (Eleventh–Fourteenth Centuries A.D.)," *Archives of Asian Art* 49 (1996): 26–50.

46 'Gos lo tsa ba gZhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po* [Blue Annals] (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984), 92, ll. 3–5: *De nas bdag nyid chen po des cig char ba 'jug pa'i rnal 'byor pa zhes bya ba dge ba'i phyogs ci yang mi byed pa'i log rtog can mang bas/ de dag dgag pa'i ched du lha khang dang mchod rten dpag tu med pa bzhengs//*. See Roberto Vitali, "Khams in the Context of Tibet's Post Imperial Period," in *Tibet after Empire. Culture, Society and Religion between 850–1000*, ed. Christoph Cüppers, Michael Walter, and Robert Mayer (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2013), 405.

47 Brandon Dotson, "'Emperor' Mu-rug-brtsan and the 'Phang thang ma Catalogue," *Journal of the International Association for Tibetan Studies* 3 (2007): 6, n. 24, argues for "the accuracy of 'simultaneist' as a translation of *cig car ba*, as opposed to 'instantaneist' or 'subitist,'" following Rolf A. Stein, "Sudden Illumination or Simultaneous Comprehension: Remarks on Chinese and Tibetan Terminology," in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 41–66. See also Sam van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection:*

perceived by Tibetans as following an all-at-once approach towards enlightenment. However, at some point in history, the followers of the Dzogchen tradition of the Nyingma school (Tib. *rnying ma pa*) became polemicised as merely being practitioners of Chan as well.⁴⁸ It is beyond the scope of the current chapter to satisfactorily answer the question as to why it was still worthwhile to polemicise against the Cigarwas/Chan Buddhists in connection with Gongpa Rapsel in a narrative account from the 15th century. After all, this is 700 years after the Samyé Debate, when it is said in the Tibetan sources that Chinese Chan Buddhists had been expelled from Tibet. In any event, we may ask what is actual historical reality and what is mere polemical motivation feeding into the creation of historical narrative in the 15th-century account. Three issues have given me reason to doubt that Gongpa Rapsel's artistic activities were actually targeted against Chinese Buddhists.

(1) Gongpa Rapsel himself is said to have been born into a family of followers of the non-Buddhist tradition of Bön (Tib. *bon*) and to have only encountered Buddhism at the age of 16. According to a Buddhist historical record, in his search for ordination he encountered a follower of Bön from whom he is said to have received a copy of the *Vinayaprabhāvatī* (Tib. *'dul ba 'od ldan*).⁴⁹ There must be some truth to his Bönpo background, otherwise the later Bön tradition would probably not have appropriated him into their narrative account of the transmission of the *vinaya*. In the Bönpo narratives Gongpa Rapsel is said to have ordained followers from Central Tibet into the monastic order. In the transmission lineage given in the 1319 composition *rGyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* [Kingly Chronicle Bön Origins] by Khyungpo Lodrö Gyeltsen (fl. 14th c., Tib. Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan), studied by Dan Martin, the following

Simultaneous and Gradual Methods of Dzogchen Practice in the Longchen Nyingthig (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), 11: "The second approach, which I will call simultaneous, is singular in that it includes no method except direct insight, and no progress over time, only the single moment of realization. It is simultaneous in that all of the elements accumulated by the gradual method are present in the singular event of realization."

48 See my article, also for further references on the topic, in Meinert, "The Legend of *Cig car ba* Criticism in Tibet."

49 Uebach, *Nel-pa Paṇḍitas Chronik Me-tog phren-ba*, 124–125 (fol. 16a.6): "On the way, when he had stayed with a Bonpo and had asked about them, [the Bonpo said]: 'They are all in the cave of Enchung namjong [Tib. An chung naM sjong]. If you search for the dharma, this is also dharma. Will you take it with you?' and he gave him a volume of the *Vinayaprabhāvatī*. As he read it on his way, he shed many tears by virtue of faith" (Tib. laM du bon po (gcig) gi sar zhag byas nas gtaM dris pas, de kun an chung naM sdzong gi brag phug na yod, khyod chos 'tshol ba yin na 'di yang chosu 'dugi 'khyeraM zer nas, 'dul ba 'od ldan gyi pu ti (gcig) byin, laM na mar blta yi byon pas dad pa'i shugs kyis mchi ma mang po yang byung).

words are put into Gongpa Rapsel's mouth when addressing the arrivals from Central Tibet who wish for ordination: "Generally there is no difference between Bön[po] and Buddhist teachings. My own *vinaya* lineage [(Tib. 'dul brgyud)] is Bön[po]." And a little further down in the text it is said: "Gongpa Rapsel was broadly learned in all the philosophical systems. So in the morning he would teach Buddhism. At midday he taught Bön. Later in the evening he taught tantra."⁵⁰ Since the publication of *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face* by Christine Mollier in 2008 and the theoretical work as a whole by Volkhard Krech, we are in a better position to understand processes of mutual borrowing (of ideas, ritual systems, or narratives, etc.) in religions in contact.⁵¹ Therefore, it is not surprising to find similar narrative accounts related to the figure of Gongpa Rapsel in both traditions, with both accounts informing each other and elaborating on the story told. In any event, what we can learn from this for our purposes is that in both accounts, Buddhist and Bönpo, Gongpa Rapsel appears as a rather open-minded religious figure because he is a cultural hero.

(2) Sometime after Gongpa Rapsel's encounter with the Bönpo follower in his early life mentioned above, he is said to have been ordained at a place called Dashö chelgyirong (Tib. Zla shod chal gyi'i rong), close to Dantig, in the presence of six Tibetan monks from Central Tibet and two Chinese Buddhist masters.⁵² Again, if the presence of Chinese masters had been problematic, it is unlikely that they would have found their way into the 13th-century narrative about Gongpa Rapsel in the *Account of the Early [Events] Called the Garland*

50 Here, I quote the Bönpo source *Royal Chronicle [of] Bön Origins* from Dan Martin. Dan Martin, "Poisoned Dialogue: A Study of Tibetan Sources on the Last Year in the Life of Gshen-chen Klu-dga' (996–1035 C.E.)," *Central Asiatic Journal* 40.2 (1996): 227–228. I follow Martin's translation with a few amendments by myself. The passage from the *rGyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas*, which was not accessible to me, is found in Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan, "rGyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas [Royal Chronicle Bön Origins]," in *Three Sources for a History of Bon*, ed. Lopon Tenzin Namdak and Khedup Gyatso (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1974), 174.2–179.2.

51 Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face. Scripture, Ritual and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Volkhard Krech, "Dynamics in the History of Religions—Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme," in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe. Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 15–70; Volkhard Krech, "From Religious Contact to Scientific Comparison and Back: Some Methodological Considerations on Comparative Perspectives in the Science of Religion," in *The Dynamics of Transculturality: Concepts and Institutions in Motion*, ed. Antje Flüchter and Jivanta Schöttli (Cham: Springer, 2015), 39–73.

52 Uebach, *Nel-pa Paṇḍitas Chronik Me-tog phreñ-ba*, 124–125.

of *Flowers*. It is hard to believe that Gongpa Rapsel would have gone against a group later in life with whom he had started his monastic career.

(3) From the above-mentioned Daozhao manuscript, the historical accounts from a Chinese pilgrim travelling through the region in the 960s, that is during Gongpa Rapsel's lifetime, we learn that the pilgrim received support from Chinese as well as Tibetan Buddhists and officials alike (IOL Tib J 754, 2nd letter of passage).⁵³ The description provides some insight into late-tenth-century Buddhism on the ground and points to the (maybe even harmonious?) coexistence of different ethnic groups and religious trends rather than hostile encounters. This is also mirrored in the frescos at Gongpa Rapsel's base, the Dantig Temple of a Hundred Nāgas (Tib. kLu brgya) (fig. 8.8).⁵⁴ Above that temple we still find frescos including a depiction of a thousand Buddhas (fig. 8.9). Most intriguing is the fact that, to the right and left sides of the scene with the Buddhas, we have depictions of Tibetan masters (with captions in Tibetan),⁵⁵ as well as the names of local donors, probably Azha/Tuyuhun people but certainly sinicised, as is clear from the captions above the figures in Chinese identifying their names (fig. 8.10a+b).⁵⁶ The round flaps of the upper garment of the Tibetan masters to the left side of the thousand Buddhas are stylistically similar to the depiction of the garment of the Tibetan emperor in Mogao Cave 159 in Dunhuang, which dates to around the ninth century (fig. 8.11). In fact, it is a well-documented practice in other cave sites around the Tarim Basin to depict donors and/or Buddhist masters from different ethnic backgrounds placed opposite each other, as can be seen for instance in the Turfan region in Bezeklik Cave 20, which contains paintings of Chinese and Tocharian donors (from the 11th/12th c.) (fig. 8.12).⁵⁷

53 Galambos and van Schaik, *Manuscripts and Travellers*, 161–162.

54 I am grateful to Daniel Berounský, Prague, who kindly shared with me (20 July 2021) the photographs which he took during a trip to the region of Dantig Temple in 2011. They are published here with his permission.

55 Only one inscription is clearly readable as Küngawo (Tib. Kun dga' bo, Skt. Ānanda).

56 The Chinese inscriptions are also not easily readable. The one for the first person to the left gives the name of a Buddhist master (Chin. *shangshi* 上師), followed by a layperson (Chin. *jushi* 居士), and a male (Chin. *fu* 父) and female (Chin. *mu* 母) family member. The latter is referred to as grandmother Yang Sheng [...] (Chin. *shangmu* Yang Sheng? 上母陽生?). Below the group of donors is a horizontal Chinese inscription, which reads (from right to left): [...] *shihuang an fuxia ju* 世皇安父下俱, meaning: “the world emperor pacifies the fathers and his family (literally, his children).”

57 Zhou Longqin 周龙勤, *Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua yishu. Di liu juan, Baizikelike shiku* 中国新疆壁画艺术. 第六卷, 柏孜克里克石窟 [The Art of Mural Paintings from Xinjiang

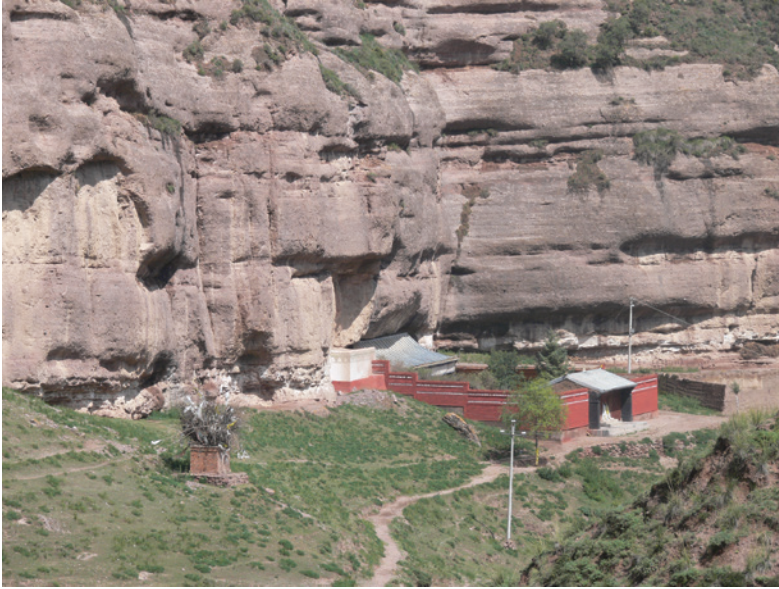


FIGURE 8.8 Temple of a Hundred Nāgas (Tib. Klu brgya). Dantig, 9th c. (?)
PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, PRAGUE



FIGURE 8.9 Fresco of a thousand Buddhas in the Temple of a Hundred Nāgas (Tib. Klu brgya). Dantig, 9th c. (?)
PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, PRAGUE



FIGURE 8.10A+B Section to the right (upper image, 8.10a) and left sides (bottom image, 8.10b) of the fresco of a thousand Buddhas (fig. 8.9) with Tibetan masters (above) and with Azha/Tuyuhun (?) donors (below). Dantig, 9th c. (?)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, PRAGUE



FIGURE 8.11 Tibetan emperor under umbrella. Mogao Cave 159, Dunhuang, end of 8th/mid-9th c.

TAN CHANXUE 譚蟬雪, ED., *DUNHUANG SHIKU QUANJI 24: FUSHI HUAJUAN* 敦煌石窟全集 24: 服飾畫卷 [COMPLETE COLLECTION OF DUNHUANG CAVES 24: SECTION ON PAINTINGS OF DRESS] (HONG KONG: SHANGWU YINSHUGUAN, 2005), 153, FIG. 137



FIGURE 8.12
Chinese and Tocharian donors. Bezeklik
Cave 20, Turfan region, 11th/12th c.
ZHOU LONGQIN, *ZHONGGUO XINJIANG
BIHUA YISHU. DI LIU JUAN, BAIZIKELIKE
SHIKU*, 142–143

In Dantig Temple itself, we find further evidence of multiculturalism: frescos inside the temple depict offering deities dressed in what appear to be local costumes (fig. 8.13a+b). Moreover, if one walks further up the valley in which Dantig Temple is located, there is a *stūpa* (fig. 8.14, see the white dot in the cliff) and further frescos in the cliff at a place nowadays called by Tibetans Lhasénang (Tib. Lha sa'i nang). Here is found another image of a thousand Buddhas with attending figures with probably a local style of hairdress. If these frescos are indeed old, perhaps dating to around the ninth century, we may wonder whether they could even be a local version of an attending bodhisattva (fig. 8.15a+b). I have not yet seen anything like this elsewhere. In any event, Daniel Berounský was told by local informants that the frescos were produced by none other than Gongpa Rapsel himself. Although this piece of information would be in line with the narrative account in the *Blue Annals*, discovering whether we are dealing with a historical fact or merely with another layer of fiction attached to Tibet's cultural hero Gongpa Rapsel would be a research question in itself. Radiocarbon dating and art-historical expertise would help to address this question.

To sum up, I do not doubt the historical credibility of Gongpa Rapsel's activities as builder of temples and *stūpas* in general, yet would consider the framing of a counter-reaction to the Cigcarwas, presumably Chinese Chan Buddhists, found in the *Blue Annals* as mere polemics. It is a trope that was first applied systematically by Nupchen Sangyé Yéshé (see timeline above, fig. 8.3), an early Tibetan doxographer in Central Tibet who was almost contemporary with Gongpa Rapsel. But he lived far away from the region east of the Blue Lake and certainly followed a different agenda. Once the legend of Gongpa Rapsel's

in China. Vol. 6: The Caves of Bezeklik] (Urumqi: Xinjiang meishu chubanshe, 2009), 142–143.



FIGURE 8.13A+B Fresco (and detail) inside the Temple of a Hundred Nāgas (Tib. Klu brgya) with offering deities in local costumes (?), Dantiq, 9th c. (?)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, PRAGUE



FIGURE 8.14 Cliff with *stūpa* (white dot) and frescos (a little further to the left of the *stūpa*). Lhasénang near Dantig Temple, 9th c. (?)

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, PRAGUE

debates with Chan masters had been established, it continued down through history.⁵⁸

5 Concluding Remarks: Towards a Network Approach

There is much more evidence available to prove the density of Buddhist activities along the Ma or Yellow River east of the Blue Lake between the seventh and tenth centuries. It is the region where *dharma* colleges were established under imperial Tibetan patronage and where Gongpa Rapsel was active in the Tibetan post-imperial period. There are also more proofs for the density of Buddhist exchanges between the Sichuan Basin in the south (from which Chan influences like the teachings of master Wuzhu from the Baotang school entered the region) as well as from the north and north-east, from the oasis

⁵⁸ I have analysed a similar process of the continuation of *Cig car ba* criticism in Tibet in Meinert, “The Legend of *Cig car ba* Criticism in Tibet.”



FIGURE 8.15A+B Detail of fig. 8.14: Fresco (and detail) with deities with local hairdress (?), Lhasé nang, 9th c. (?) PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, PRAGUE

towns along the Hexi Corridor and around the Tarim Basin (see network of trade routes in map 8.1 above).

Further research needs to be carried out on the connection between Dunhuang and the region east of the Blue Lake. Maybe we could then find out where the bulk of Tibetan manuscripts recovered from the so-called Library Cave in Dunhuang were actually produced. I wonder whether some or maybe even most of them were produced in the region east of the Blue Lake and not in Dunhuang itself.⁵⁹ Within the *BuddhistRoad* project, Henrik H. Sørensen recently searched for evidence in Chinese sources of Tibetan monks, scribes, and so forth, who were said to be attached to a monastery or scriptorium in Dunhuang. However, he could not find any evidence for specific Tibetan names.⁶⁰

Whereas the Chinese Dunhuang Chan manuscripts mirror the variety of attitudes and approaches to meditation practice in the heterogeneous Tang Dynasty Chan movement,⁶¹ the Tibetan-language Dunhuang Chan manuscripts, some of which have here been re-contextualised against the broader historical backdrop, show processes of local appropriation of Buddhist trends for local ends in the course of the transfer of Buddhist knowledge.⁶² Both in the region of the Blue Lake and also in Tang China, it was intellectual openness, doctrinal fluidity, and religious creativity that—at least for a moment in time—were probably the norm rather than the exception.

59 In a recent publication, Gertraud Taenzer meticulously analysed the intensity of the exchanges between Dunhuang and the region east of the Blue Lake in the course of the above-mentioned *sūtra* copying project at Dunhuang in the 820s–840s. She provides the example of a *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* which was copied by specific scribes in a place called Thangkar (Tib. Thang kar) in the region east of the Blue Lake on the basis of an exemplar from Gachu/Hezhou. The copy was then sent to Dunhuang for repair in the first half of the ninth century. See Gertraud Taenzer, “*Śatasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtras* Discovered at Dunhuang: The Scriptorium at Thang kar and Related Aspects. A Preliminary Investigation,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 60 (2021): 239–281.

60 See his very detailed study on all Buddhist institutions in Dunhuang: Henrik H. Sørensen, “The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang: Mid–8th to Early 11th Centuries,” *BuddhistRoad Paper* 5.2 (2021).

61 Mario Poceski provides a great summary of the heterogeneous Chan movement during the Tang Dynasty, convincingly arguing for a high degree of religious creativity. See Mario Poceski, “Conceptions and Attitudes towards Contemplative Practice within the Early Traditions of Chan Buddhism,” *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 28 (2015): 67–116.

62 Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 184. One of the main hypotheses of the *BuddhistRoad* research agenda concerns the emergence of local trends to cater for local needs, thus the localisation of Buddhism. See BuddhistRoad Team, “Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer in Eastern Central Asia 6th–14th Centuries: A Project Report,” *Medieval Worlds* 8 (2018): 126–134.

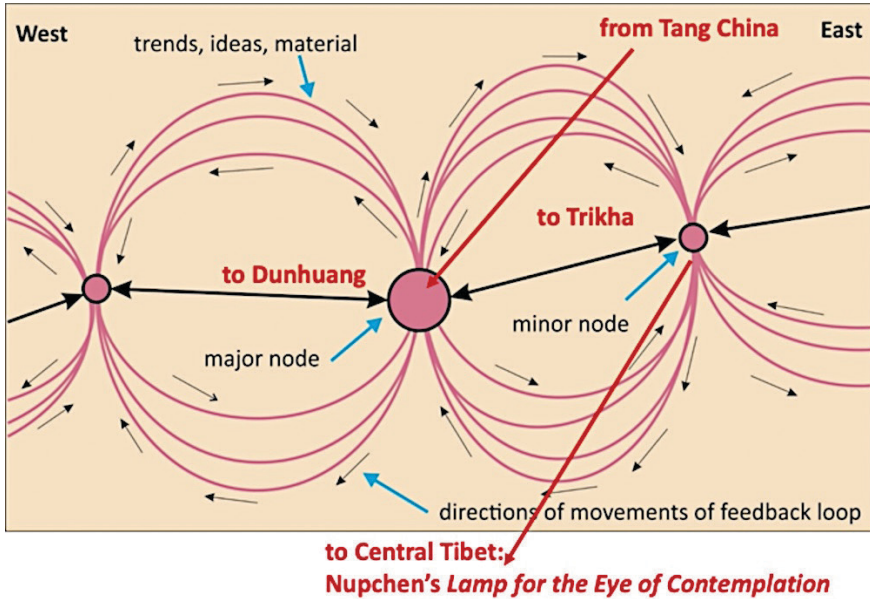


FIGURE 8.16 Buddhist network with model of feedback loop, by *BuddhistRoad* project, red parts are additions by author
 BUDDHISTROAD TEAM, "DYNAMICS IN BUDDHIST TRANSFER IN EASTERN CENTRAL ASIA 6TH–14TH CENTURIES: A PROJECT REPORT," 130, FIG. 3

In the *BuddhistRoad* project, we developed a still relatively simple model of a Buddhist network with major and minor nodes and feedback loops. It describes how knowledge travels through a system in a multicultural setting, across cultural boundaries, sometimes with information added, thus producing reformulations and/or displacement of religious meaning. Applied to our case study, we have knowledge of Chan Buddhism entering a Buddhist network from Tang China and reaching Dunhuang, being reformulated further on its passage to the hermitage of Namké Nyingpo in Trikha, before being critically evaluated in a Central Tibetan composition (fig. 8.16).⁶³

The contested space between Tibetan and Chinese confluences investigated here exemplifies the process outlined above on a micro-section within a Buddhist network of major and minor nodes. As I have pointed out

63 These ideas are described in BuddhistRoad Team, "Dynamics in Buddhist Transfer in Eastern Central Asia 6th–14th Centuries: A Project Report." I first formulated the gist of the research agenda of the *BuddhistRoad* project and the idea of a network approach in Carmen Meinert, "Introduction—Dynamics of Buddhist Transfer in Central Asia," in *Transfer of Buddhism across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–16.

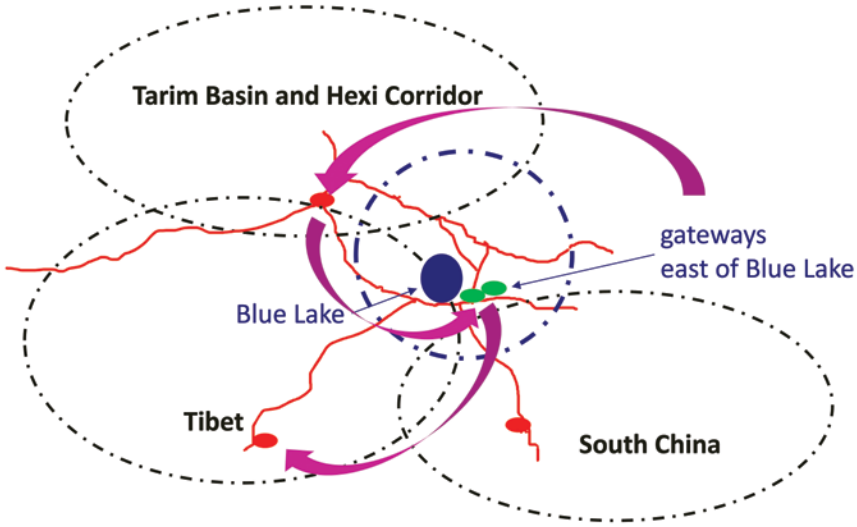


FIGURE 8.17 Exchange routes traversing cultural units, with gateways (green dots) in contested Tibetan-Chinese border region and pink arrows indicating circulation of knowledge
SKETCH BY CARMEN MEINERT

elsewhere with reference to network approaches discussed by Ray Rivers, Carl Knappett, and Tim Evans within the context of archaeology, there is a difference between a central place or a hub, which is comparatively the busiest site within a region, and a gateway relatively conceived, which is qualified by what the authors refer to as a high *betweenness centrality*. Such gateways are often nodes which are in the periphery of larger cultural unites or empires. They function as important bridges between the parts of a network. Thus, if the connection is broken, it results in damage to the network as a whole. Such gateways are often located along important interchanges between central sites.⁶⁴ I suggest that some of the places in the region east of the Blue Lake—probably also those where *dharma* colleges were established (Trikha, Guochu, Dantig, Gacu) (fig. 8.17)—functioned as bridges that enabled the circulation of people, texts, and topics from north to south and east to west. With this chapter I hope to have opened a new perspective to understand the connectivity of the region

64 Carmen Meinert, "Introduction—Dynamics of Buddhist Transfer in Central Asia," 8–10. See Ray Rivers, Carl Knappett, and Tim Evans, "What Makes a Site Important? Centrality, Gateways, and Gravity," in *Network Analysis in Archaeology. New Approaches in Regional Interaction*, ed. Carl Knappett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125–150; on betweenness centrality, see particularly pp. 128–129.

east of the Blue Lake, which, I suggest, was crucial for the westward spread of Chinese Chan Buddhism in the Tibetan Empire and beyond. A little later in time, it was important for a development in the other direction, namely the eastward move of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism to the Tangut Empire which I discussed elsewhere.⁶⁵

65 See four of my publications about the spread of Tantric Buddhism in the Tangut Empire mentioned in fn. 24 above.