

Commoners and Nobles

Hereditary Divisions in Tibet

Heidi Fjeld



COMMONERS AND NOBLES

NORDIC INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES
MONOGRAPH SERIES

67. Asta Olesen: *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*
68. Hans Antlöv: *Exemplary Centre, Administrative Periphery*
69. Arne Kalland: *Fishing Villages in Tokugawa Japan*
70. Weng Eang Cheong: *The Hong Merchants of Canton*
71. Christine Dobbin: *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities*
72. Eldrid Mageli: *Organising Women's Protest*
73. Vibeke Børdahl: *The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling*
74. Cecilia Nathansen Milwertz: *Accepting Population Control*
75. Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan and Sven Cederroth: *Managing Marital Disputes in Malaysia*
76. Antoon Geels: *Subud and the Javanese Mystical Tradition*
77. Kristina Lindell, Jan-Öjvind Swahn and Damrong Tayanin: *Folk Tales from Kammu – VI: A Story-Teller's Last Tales*
78. Alain Lefebvre: *Kinship, Honour and Money in Rural Pakistan*
79. Christopher E. Goscha: *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954*
80. Helle Bundgaard: *Indian Art Worlds in Contention*
81. Niels Brimnes: *Constructing the Colonial Encounter*
82. Ian Reader: *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan*
83. Bat-Ochir Bold: *Mongolian Nomadic Society*
84. Shaheen Sardar Ali and Javaid Rehman: *Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Minorities of Pakistan*
85. Michael D. Barr: *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man*
86. Tessa Carroll: *Language Planning and Language Change in Japan*
87. Minna Säävälä: *Fertility and Familial Power*
88. Mario Rutten: *Rural Capitalists in Asia*
89. Jörgen Hellman: *Performing the Nation*
90. Olof G. Lidin: *Tanegashima – The Arrival of Europe in Japan*
91. Lian H. Sakhong: *In Search of Chin Identity*
92. Margaret Mehl: *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan*
93. Andrew Hardy: *Red Hills*
94. Susan M. Martin: *The UP Saga*
95. Anna Lindberg: *Modernization and Effeminization in India*
96. Heidi Fjeld: *Commoners and Nobles*
97. Hatla Thelle: *Better to Rely on Ourselves*
98. Alexandra Kent: *Divinity and Diversity*
99. Somchai Phatharathananunth: *Civil Society and Democratization*
100. Nordin Hussin: *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka*
101. Anna-Greta Nilsson Hoadley: *Indonesian Literature vs New Order Orthodoxy*
102. Wil O. Dijk: *17th-Century Burma and the Dutch East India Company 1834–1680*
103. Judith Richell: *Disease and Demography in Colonial Burma*

Commoners and Nobles

Hereditary Divisions in Tibet

HEIDI FJELD


NIAS

Press

NIAS Monograph 96
First published in 2005
by NIAS Press
Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
Leifsgade 33, DK-2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark
tel: (+45) 3532 9501 • fax: (+45) 3532 9549
E-mail: books@nias.ku.dk • Website: www.niaspress.dk

© Heidi Fjeld 2005

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Fjeld, Heidi

Commoners and nobles : hereditary divisions in Tibet. -
(NIAS monograph ; 96)

1.Aristocracy (Social class) - China - Tibet 2.Social
classes - China - Tibet 3. Tibet (China) - Social conditions
4.Tibet (China) - Social Policy

I.Title II.Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
305,5'2'09515

ISBN 87-91114-17-9

Typeset by Thor Publishing
Produced by Bookchase
Printed in the European Union

To Runa Jyoti

Contents

Preface	xi
Note on Tibetan terms	xii
Glossary	xiii
Introduction	1
<i>Some conceptual clarifications • A brief outline of recent political history in Tibet • Official presentation of the ‘old Tibet’ • Lhasa: Tibetan and Chinese</i>	
1. Social Categories	22
<i>Under Tibetan and Chinese rule • Pre-Communist Lhasa • Hereditary social divisions • Social distinctions and relations • The Mao era (1949–1976) • The 1980s • Contemporary Lhasa • Kyesa in the work units and the schools • Contradicting value systems?</i>	
2. Expressions of Rank in Daily Life	47
<i>Menrig – the inferior kind • Miser – commoners • Kudrak – noble families • A new internal division • Thupten and Wangchuk • Summary</i>	
3. Marriage	71
<i>Marriage: Practice and value • Arranged marriages • Pre-marital relations • Endogamous practices • Yangzom and her father • Kyesa as an indicator of behaviour</i>	
4. Keepers of Cultural Knowledge	95
<i>History and religion • Zhesa – honorific language • Losar – the new year • Defining ‘culture’ as kudrak practices</i>	
5. The Value of Inherited Knowledge	117
<i>Official recognition of kyesa and kudrak • Knowledge and education • Transfer of knowledge • ‘Internal’ and ‘external’ influences on knowledge</i>	

6. Morality and Rank	132
<i>An articulated value and a 'bodily automatism' • Expressed motivation for yarab chözang • Buddhist motivation • Ideal and practice • The double person and coexisting moral orders • A bridge between Tibetan and Chinese value systems</i>	
7. Conclusion	152
Bibliography	157
Index	166

FIGURES

1. Overview of Lhasa, the city in Lhasa valley	15
2. Monks visiting Norbulinka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace	17
3. Sale stands with <i>katags</i>	19
4. Two silver cups	49
5. Butter lamps	102
6. Offerings of butter lamps and food	108
7. A newly built house in Lhasa, resembling the traditional noble houses	112
8. Prayer flags on the mountain	140
9. People prostrating outside the Jokhang temple	143

Preface

This book is about the former aristocracy of Lhasa. The noble families, together with the clergy, constituted the political and economic elite of traditional Tibet. Since the Chinese takeover in 1950, the Tibetan socio-political system has been dramatically restructured and the book explores the role of the noble families in Lhasa today. It uses ethnographic data to look at the relations between Tibetans of common and noble backgrounds, and describes how, despite more than half a century of strong Chinese presence in Lhasa, the traditional categories of hereditary background (*rigs* [rigs]) are still operative as meaningful terms and in use as a principle for social classification in general and as a criterion for rank in particular.

My interest in the Tibetan nobility goes back to the very first literature I came across about Tibet, namely the books written by British officers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most, if not all, of these descriptions of traditional Tibet depict a Tibetan reality seen from the perspective of the elite, with whom the foreigners socialized. Traditional Tibet had a peculiar political organization, where the secular and religious aspects of society were united in the particular positions in the administration, so that most positions were shared between a man from a noble family and a monk. It was in the function of being officials in Lhasa, as well as estate administrators around Tibet, that the noble families were given their positions as the high-ranking elite of society. After the Chinese takeover, all institutional power was taken from the nobility, and a noble family background no longer provided membership in the higher strata. Given the dominant interpretation of the Tibetan nobility as a political institution in traditional Tibet, and the vast political changes after the Chinese takeover, I was interested in knowing whether a noble family background is relevant in social interaction in contemporary Lhasa and, if so, how the noble families are seen both by themselves and by other Tibetans. Also, the changes in the socio-political environment in Tibet seemed to bring an opportunity for exploring the fundamental ideas of hereditary social divisions among Tibetans. The writings of the British

officials, as well as those of the earlier scholars (such as Carrasco and Stein) mention low-ranking groups (*menrig* [smad rigs]) living on the outskirts of society, seen and treated as being polluted. The description of these low-ranking groups show clear similarities to what we know as the untouchables of India. Both the top and the bottom of this social hierarchy seemed to be characterized by rigidity, as membership of these social groups was ascribed by birth rather than by achievements. These hereditary social divisions interested me, partly because they are equally intriguing as the Indian caste system, but also because of the dominant role that Buddhism has in Tibet, and the presumable colliding ideologies of Buddhism and a caste-like social hierarchy. This book was therefore a result both of an anthropological concern with social hierarchies, and of a particular interest in the nobility and their formal and informal roles in Lhasa after the Chinese re-structuring of Tibetan society. The persisting relevance of hereditary background in contemporary Lhasa indicates that *rig* is not only about political-economic power, but also connected to ideas about personhood and morality; on a fundamental level, *rig* reflects the ongoing debates on what defines Tibetan culture and identity. This book argues that the former nobility remains important for Tibetans today because they have come to represent the past, and that it is through their dominant position in Tibetan history that the nobles are seen to be the custodians of cultural knowledge today. In their search for the 'original' culture, Tibetans look to the former nobility and their cultural practices before the Chinese takeover, and thus, the noble families are no longer the political-economic power in Lhasa but rather the cultural elite.

Two main fieldworks have been conducted in Lhasa for this book, the first from October 1995 to June 1996, and the second from January to April 1997. Most of the recorded data are based on talks with mainly three groups of informants. The vast majority are Tibetan women and men aged 20 to 40 years old, with or without formal education, and from both noble and commoner families. Another important group consists of well-educated Tibetan men of about 40 to 50 years old, also of common or noble background, and finally, elderly men and women, mostly of noble background. Participant observation has been the main method used, combined with some 40 structured interviews with members of noble families in Lhasa. As my command of Tibetan was limited when fieldwork started, I was partly dependent on interpreters for the interviews.

In 1994, an agreement of academic exchange between Tibet and Norway was signed in Oslo, and this 'Network for University Co-

operation Tibet-Norway' provided the possibility for conducting long-term fieldwork in Tibet. One of the main Tibetan partners of this agreement is the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences in Lhasa, which was my excellent host institution during the first period of fieldwork, providing research permit and introductory letters and interpreters, as well as a place to live in Lhasa. The second part of fieldwork was conducted in Lhasa without institutional affiliation, and in this period data collection was done in a much more informal way, i.e. through conversations rather than interviews as such.

The data collected during these two periods of fieldwork provided the material used for my M.A. thesis, which was submitted to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oslo in 1999, and this book has developed from that thesis. The two periods of fieldwork were funded by the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, the Network for University Co-operation Tibet-Norway, the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oslo. Further, the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) provided a fellowship and office facilities for the writing-up period. I would like to express my thanks to these institutions for their generous support. At NIAS Press, I would like to thank Janice Leon and Leena Höskuldsson for their time and energy.

Thanks also to all those who have read and commented on the manuscript in various stages, in particular my excellent supervisor Prof. Marit Melhuus, and Dr Kathinka Frøystad, Dr Axel K. Strøm, Benedikte V. Lindskog, Tone Sommerfelt, Dr Astrid Anderson, Åshild Kolås, Thessa Ploos von Amstel and Jacob Risdal Otnes. Thanks are also due to the two referees of the manuscript for their constructive criticism. I am grateful to Mr Tashi Nyima in Oslo who has done excellent translation work of the Chinese survey *Tibetan Social History*, and to Tsomo N. Gyachungtsang for help with Tibetan terms when memory and dictionaries were not sufficient. I would also like to give a special thanks to Prof. Per Kværne for his scholarly generosity and support in Oslo, and Nanna Melland, Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy, Li Ng, Leslie Nguyen and Alison Joyner for interesting and useful discussions in Lhasa. Jacob Risdal Otnes has been a solid support both during fieldwork in Lhasa and the writing-up process in Oslo, for which I am very grateful.

Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the Tibetans I got to know in Lhasa, who shared their knowledge and time with me, and thus made my work possible. Thank you.

Note on Tibetan Terms

There is a significant discrepancy between the oral and written forms of Tibetan words, and it is in many cases difficult for non-specialists to pronounce words romanized in accordance with the proper spelling. For example, the term for respectful behaviour is properly spelled *ya rabs spyod bzang*, but is pronounced as *yarab chözang*. Because there is no standardized system for transcribing oral Tibetan, I have used my own simplified forms to representing the approximate pronunciation of each word (cf. Huber 1999). In the case of crucial words the written form is given in parenthesis on first occurrence. The written form of each word is given in the Glossary below, where the Wylie standard for transcribing Tibetan into roman letters (1959) has been used. Tibetan proper names, however, are presented in the oral form only. Chinese and Sanskrit words in the text are marked with (Ch) and (S).

Glossary

This word list gives both the oral form and the Tibetan spelling, as well as the English equivalent of the words.

<i>akor</i> [a kor]	noblewoman's earrings
<i>bökyi rigzhung</i> [bod kyi rig gzhung]	Tibetan culture
<i>cak zoba</i> [lcags bzo ba]	ironsmith, blacksmith
<i>chang</i> [chang]	mildly alcoholic barley beer
<i>chasi trölsog</i> [chab srid gros tshogs]	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
<i>che</i> [chas]	to do
<i>chelmo</i> ['chal mo]	fornicator, promiscuous woman
<i>chema</i> [phye mar]	container to make offerings (for the New Year)
<i>chenpo</i> [chen po]	big
<i>chitsog nyingpa</i> [sphyi tshogs rnying pa]	'old society', i.e. pre-1950
<i>chö</i> [chos]	religion, dharma (S)
<i>chö</i> [mchod]	religious offering
<i>chögyel</i> [chos rgyal]	religious king
<i>chöri lugnyi</i> [chos srid lugs gnyis]	religious and secular together
<i>chöri nyiden</i> [chos srid gnyis ldan]	same as <i>chöri lugnyi</i>
<i>chuba</i> [phyu pa]	woman's traditional dress
<i>chungchung</i> [chung chung]	small
<i>danwei</i>	(Ch) work unit

Commoners and Nobles

<i>depön</i> [mda' dpon]	a category of the nobility believed to be descendents of the religious kings
<i>dharma</i>	(S) the religious law, i.e. religion
<i>drip</i> [grib]	pollution
<i>driptsog</i> [grib btsog]	pollution
<i>düchung</i> [dud chung]	small households without hereditary access to land
<i>gara</i> [mgar ba]	blacksmith, also 'low people' in general
<i>gegen kyuma</i> [dge rgan dkyus ma]	ordinary teacher
<i>gerpa</i> [sger pa]	a category of the nobility administering estates
<i>go rim</i> [go rim]	hierarchy
<i>guzhab</i> [gus zhabs]	politeness
<i>gyezhen</i> [rgyal zhen]	patriotism
<i>hukou</i>	(Ch) residence permit, household registration
<i>jakhang</i> [ja khang]	tea house
<i>ke</i> [skad]	language, dialect
<i>khyimtshang chenpo</i> [khyim tshang chen po]	'big families' (important families of the nobility)
<i>kudrak</i> [sku drag]	a noble, the nobility
<i>kyuma</i> [dkyus ma]	ordinary
<i>kuzbug</i> [sku gzugs]	body (honorific)
<i>kyerü</i> [skye rus]	birth and class lineage
<i>kyesa</i> [skye sa]	birthplace, kind
<i>kyesa thobo</i> [skye sa mtho po]	high birth
<i>kyeyul</i> [skye yul]	birthplace
<i>labrang</i> [bla brang]	household corporation of a lama
<i>lamlug</i> [lam lugs]	system
<i>lao gai</i>	(Ch) hard labour camp
<i>lekhang</i> [las ru khag]	work unit
<i>lökkel</i> [blos 'khel]	trust
<i>lonchen</i> [blon chen]	minister, often translated as prime minister

Glossary

<i>longkhen</i> [bslong mkhan]	beggar, begging musician
<i>losar</i> [lo sar]	the new year
<i>lū</i> [lus]	physical form of the body
<i>lugsöl</i> [lugs srol]	tradition, customs
<i>lungpa</i> [lung pa]	country, place
<i>menrig</i> [smad rig]	inferior kind
<i>mibog</i> [mi bogs]	‘human lease’
<i>midrag</i> [mi drag]	a category of the nobility holding high political positions
<i>mi kyüma</i> [mi dkyus ma]	ordinary people
<i>miser</i> [mi ser]	citizen, commoner
<i>mönlam chenmo</i> [smon lam chen mo]	the great prayer festival
<i>namthar</i> [rnam thar]	biography
<i>nang</i> [gnang]	(honorific) to do
<i>nang</i> [gnang]	to give
<i>nangma</i> [nang ma]	modern night club
<i>ngotsa minpo</i> [ngo tsha smim po]	a shy person
<i>ngul zoba</i> [dngul bzo ba]	silversmith
<i>nyeba</i> [nya ba]	fisherman
<i>nyingje</i> [snying rje]	compassion
<i>phul</i> [phul]	to give (humilific)
<i>pomo</i> [pho mo]	young girl, also house attendant and baby sitter
<i>ragyapa</i> [rags rgyab pa]	low ranked group responsible for bringing the (unclaimed) corpses to the burial site in traditional Tibet
<i>rangshe tshabo</i> [rang shed tsha po]	selfish
<i>rig</i> [rigs]	kind, category
<i>rig dugchag</i> [rigs sdug chag]	bad kind
<i>rig nge</i> [rigs ngan]	bad, evil kind

Commoners and Nobles

<i>rig rü</i> [rigs rus]	lineage, race caste
<i>rig thobo</i> [rigs mtho bo]	high kind
<i>rig tsogpa</i> [rigs btshog pa]	unclean kind
<i>rim ba</i> [rim ba]	ranking (of things or people)
<i>rimden lamlug</i> [rim ldan lam lugs]	class system (new)
<i>rü gyüd</i> [rus rgyud]	lineage, decent group
<i>sem</i> [sems]	mind, heart
<i>sem böpa</i> [sems bod pa]	'Tibetan at heart'
<i>sem marpo</i> [sems dmar po]	'Red at heart'
<i>semchung</i> [sems chung]	humble (small-minded)
<i>ser zoba</i> [gser bzo ba]	goldsmith
<i>shaoshu minzu</i>	(Ch) minority nationalities
<i>shape</i> [zhabs pad]	council minister
<i>shemba</i> [bshas ba]	butcher
<i>sherab</i> [shes rab]	wisdom
<i>zhing zoba</i> [zhing bzo ba]	carpenter
<i>shunyata</i>	(S) emptiness
<i>tamdzing</i> ['thab 'dzing]	struggle sessions, self-criticism meeting
<i>tha tsongba</i> [tha tshong ba]	horse dealer
<i>tomden</i> [rtogs ldan]	sky burial worker, corpse-cutter
<i>tong ba</i> and <i>tong du</i>	the two strata of society according to Kawaguchi (1995 [1909])
<i>tre</i> [sprad]	to give
<i>treipa</i> [khral pa]	taxpayer
<i>treipa chi</i> [khral pa phyi]	outside taxpayer
<i>treipa nang</i> [khral pa nang]	inside taxpayer
<i>trerim</i> [gral rim]	class (new)
<i>tsangma</i> [gtsang ma]	clean
<i>tsheyog</i> [tshe gyog]	lifetime servant

Glossary

<i>tsogpa</i> [btsog pa]	dirty, unclean
<i>tulku</i> [sprul sku]	reincarnated lama
<i>yabshi</i> [yab gzhis]	the category of the nobility consisting of families of the various Dalai Lamas and their descendants
<i>yarab chözang</i> [ya rabs spyod bzang]	respectful behaviour
<i>yawa</i> [ya ba]	lowest social category (as used in Tingri)
<i>zhesa</i> [zhe sa]	honorific language
<i>zhing me kudrak</i> [zhing med sku drag]	nobles without land, non-targeted by the Chinese government
<i>zhing yö kudrak</i> [zhing yod sku drag]	nobles with land, targeted by the Chinese
<i>zhötön</i> [zho ston]	the Yoghurt festival
<i>zugpo</i> [gzugs po]	the body

Introduction

In Lhasa today, two contradictory value systems coexist. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, the Chinese authorities have altered the Tibetan social system, invalidating its long-established organizing principles. The Chinese dominate the public sphere, wherein Tibetan language and ways of behaviour have been made irrelevant means of communication. In everyday life most Tibetans in Lhasa engage in actions that they themselves conceive as being contradictory to Tibetan values. This book explores how Tibetans manoeuvre within these two value systems, balancing between idealism and pragmatism.

Commoners and Nobles concerns hereditary social division in Lhasa under Communist rule. The main questions posed in this book are: How and why are the social categories of pre-Communist Lhasa persistent and made relevant in daily life despite five decades of Chinese rule and the comprehensive socio-economic restructuring of Tibetan society? Family background as an organizing principle of traditional Tibetan societies, and in particular the position of the former lay elite, the aristocratic families, is suggested as the main focus. Crucial, then, is the question of how family background is made relevant as a principle of social classification in everyday life. In contemporary Lhasa, Tibetans from different family backgrounds socialize extensively through working and neighbourhood relations, and family background does not initially seem to be determining social interaction today. Yet the Tibetans recommended in Lhasa for interviews on Tibetan traditions – the local experts – proved to be members of the former Tibetan nobility. Hereditary social divisions have been officially declared eradicated by Chinese policies, but they remain of great interest to Tibetans. This book analyses how family background is made relevant with regard to marriage practices and choice of marriage partner, to local notions of cultural knowledge and to norms of respect and humbleness.

The pre-Communist Tibetan social system was organized into four main social strata: in addition to the clergy, there were the families defined as nobles (*kudrak* [sku drag]), commoners (*miser* [mi ser]) and

as 'inferior kind' (*menrig* [smad rigs]).¹ This study deals only with the lay population, i.e. the three latter categories. These social categories were occupationally defined: commoners were farmers with varying relations to land, nomads, traders, etc.; the inferior kind were smiths, butchers and of other occupations involving what is considered as improper conduct for Buddhists; and the nobility consisted mainly of members of the political administration in Lhasa (a position shared with the clergy), as well as administrators of estates in the countryside. Family background, such as *miser*, *kudrak* and *menrig*, is termed *rig* (rigs) or *kyesa* (skye sa).² After the Chinese invasion in 1950, the Tibetan social system was evaluated with Communist eyes, and a dramatic restructuring was initiated. The new Chinese authorities saw the Tibetan social system, where distribution of wealth followed the lines of family background, as the major obstacle to the transformation of Tibetan society into a 'Socialist society'. In the early 1960s, redistribution of property was introduced, accompanied by a reclassification of the Tibetan people into new Marxist classes. Class background then became the principle for social organization, in terms of occupation and for social benefits in general. The traditional Tibetan family background (*kyesa*) was restructured (more or less turned upside-down) and replaced with class background (*trërim* [gral rim]). As such, both in the Tibetan social system and in the Communist social system, the family background of the individual is the principle for classification into social categories, although the premises for the social hierarchy of the categories are of different, and to some extent opposite, kind.

Ever since the Tibetan resistance towards Chinese rule, manifested in the Lhasa uprising in 1959, Chinese officials have emphasized social inequality. China, being a Communist state since 1 October 1949, is officially a state without social inequality. With the invasion of Tibet, this concept of equality was introduced to Lhasa as well. However, claims that the Communists have created equality in Tibet are false, as such a policy has never been implemented. All societies will obviously have social inequality at some level, whether this inequality is related to financial resources or power. This, I believe, must especially be true for a state where one political party governs more than one billion people. The claim of social equality is mainly rhetorical, and the traditional Tibetan social system has during the last 40 years constantly been under attack by the Chinese authorities. What the authorities call an unjust organization of wealth and power, in addition to the claimed 'backwardness' of Tibetan lifestyle, has been the main legitimization cited for Chinese rule in Tibet.³

At first glance, the social categories of *kyesa* appear to be eradicated and socially irrelevant in Lhasa today. When asked about *kyesa* as a criterion for rank, Tibetans tend to answer that there are no social differences in Tibet, claiming that all people are equal in the People's Republic of China. However, it does not take long before the Tibetans' general interest in family background becomes apparent. Although *kyesa* and the hereditary social categories of *menrig* (inferior kind), commoners and nobles may be officially non-existent, this book argues that family background *is* made relevant in everyday life in Lhasa. Tibetans live and work together with people from different family backgrounds, and as such have established inter-*kyesa* social relations. Within these daily relations people relate to and reproduce social divisions, and it will be argued that *kyesa* is made relevant in three social contexts and fields in particular: marriage practices, the distribution of cultural knowledge and norms of respectful behaviour. Within these social contexts the main issues in focus are how people of *menrig*, commoner, and noble background, in particular are perceived, and how they describe themselves and analyse the reproduction of *kyesa* as a relevant criterion for rank. Although the institutional framework within which Tibetans now live and operate is defined on the basis of contradictory criteria, *kyesa* is made relevant in social relations within these institutions. The Chinese authorities may claim that *kyesa* is non-existent, but I shall argue that *kyesa* is not necessarily irrelevant to Tibetans in contemporary Lhasa.

SOME CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Within the Tibetan language there are several terms to cover what defines the focus of the present book, namely family background (membership by ascription into certain social categories) and the social system based on this organizing principle. In the ethnography of traditional Tibet the set of social categories is seldom referred to by one collective term (such as the *jaimani* or caste system in Indian sociology), as terms for 'social system' or 'social hierarchy' do not refer directly to a system of hereditary background. The Tibetan word given by Goldstein and Ngawangthondrup Narkyid (1984) for 'hierarchy' (*go rim*) cannot be combined with the word for 'system' (*lam lugs*), and thus does not cover a social hierarchical system. In Lhasa today, *rim ba* is used in order to describe the ranking of people. This word can also be combined with *lam lugs*, i.e. *rimden lamlug* (*rim ldan lam lugs*). This would appear to be a direct translation of Marxist terminology, as *rim* is

‘class’ (*trërim* [gral rim]), *ldan* is ‘to have’ and *lam lugs* translates as ‘system’ or ‘ideology’ – thus, a system with classes, a class system. The term *rimden lamlug* was not in use prior to the Chinese takeover, and in earlier dictionaries *rim* is used only in the ordering of things, not people (cf. Jäschke 1992[1881]). This construction is part of the attempt by Chinese authorities to develop a new Tibetan lexicon to promote a (to the Tibetans unfamiliar) socialist ideology (Shakya 1994). However, while *rimden lamlug* refers to the class system in Chinese terms, it does not cover what is at stake here, namely the set of social categories of pre-Communist Tibetan society and the organizing principle upon which these were defined.

There are several other possibilities for terming a social system moving away from social hierarchy, towards family background and hereditary membership in a group by ‘birth’. In Tibetan, two terms cover these meanings: *rig* (rigs) and *kyesa*, where *rig* is a direct term and *kyesa* is more ambiguous. Ugen Gombo writes: ‘The general meaning of the term *rigs* is “kind”, in the broadest sense of “category” or “class”, but it can mean and does imply biological categories in certain contexts’ (Gombo 1983: 48). Goldstein translates *rigs* as ‘1. race, ethnic group, nationality, lineage ... 2. kind, category’ (Goldstein 2001: 1037). *Rig* means family background, or membership in a social group or category defined to a certain extent by birth. In combination with *rü* (*rus*, bones), *rig rü* (bone kind) translates as ‘lineage, race, caste’ (ibid.: 1038). As such, this book is about *rig* and *rig rü*.

Today, however, *rig* is not used extensively to cover hereditary family background. With the project of activating a national identity, *rig* now seems to be predominately used and understood as *mirig*, meaning Tibetans as a nationality. Usually one does not ask directly about a person’s *rig*, but rather uses a more general way of asking (and mostly about a third person): *khong su tshang red* (which is her/his family?). The answer to that question could be he/she is of bad (*rig dugchag*) or high *rig* (*rig mthobo*), but the specific term for the social group or category is mostly used, instead of *rig* (cf. Gombo 1983). Thus, it is the social categories that claim significance, rather than the organizing principle behind the categories.

When asking about a person’s family background, the question is understood to be broad in terms of which particular aspects of family background are being referred to, and membership in a hereditary social category could be included. In interaction among Tibetans, the use of indirect questions is very common, particularly when formulating sensitive questions, and in order to ask about family background

in Lhasa today, the term *kyesa* is often used. *Kyesa* translates as ‘birthplace’, and is similar to *kyeyul*. However, *kyesa* is also used as ‘family background’, as the ‘social place’ where a person is from, such as *kyesa thobo* (high birth) referring to the hereditary aspect of social ranking. Goldstein also mentions another word for *kyesa*, namely *kyerü* (skye rus), meaning ‘birth and class/ lineage’ (2001: 75). When asking information about a third person (which is very frequent), the term *kyesa* is used, both in the question and the answer. Inquiring about *kyesa* is not considered impolite, because it is seen as a neutral question that does not put the inquirer in a bad light: the term has the same connotation as ‘what is his family?’ mentioned above. A question about a person’s *kyesa* could be answered in two ways, either by focusing on where that person was born, or on the hereditary background of the person. The latter is considered additional information to the former. As one of my informants says: ‘When I ask about where a person is from, of course I want to know his family [background]’. *Kyesa* is thus a polite and discreet way of asking for potentially sensitive information. If a person is *menrig*, such questions are considered very embarrassing for both the inquirer and the one who must answer. In this book I have preferred to use *kyesa* rather than *rig*, because *kyesa*, although initially translated as ‘birthplace’, today rather indicates hereditary family background, similar to, but not interchangeable with, caste.

A study of family background – as a criterion for rank – can be conducted in various ways, drawing on different theoretical approaches. Tibet, bordering India and being a Buddhist country, might perhaps be expected to have a caste system similar to that of Hindus. A comparative study would be both interesting and fruitful, as the similarities of the former Tibetan social system and the caste system in India are clearly apparent, particularly with regard to notions of purity and impurity among the lower groups. In Tibet, however, this dichotomy has not had the same socio-economic effects as in India. Comparisons have also been done, albeit to a limited degree, based on literature (Passin 1955, Price 1966, Allen 1978)⁴ or on ‘memory ethnographies’ (Gombo 1983).⁵ One of the major objections to an extensive comparison between the caste system in India and social hierarchies in Tibet is the fact that the lower and the higher ‘castes’ in Tibet do not share criteria for ranking. While the lower groups, such as blacksmiths and butchers, are classified in terms of impurity, the upper stratum, the aristocracy, should rather be understood as a politico-economic institution and thus not defined in terms of purity.

The underlying themes of this book are an interest in cultural and social change and continuity within a politically complex context. There are several ways to approach such vast topics, and I have chosen to focus on social organization, with particular emphasis on a set of social categories of family background. This book examines how these social categories are maintained and how they change in a context dominated by extreme external influence and pressure, both by propaganda and the dramatic socio-economic restructuring of Tibetan society since the Chinese takeover in 1950. The point of departure is that the various Chinese policies in Tibet over the past four decades have been an attempt to alter or indeed eradicate and replace the social hierarchy found in pre-Communist Tibetan society, and the assumption that these policies have had an effect on the relevance of family background (*kyesa*) among Tibetans.

The book also questions some general assumptions in the literature on social organization in traditional Tibetan societies. Prevalent in this literature is the idea that principles for social classification and criteria for rank were based on wealth and political influence, i.e. politico-economic features. This book suggests otherwise. After the dramatic socio-economic restructuring of the past four decades, one could assume that if *kyesa* reflects wealth and political influence, then the traditional social hierarchy would have been eradicated with the implementation of these changes. However, this is not the case, as *kyesa* remains operative as a principle for social classification, and there is a general consensus in Lhasa today that noble families are high-ranking and *menrig* are low-ranking. Therefore, it is likely that the principles for social classification and criteria for rank in traditional Tibet had other important aspects besides the distribution of wealth and power.

Here I shall focus on the interdependence of *kyesa*, knowledge and the constitution of a 'good person', arguing that nobles are not merely the former financial and political elite of Lhasa – they are also perceived as cultural experts and, in certain aspects, as ideal persons.

In contemporary Lhasa, *kyesa* is an operative concept, a term used and activated in everyday social relations. Clearly then, *kyesa* must be accorded some relevance. In order to understand the significance of *kyesa* to Lhasa Tibetans, I have chosen to focus on relations between commoners and nobles. Throughout this book I shall analyse how and why members of noble families are seen by commoners to be high-ranking in the 'informal' (as opposed to the official) social hierarchy in Lhasa. I argue that it is not merely the nobles who uphold the social divisions – the commoners play an active role in this process as well.

Noble families are perceived as cultural experts with a power of social memory, and they are understood by non-nobles to define and represent the 'original' Tibetan culture, and behave and act in accordance with the concept of an 'ideal Tibetan person'. I shall also analyse the persistence of *kyesa* from the perspective of commoners, asking why commoners act humbly and respectfully towards members of noble families, thereby recognizing and reproducing the social divisions. I argue that, by being submissive in social relations with nobles, commoners present themselves in accordance with established Tibetan values of respect and humbleness. This, I argue, is crucial in order to manoeuvre within the contradictory value systems present in Lhasa today. Thus, through an analysis of how nobles are perceived as being different from non-nobles, and how *kyesa* is interconnected with norms of respect and being a good person, I seek to delineate the persistence of *kyesa* as a principle of social classification.

In marriage practices, and especially in choosing a marriage partner, preferences with regard to *kyesa* are brought out. A significant degree of discrepancy between ideals, norms and actions is apparent in marriage practices. In the cases presented, inter-*kyesa* marriages are defended in principle, but actual praxis results in endogamy. It is the notions tied to endogamous practices that will be the focus in the analysis. The choice of marriage partners illustrates the connections between *kyesa* and personhood, and I argue that *kyesa* is an indicator of behaviour and conduct. Further, it will be shown that members of noble families are perceived by commoners (and by other nobles to a certain extent) as ideal persons, and are therefore seen as attractive marriage partners. The cases presented also illustrate how right conduct is seen by Tibetans to be dependent on valuable knowledge. As such, a focus on marriage practices, and especially the choice of a marriage partner, makes possible an analysis of what is understood as a highly valued person, and how such values are associated and connected with *kyesa*.

Further still, the linkage between the concept of valuable knowledge and *kyesa* will be explored. I claim that this knowledge, defined locally as knowledge of Tibetan culture, is desired yet inaccessible within the official educational system of society. Cultural knowledge – knowledge of Tibetan history and religion, language and traditions (festivals) – is identified with noble families and their ancestors. This may be understood in terms of the nobles' ability to control social memory by documenting the past. By analysing both the ambiguous relation between the former Tibetan nobility and the Chinese government, and local perceptions of the transmission of

knowledge, the book explores how cultural knowledge is seen to remain within the noble families.

Lastly, a focus is put on the persistence of *kyesa* with regard to norms of respect and politeness. Commoners act both respectfully and submissively towards nobles – a type of behaviour termed *yarab chözang* (ya rabs spyod bzang). I shall argue that a focus must be put not only on what defines nobles as being high-ranked, but also on what motivates commoners to show respect towards nobles. *Yarab* is a moral value learned through primary socialization, and it is my contention that *yarab* is not only an expression of rank, but also an act based on religious principles, and on notions of a good person. A focus on inter-*kyesa* relations and expressions of rank in a wider perspective makes it possible to analyse what a violation of expected behaviour in inter-*kyesa* relations may imply. Humble behaviour must be understood as related to religious doctrines on the one hand and as a means of self-presentation on the other. A violation of the value of *yarab* in inter-*kyesa* relations does not only involve disregarding nobles and *kyesa* as a valid criterion for rank, but also signals a rejection of what the nobles represent, namely the period of Tibetan independence when Tibetan culture and traditions are believed to have flourished.

A study of *kyesa* and inter-*kyesa* relations elicits discussions on rank and values. As such, *kyesa* could be analysed along with other contesting criteria for rank, such as economy, political influence, education, religious expertise, etc. Here the focus will be limited to *kyesa*, as the scope of this book does not allow further comparisons. In other words, the present study does not seek to explain the relation between co-existing social ranking systems, nor does it focus on the influence that other criteria of rank might have on *kyesa*. Rather, the purpose here is to scrutinize one social phenomenon in a broader perspective, and to analyse it contextually.

Crucial to an analysis of cultural notions and social organization in Lhasa is the context of a political conflict. Ever since 1950, Tibet has been under Chinese rule. During these decades, a dramatic restructuring of Tibetan society has been carried out, in terms of implementing a new social structure and a new political and economic system. The Tibetan resistance to Chinese presence in Tibet has been strong, and everyday life in Lhasa is marked by political control of the individual. Tibetan traditions and customs are under attack by the Chinese political campaigns for being ‘backwards’.

The main methodological perspective is on the individual rather than on the social system, and I shall explore how individuals make

kyesa relevant in their everyday lives and how their social practice generates a social form. I shall not focus on the political system as such, nor analyse political means. However, in order to understand the prevalent political conflict within which Tibetans live their everyday lives, a brief introduction to the recent political history of Tibet is essential.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF RECENT POLITICAL HISTORY IN TIBET

On coming to power, the Chinese Communists made it clear that the crowning victorious task of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) should be the liberation of Tibet. When Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949, Tibet had already been included as a part of the new republic. In late May 1950, the first clashes between PLA soldiers and Tibetan troops took place. This happened far away from Lhasa, in Chamdo, some 600 km east of the Tibetan capital, and on 19 October 1950, the Tibetan governor of Kham surrendered to the PLA. In Lhasa, the fear of Chinese military attack on Central Tibet grew, and on 20 October 1951, and after difficult negotiations in Beijing, the Tibetan government accepted a 17-point agreement that gave China sovereignty over Tibetan territory. The agreement was intended to safeguard the social and cultural independence of Tibet, i.e. not altering the traditional social system, and maintaining religious freedom (Shakya 1999: 1–89).

The first decade of Chinese occupation did not bring notable social changes to Lhasa,⁶ although it was marked by an uneasy coexistence of Chinese and Tibetan rule. The Chinese authorities initiated a strategy of cooperation with the Tibetan government, not altering the power structures, but seeking support from a loyal political elite. However, scepticism grew within the Tibetan government, as the Chinese came to dominate more and more of the political arena. In 1954, the Dalai Lama went to Beijing to meet with Chairman Mao; he was at first impressed by the thoughts of Marxism (Dalai Lama 1994 [1990]: 98), but by the end of the meeting, he realized that, as he puts it, Mao was 'the destroyer of Dharma⁷ after all' (ibid.: 108). Tensions continued to grow between the Tibetan government and the Chinese leaders, and the coexistence of the Tibetan and Chinese leaders in Lhasa came to an abrupt end on 10 March 1959, when a huge number of Tibetans demonstrated.⁸ The demonstration continued for a week without interference from the Chinese. The general situation deteriorated, and

on the 17 March, the Dalai Lama and his entourage escaped from Lhasa, heading for India. Three days later, the PLA was ordered to re-take control of the city, which resulted in violent attacks and bloodshed where thousands of Tibetans were killed, arrested or fled the country. This marked the end of a 'liberal' Chinese presence in Lhasa and the start of long-term Tibetan resistance against Chinese rule, which has remained up until the present day.

As will be described in the following chapter, the Mao era brought about a dramatic restructuring of Tibetan society. In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region was declared, although actual autonomy was never implemented. The problems started initially with the introduction of communes and collectivization in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing famine to Tibet. Secondly, the Cultural Revolution had enormous impact on Tibetan society, in terms of destruction of important cultural institutions and prohibiting much of what Tibetans perceive as cultural practice, but also in terms of infusing fear and distrust into all social relations.

When a more liberal policy was developed for Tibet in the early 1980s, the much-hated communes were abolished, and Tibetans were intended to participate more in the political administration. However, implementation of the reform policies proved difficult, as the leaders in Tibet belonged to the 'leftist' faction of the Communist Party and did not agree with these new ideas of the leaders in Beijing. Although the period from 1980 to 1986 brought positive changes for Tibetans – greater religious freedom, rebuilding of monasteries, some use of Tibetan language in the schools, less control of trade and the return of property – mistrust grew among the Tibetan people, and in 1987 the first in a series of demonstrations erupted in the Barkhor area of Lhasa. The demonstrations were initiated and led by monks and nuns from the monasteries and nunneries around Lhasa, but lay Tibetans also participated (Schwartz 1994). The demonstrations were violently stopped by the Security Police and the PLA, and many Tibetans were arrested and tortured, or killed, and in March 1989 martial law was implemented in Lhasa. These years were to be the most active anti-Chinese period after the takeover. In the 1990s, only a few demonstrations have been staged in Lhasa. The average duration of a demonstration is now extremely short, due to the dense presence of both uniformed and plainclothes police. The policy of the Chinese leadership is now to act, rather than to react, which implies strict control of individual activities in order to curb any political activities before they are manifested. The tanks and soldiers and police with

machine guns that were a part of the Lhasa city picture of the late 1980s have now been replaced with large numbers of plain-clothes police. The consequence of this is a system based on surveillance and the widespread use of informants.

Since the crackdown on political activities at the end of the 1980s, the Chinese strategy has varied between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ (*ruan* and *ying* [Ch]) policies. Although many tend to characterize the period from 1980 as a liberal period in general, I believe that this is only partially accurate. Although the years 1980–86 were a period of liberalization, the period after that has been dominated by strict control and surveillance on the one hand, and economic development on the other. The general focus on economic development in China has led to new attacks against Tibetan culture and religion, and in 1996 a new campaign against religion (‘Strike Hard’) was launched, focusing on what the Chinese claimed to be hindrances to development (the ‘backwardness’ of Tibetan traditions, religion and history).

Ever since the Chinese invasion and occupation in 1950, and in particular since the Lhasa uprising of 1959 that resulted in the Dalai Lama’s flight into exile, Tibetan political resistance has been firm, both in Lhasa and elsewhere in Tibet. Whereas in China a greater level of individual freedom has developed, this has not been the case in Tibet. Strict policies (in order to prevent any ‘splittist’⁹ activities) still limit Tibetans’ activities. Since 1996 (and thus during the period of my fieldwork) Tibetan culture and religion have been under severe attack from the ‘Strike Hard’ campaign. The Chinese government has not been able to win the support of the Tibetan people. Political resistance has remained strong throughout the five decades of Chinese presence. This has many reasons, but the loss of the Dalai Lama is of major importance. His significance for Tibetans must not be underestimated. To the Chinese authorities, the Dalai Lama is their main political opponent and Tibetans have realized that any show of interest in him can be extremely risky. However, he is still the symbolic representation of an independent Tibet.

The present political situation in Lhasa has a major impact on the daily life of Tibetans. Surveillance of the individual is common, and fear and distrust are inherent in all social relations. The official attack on Tibetan culture and religion – everything that Tibetans define as particular to the Tibetan people – creates a situation where Tibetans become second-class citizens. As Havnevik concludes from her study of Tibetan nuns and their accounts of living a lay life in Lhasa:

... Tibetan identity has to be underplayed in these encounters [with Chinese]. Tibetan customs, ways of behaving and language are irrelevant means of communication. ... Hence, living a lay life and taking part in everyday social and economic activity involves many compromises, and by suppressing their own identity Tibetans experience a high degree of frustration. (Havnevik: 1994: 263)

This interpretation of daily life in Lhasa seems accurate in terms of Tibetans compromising their identity when interacting with Chinese. As will be shown in Chapter One and Chapter Two, although inter-ethnic contact is superficial, Chinese and Tibetans share social arenas such as school, work, markets and shops. Thus, as Havnevik writes, taking part in everyday activities involves compromises and results, for many, in a high degree of frustration. Nevertheless, there are subtle ways to express Tibetanness in everyday life – a point to be borne in mind when studying social and cultural processes in contemporary Lhasa.

OFFICIAL PRESENTATION OF THE ‘OLD TIBET’

Kyesa and the social categories involved are seen as part of pre-Communist Tibetan society, a period of Tibetan history under constant attack from the Chinese authorities. Below, I shall illustrate how the independent period of Tibetan history is presented in the public information channels, and particularly how nobles are presented as ‘reactionaries’ who exploited the Tibetan population before the Chinese arrived.

After the 1959 revolt in Lhasa and the flight of the Tibetan leadership, the Chinese authorities realized that they had lost the battle for winning the sympathy of the Tibetan elite, and the Dalai Lama in particular. A second strategy was initiated – winning the sympathy of the masses. There was little or no basis for a socialist revolution in Tibet, and one of the immediate problems was ‘how to promote and develop socialism in a society where there was a very low material base’ (Shakya 1994: 157). In order to gain support for the Chinese rule and policies implemented in Tibet, there has been a continuous focus on the ‘unjust character’ of the social system in the ‘old society’ (*chitshog nyingba*), i.e. the system of ‘social inequality’. The Chinese authorities claim that the Tibetan people needed to be liberated from imperialism and the yoke of religion; that they needed to be helped in order to modernize and develop. This is also the argument for the massive population transfer

of Chinese to Tibet. The traditions and practices of 'old Tibet', it is claimed, represent a barrier to development and hence must be eradicated. In one Chinese publication from the 1990s, pre-Communist Tibet is described in the following way:

Tibet, located on the roof of the world, is wide in territory and rich in resources. But, in the Old Tibet the rotten, declining feudal serf system and dictatorship of monks and aristocrats seriously hindered the development of productive forces, economic development stagnated and the masses of serfs and slaves lived in untold misery. (Guo Qing 1991: 38)

The nobility and the clergy have been the main targets of anti-Tibetan propaganda.¹⁰ The clergy and the nobility form the body of 'state enemies' who are claimed to oppose the will of the Tibetan people.¹¹ After the 1959 Lhasa revolt, the following press release was published by Xinhua (the Chinese state news agency),¹² marking the beginning of Chinese attacks on the Tibetan nobility:

Violating the will of the Tibetan people and betraying the motherland, the Tibetan local government and the upper-strata reactionary clique colluded with imperialism, assembled rebellious bandits and launched armed attacks against the PLA Garrison in Lhasa during the night of March 19. (Quoted in Panchen Lama 1997: 176)

Since that time, the Chinese authorities have persisted in separating the Tibetan elite from the so-called masses, claiming that the only resistance to Chinese rule is found among the former Tibetan elites. Moreover, the position of noble families in the Tibetan society is explained as that of exploitation of the people and hindering development, as the following illustrates:

Young, pretty female serfs often had to 'accompany' the serf owners overnight with the result that many suffered from the humiliation of bearing children of the *kudrak* families, being made sex slaves, an act that was more barbarous than those of feudal lords in Europe during the Middle Ages ... When the broad masses of the serfs were exposed to devastation, oppression and the outrages of officials and *kudrak*, where could they go and enjoy human rights? (Wang and Nyima Gyaincain 1997: 226-227)

This Chinese publication goes on to argue that China's 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet brought justice and human rights to the people, as the power was taken from the 'reactionary serf owners' and given to

the people. It is within this context of official propaganda, attacking both the Tibetan social system and the role of the noble families in that society, that I shall explore *kyesa* and inter-*kyesa* relations in Lhasa today.

LHASA: TIBETAN AND CHINESE

Landing at Gongar airport, after a flight over the magnificent Himalayas and then viewing the amazing Mount Everest and the scorpion-shaped Yamdrok Lake, the visitor cannot but be made aware of the current political status of Tibet: Tibet is a part of the People's Republic of China.¹³ The low, concrete airport building and the officials in Chinese uniforms leave an impression unlike what is usually shown from Tibet. Signposts are written in both Chinese characters and Tibetan letters – but the instructions dealing with customs are in Chinese only. We are in China. The road to Lhasa runs by the quiet shores of the Kyichu river. Once in a while, we pass small Tibetan villages and see people working the fields. In the distance, still one hour away, gleams the Potala Palace. Rising some 130 metres above the Lhasa valley, this magnificent white and red palace, the winter palace of the Dalai Lamas, has become the symbol of Lhasa city. Before reaching the foot of the Red Mountain on which the Potala rests, we have to pass several checkpoints, where the special police controls who leaves and enters the municipality of Lhasa. We enter Lhasa by the western gate, and come to an area where the Chinese immigrants have settled. Finally we approach the Potala Palace. We are in Lhasa at last.

Lhasa is located in the long, 4-km-wide Kyichu Valley, at 3,690 metres above sea level. Tibet's total area covers approximately 2,47 million sq. kilometres (Dept. of Information and International Relations, 1992). Lhasa is situated in the southeast of the country, some 1,000 km from Kathmandu in Nepal, and about 2,500 kilometres from Beijing.

Lhasa was founded by King Songsten Gampo in the seventh century, and has since the seventeenth century been the capital of Tibet (Dowman 1988).¹⁴ To Tibetans it is a holy city, as it hosts the most important temple in the whole of Tibet, the Jokhang. Dowman writes: 'Lhasa is the centre of the Tibetan mandala, and the Jokhang is the centre of the Lhasa mandala' (Dowman 1988: 40).¹⁵ The Jokhang, the Potala Palace and the three major Gelugpa monasteries in Tibet¹⁶ are among the most important places for worship and pilgrimage for Tibetan Buddhists.¹⁷



Figure 1. Overview of Lhasa, the city in Lhasa valley

Lhasa became the capital of Tibet in the 17th century, and for almost 300 years it was small town centered around the Jokhang temple, while the Potala Palace was located outside the heart of town. Now, Lhasa has become a city, encapsulating the magnificent palace, and reaching far in both western and eastern directions.

Lhasa has for centuries been known in Western literature as the holy Buddhist city, inaccessible to the rest of the world (Hedin 1907, Harrer 1953). Many travellers and explorers tried to reach Lhasa: some made it while others did not, but most returned to Europe with magic stories about the isolated Tibetan people who feared foreign intruders (David-Neel 1927). Seen in historical perspective, this alleged xenophobia seems to be partly a myth. Miller points out that Lhasa has in fact had a long and consistent history of foreign residents (1985: 258). These foreigners came mostly from neighbouring countries, such as Nepal, China, Mongolia and other Central Asian countries, and they were not all Buddhists. While in Lhasa, they were traded various goods or engaged in work considered improper conduct for Buddhists. However, in the early twentieth century, Tibet was declared inaccessible to foreigners (and Westerners in particular) (David-Neel 1927, Kawaguchi 1995 [1909]). That century's xenophobia was partly founded in fear of British invasion,¹⁸ and was also an important reason for the isolation from the international community.

Today, Lhasa is an urban exception, as Tibet still is predominantly rural. According to Zhang (1997: 16), in 1990, only 11 per cent of the population in the Tibetan Autonomous Region were registered as urban residents (252,900 people), i.e. as living in Lhasa or any of the nine other townships (Li 1990: 37). When the Tibet Autonomous Region was established in 1965, Lhasa became the centre for modernization of infrastructure (e.g. building of roads, telephone system, etc.) and economic development in Tibet.¹⁹ Due to this, material standards are significantly higher in Lhasa than in the rural areas.

Three paved roads run parallel to the Kyichu river, and two roads intersect with those. Along these main roads are Chinese stalls, shops and restaurants, selling noodles, vegetables, refrigerators, televisions, clothes, shoes and everything a person could desire while in Lhasa. Some of the roads, mostly in the Chinese dominated western part of the town, host exclusive shops selling furniture and fashionable, expensive clothes. There are several shopping centres in Lhasa, offering specialized items like mobile phones, microwave ovens and heaters.

Activities in the Tibetan part of Lhasa are dominated by religion and commerce. In the Barkhor, a kilometre-long cobbled road encircles the Jokhang temple, Muru Nyingba (the Lhasa seat of the Nechung oracle)²⁰ and several erstwhile noble houses. The most visible religious practice is that of circumambulation,²¹ performed inside the Jokhang temple, in the Barkhor circle and in the bigger circle of the Lingkor encompassing outer holy places, such as the Blue Buddha, Chakpori and the Potala Palace. In addition to being the religious centre, the Barkhor is the main market for vendors from all over Tibet. During the winter, the Barkhor is crowded with pilgrims, who travel to Lhasa after the harvest and bring meat, jewellery, sheepskin and other items for sale. The Barkhor is also the centre for political aspirations, and there is a high density of both plainclothes and uniformed police placed in the area.

Lhasa city has experienced major changes during the last 40 years – in architecture, material standards, and infrastructure but, most importantly, with respect to the number and the composition of its inhabitants. The Tibetan quarter in Lhasa now covers a scant 2 per cent of the urban area, whereas in 1950 it constituted the entire city (Leckie 1994). The old city – the Barkhor – surrounds the Jokhang, the main temple in Tibet. The Barkhor and the small village of Shö at the foot of the Potala Palace are the sole remaining areas of Lhasa where Tibetan architecture can still be seen. Due to government plans for modernization, however, the old houses in the Barkhor and Shö are

constantly under the threat of being demolished and replaced by new Chinese structures.



Figure 2. Monks visiting Norbulinka, the Dalai Lama's summer palace

The population of Lhasa decreases and increases according to the time of the year. In the wintertime, after harvesting, pilgrims travel in large numbers to Central Tibet and particularly to Lhasa. Pilgrimage and tourism are often two sides of the same coin. Here some monks from Kham have their photos taken outside the Norbulinka, the summer palace of the Dalai Lamas.

Estimating the population of Lhasa is not easy, not least because of four complicating issues. Firstly, Chinese figures do not count military personnel (including the special police force), who are present in considerable numbers in Lhasa. Secondly, the Chinese authorities are reluctant to give the actual figures of Chinese inhabitants. As a means of transforming Tibet into an integral part of China, settlement strategies have been practised throughout the country. Chinese are offered good jobs in Tibet, with higher salaries, extra holidays and a permit to have two children instead of one. Population transfer is the one Chinese policy in Tibet that has caused most anger among the exile government and Tibet supporters in the West, since Tibetans have become a minority and their claims are marginalized. Because of widespread international opposition to the transfer of Chinese to Tibetan areas, the Chinese authorities rarely supply exact figures on Chinese inhabitants, also in Lhasa. Thirdly, within China itself there is

a growing problem of a 'floating' population drifting towards the cities, a population movement which the government does not control. This is also the case in Lhasa. The majority of 'transients' seem to be Chinese. Often they start a business (restaurants or small workshops); although they may have planned to stay for perhaps a few years, it seems that they stay longer. Lastly, Lhasa is the religious centre of Tibet, and the goal for many Buddhist pilgrims. After the autumn harvest, numerous pilgrims enter Lhasa and stay on during the winter, which means that the Tibetan presence in Lhasa varies greatly, depending on the seasons.

The current figures of Lhasa's population are invariably subject to debate. In 1999, a Xinhua report set the population of Lhasa at approximately 200,000, which was an increase of almost 10 per cent over the past 12 or 13 years²². The major controversy is not how many people are living in Lhasa altogether, but rather what the proportion of Chinese inhabitants is. The most detailed figures made available to me are from the 1992 *China Population Statistical Yearbook*, where Lhasa city is stated to hold 96,431 Tibetans, 40,387 Chinese, and 2,998 others,²³ yielding an overall total of somewhat less than 140,000. These figures include permanent city dwellers only. Luo notes that in addition to these 140,000 residents there are some 60,000–80,000 'transients', the majority of which, he claims, are Tibetan pilgrims and traders (Luo 1989). These are all Chinese figures, and they place Tibetan people in majority. However, as Leckie has noted, 'no non-Chinese figures place Tibetans in majority' (Leckie 1994: 87), and Chinese data are known to be unreliable and politically biased. Michael van Walt indicated a total number of 100,000 Chinese and 50,000 Tibetans in Lhasa in 1986 (1986), and this seems to be the official exile-government position as well (Department of Information and International Relations 1992).

With these figures and reflections in mind, there are evidently more Chinese than Tibetans in Lhasa today,²⁴ a point also made by my informants in Lhasa. Regardless of the controversies over population figures, one thing is clear: there has been a dramatic increase in Lhasa's population since 1950, and the majority of the new inhabitants are Chinese. Lhasa has become a small city, where Tibetans and Chinese share the landscape and social arenas. Daily inter-ethnic relations are inevitable, and two different value systems confront each other in these encounters.



Figure 3. Sale stands with katags

Chinese immigrants dominate large parts of Lhasa, and the Tibetan quarter, the Barkhor, now covers only a small percentage of the city. In Barkhor, Chinese businessmen have taken up the sales of the famous Tibetan ritual scarfs, the katag.

NOTES

- 1 Gombo suggests that *menrig* constituted some 7 per cent of the population (Gombo 1983), the *kudrak* some 5 per cent (150–200 families) (Prince Peter 1954). The vast majority was categorized as *miser* (Goldstein 1971a).
- 2 See page 3 for conceptual clarifications.
- 3 In addition, Chinese authorities claim that Tibet has always been a part of China and use historical arguments for the present rule of Tibet. The pre-1950 period, when Tibet had its own government, postal system, flag, etc., is termed by the Chinese to be a period of local government, under the rule of the central government in Beijing.
- 4 Passin and Price write on untouchables in Asia, especially South-Asia and Japan, while Allen compares the fourfold social classification systems of different peoples in the Himalayan region.
- 5 Ugen Gombo bases his analysis on his own reconstruction of childhood memories of growing up in a village (he terms this method ‘memory ethnographies’). It is not clear how old he was when he fled Tibet. Moreover, Gombo does not provide information on exactly where in Central Tibet his village is located (Gombo 1983).
- 6 In Amdo and Kham, however, the Chinese invasion was much more dramatic during the 1950s. Democratic reforms (redistribution of land and property) and attacks on monasteries were started in the mid-1950s, resulting in fierce resistance among the local people. This manifested in the establishment of a Khampa guerrilla movement, supported by the CIA (Peissel 1972, Shakya 1999).
- 7 *Dharma* (Sanskrit) translates in Tibetan Buddhism as religious law, i.e. religion.
- 8 There were rumours that the Chinese planned to kidnap the Dalai Lama during a theatre show that same evening, and these rumours brought more and more Tibetans out on the streets to protect him.
- 9 In Chinese rhetorical language, all political activities promoting a higher degree of autonomy are termed ‘splittist’, meaning to split the motherland.
- 10 The Dalai Lama is both the prime symbol of Tibetan resistance and of the pre-Communist Tibetan society (Nowak 1984). He (together with the exile-government) is the main state enemy, and campaigns constantly introduced in Tibet in order to undermine the activities of the government in Dharamsala.
- 11 As I shall show in Chapter Five, the Chinese policies towards the former nobility are highly ambiguous.
- 12 Published 28 March 1959.

13 The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is now the official term for the area. However, 'Tibet' is a well-established term in English, and it is used by Tibetans in English. I shall use 'Tibet', covering the area of Central Tibet, corresponding approximately to TAR.

14 In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was defined. The Tibetan areas of Kham and Amdo were excluded from the TAR and included in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan.

15 Mandala is, in Buddhist belief, a symbolic diagram that is seen as a representation of cosmos.

16 Gelugpa is the reformed school of Tibetan Buddhism, and the three major monasteries surrounding Lhasa, Sera, Drepung and, further away, Ganden, were the main institutions for higher learning of the Tibetan Buddhist order.

17 For a study of pilgrimage sites in Tibet, see Dowman 1988, Chan 1994.

18 This fear must be said to have been well-founded, as Britain actually occupied Tibet in 1904–05 (Shakya 1999).

19 See Tibet Information Network (2000) on China's plans for rural and urban development in the TAR, and Adams (1996) for a study of modernization of Lhasa, and particularly the introduction of a new entertainment sector.

20 The Nechung oracle is the state oracle of Tibet, and his main seat is Nechung monastery outside Lhasa. The Nechung oracle followed the Dalai Lama to India in 1959, and plays an important role in the exile community in Dharamsala today.

21 To circumambulate implies to walk around religious objects or buildings in clockwise direction.

22 World Tibet News 25.02.1999.

23 The category of 'others' includes minorities from neighbouring provinces, such as the Hui, as well as Tibetans from outside the TAR. In the beginning of the 1960s, the Tibetan population (and the Chinese) were categorized into minority groups, and Tibetans were divided into a number of groups.

24 See also Adams (1996) for a similar view.

Chapter One

Social Categories

UNDER TIBETAN AND CHINESE RULE

How, and why, have the social categories of pre-Communist Lhasa persisted despite four decades of Chinese propaganda of equality and comprehensive socio-economic restructuring? Available information about pre-Communist Tibetan societies, though limited, is vast compared to what exists of social analysis of Tibet's present-day social system. Five main types of literature can be defined. First, there are the academic contributions, especially those of Carrasco (1959), Stein (1972), Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969) and Goldstein (1968, 1971a, 1971b, 1973, 1986, 1989), as well as Aziz (1978) and Miller (1987). These publications are all reconstructions of Tibetan societies through interviews conducted in India, Nepal or the USA. The second type of literature includes accounts by explorers and travellers (Rockhill 1975 [1891], Kawaguchi 1995[1909], David-Neel 1927, Harrer 1953), who managed to live or travel extensively in parts of Tibet during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Third, British diplomats (Waddell 1895, Bell 1928, 1992 [1940], MacDonald 1996¹) have provided descriptions of parts of the social system, based on their stays in Lhasa or in bordering stations like Gangtok in Sikkim. Fourth, the auto biographies of Taring (1994 [1970]) and Yuthok (1990) yield interesting insights into the life of the nobility. Lastly, the Chinese survey *Tibetan Social History* (Xizang Renmin Chubanshe 1987) describes rank and social categories within Tibetan society as registered by Chinese social scientists in the 1950s. The information provided by these various publications leaves some problematic issues to be discussed.

Both the autobiographies and, to a certain extent, the biographies of Tibetans deal with the nobility in Lhasa. Taring (1994 [1970]) and Yuthok (1990) are both noblewomen writing about their childhood and life in Tibet before they escaped to India. Other biographies depict the ruling elite of the pre-Communist Tibetan society, such as those about the Dalai Lama's brother (Thubten Jigme Norbu 1960), and a

former minister (Shuguba 1995). These books do not provide information on all social groups, but offer a 'nobility biased' view of life in Tibet. One exception is the autobiography of Tashi Tsering (Goldstein, Siebensschuh and Tashi Tsering 1998), the son of a poor farmer's family living outside Lhasa, whose life story indicates some of the difficulties Tibetans outside the nobility faced in the times before 1959. The focus on the nobility is also evident in the literature of travellers and explorers and diplomats, as they were guests of the Tibetan government and socialized extensively with the noble families (Bell 1928, Richardson and Aris 1998, Harrer 1953).

The second problem arising from the literature concerns shifts in research focus. Most of the systematic research conducted on the Tibetan social system was done some decades ago (Bell 1928, Carrasco 1959, Goldstein 1968), when the question of structure and function was considered more relevant within the social sciences than it is today. In the literature on the Tibetan social system, this problem does not seem to be as evident as one finds for instance in the sociology of India. Early Tibet scholars, diplomats and travellers approached the field empirically, without a 'hidden theoretical agenda', i.e. they did not focus specifically on developing general theories of society, which has meant that their contributions have been more easily comparable with current work in the social sciences. However, the lack of a case-study focus is a problem in the literature on Tibet as well. Scant information is available on daily relations between people of different social rank, and little has been written on the varying criteria for rank within the social ranking systems in Lhasa. Due to the general shift of research focus in the social sciences – from structure and function to agent and agency, and meaning – one might assume that the social system in Lhasa was more fragmented and less consistent than what appears from the available literature.

Whereas the methodological problems in Indian sociology could be termed epistemological, the problems of early research conducted on the Tibetan social system are rather of a political character. The structure of Tibetan society has come under scrutiny by Chinese and Tibetans alike. A major legitimization for China's invasion and occupation of Tibet has been what the Chinese have called the social inequality and the 'unjust' distribution of wealth in Tibetan society. In Chinese propaganda, both international and domestic, the government has argued that the nobility and the clergy of Tibet exploited the Tibetan population, and that the commoners therefore needed to be 'liberated'.² Tibetans, however, argue that most farmers and nomads (the

majority of the population) enjoyed a fair degree of freedom of mobility and choice, and that relations between landowners and farmers were characterized by mutual respect.³

PRE-COMMUNIST LHASA

The Tibetan political system before the Chinese occupation was by Tibetans termed *chöri lugnyi* [chos srid lugs gnyis], which translates as 'the religious and secular system'.⁴ The institution of the Dalai Lama had a dual role, both as the patron of religion (he is seen to be the reincarnation of Chenresig)⁵ and as the political leader, administering the state. In the dual system of *chöri lugnyi*, any position in the political administration should ideally be shared between a nobleman and a monk.

The people of Tibet had various livelihoods. The majority worked with agriculture, many were nomadic pastoralists, some were traders (salt being the main export item) and others were officials and bureaucrats.⁶ Land was the most important means of production, and the land tenure system reveals the foundations of the social system (Carrasco 1959). Arable land was administered by the noble families or monasteries (*labrang*⁷ or monasteries proper) or by the government directly. According to Chinese accounts, 37 per cent of the arable land was held by monastic estates and 25 per cent by aristocratic estates (Epstein in Goldstein 1989: 3). The remaining 38 per cent of the land was not defined as manorial estates, but held directly by the 'taxpaying' farmers. Surkhang, a minister in the former Tibetan government, estimated that monastic and lay estates accounted for slightly more than half of all arable land (Goldstein 1989), which would indicate that land held directly by farmers represented about 45 per cent of the total arable land. Although it was administered by the government, the farmers held the deeds to the land.

The activities of the Tibetan government were financed by taxes of various kinds – rendered in money, in goods, in animals and in work. Tax was paid by the estate holders (noble families or monasteries or *labrang*) as well as by farmers and nomads. The amount to be paid was determined by the government, but many estate holders possessed ancient documents that gave them special concessions. Government revenue was low, and most of it was earmarked for religious affairs and festivals (or ended up in the pockets of local governors). Landlords had jurisdictional authority over their estates, as they administered the land in the name of the government. Disagreements and conflicts among

the farmers and nomads were seldom taken to the central government in Lhasa, but were generally solved directly by the estate holder (cf. Dawa Norbu 1987: 75–88).

HEREDITARY SOCIAL DIVISIONS

Family background (*kyesa*) was the basic principle for categorizing lay people into social hierarchies.⁸ Goldstein divides all lay Tibetans into ‘two hierarchical, endogamous strata’: the ‘aristocratic lords (*gerpa*) and the serfs (*miser*)’ (Goldstein 1971a: 522). Following the vocabulary used by Ugen Gombo (1983), this book holds that there were three social levels: nobility (*kudrak*), commoners (*miser*) and low families (*menrig*), all with various subdivisions.

Both Carrasco and Goldstein assume that social position in Tibet was based on relations to land and (control of) political power (Carrasco 1959, Goldstein 1968). However, it seems unlikely that economy and politics were the sole criteria for rank, as there were families whose wealth did not correspond to the rank of their social group. Some noble families of the *gerpa* category were relatively impoverished (Goldstein 1973), poor even when compared to some of the commoners (*miser*). On the other hand, there were also wealthy families of low rank, especially corpse-cutters for the sky burial (*tomden*), who were left on the fringes of society. Ugen Gombo, a Tibetan scholar who bases his work on what he terms ‘memory ethnographies’, holds that in the village where he grew up in Tibet, both socio-economic factors as well as ritual purity and morality were relevant to a person’s rank in the local hierarchy. However, he argues that the dominant criterion was socio-economic relation to land. It is not the task of this book to determine the underlying criteria of the former Tibetan social system; most probably, both socio-economic and ritual purity were contextually important. There seem to have been two different, coexisting norm systems defining the social categories and the subdivisions within each: one based on economic and political standards, and another based on purity, morality and religion.⁹ The latter, based on both clerical and lay religious ideas (including morality and purity), defines the main social groups or categories in Tibet, while the former, based on profane criteria, defines the subdivisions of the main groups. This is supported by Bell:

Most of the noble families are rich, but not all. Some have lost their wealth long ago, but as long as the unbroken male descent continues,

they cannot lose their social position (*rik*). A family may have a good *rik*, though poor and without high official position. And, having it, sons and daughters will eat, drink, and marry with the most exalted in the land. (Bell 1928: 95)

According to Goldstein, the vast majority of the Tibetan people were *miser* (lit.: ‘yellow people’) (1968). Whereas Goldstein translates *miser* as serfs, both the main Chinese source on Tibet’s social history (Xizang Renmin Chubanshe 1987) and the informants I interviewed translate *miser* as ‘commoner’ or ‘citizen’, and we might understand ‘commoners’ as a translation of *miser* and see ‘serf’ as a subdivision of *miser*.

While drawing on other literature on the subject, in particular Bell (1928), Goldstein (1968, 1971a, 1986) and Carrasco (1959), the description below is based on the Chinese *Social History of Tibet* carried out in the 1950s (Xizang Renmin Chubanshe 1987). It is essential to be critical towards Chinese publications, as political propaganda obviously is widespread, especially regarding social and cultural issues. Most Chinese publications dealing with social categories in the former Tibetan society are intended solely as propaganda.¹⁰ However, the *Social History of Tibet* is available only in Chinese, and, to my mind, provides a proper introduction to the social categories and subdivisions, giving detailed descriptions of various contracts to land, followed by the Tibetan terms used by Tibetans in the villages. The survey was originally part of a nationwide project meant to map the social life of the ‘minority nationalities’ (*shaoshu minzu* in Chinese). The aim of the surveys was partly to determine the stage of development of each nationality according to Marxist ideals of social evolution, and partly based on a genuine belief within the Communist Party in the necessity of knowing a system well, in order to introduce efficient policies (Kolås 2003). The various categories described in the survey are given in Tibetan letters, as well as the Chinese translation.

According to the *Social History of Tibet*, the main category of farmers was *trelpa* (*khral pa*, *khral* meaning tax) i.e. taxpayer. *Trelpa* were taxpaying farmers that held hereditary contracts to land. The contracts could be held by both men and women in the family, and in return for the right to the land, they had tax obligations. There were two types of *trelpa*. The *trelpa chi* (‘outside taxpayers’) were the families who cultivated land directly administered by the government, and who were not a part of (they were literally ‘outside’) a manorial estate. These families were their own landlords, as they held the right to their own land and were not obliged to work on demesne fields. The other tax-

payers were called *trelpa nang* ('inside' taxpayers): they held contracts to land administered by noble or religious estates. The *trelpa nang* had tax obligations to the estate holders. However, these *trelpa* families were still the rightful holders of their land, with contracts of the title deed. The *trelpa* was superior to the other family categories of *miser* background, in terms of prestige, rights, basic economic resources and, generally, in wealth (Goldstein 1971a). The *trelpa* were free citizens (Xizang Renmin Chubanshe 1987: 92).

The other main category was *düchung* (dud chung, often translated as 'small households', lit. 'small smoke'). *Düchung* were persons with individual leasing contracts to plots of land. These contracts could be lifelong, and, like the *trelpa*, they were entitled to the products of the land they cultivated and paid taxes to the person they leased the land from. One of the tax obligations was to work on the demesne fields of the owners, who were either nobles, monasteries or *labrang*, or wealthy *trelpa* families. Some *düchung* did not have leasing contracts, as these were not hereditary, and were instead engaged in short- and long-term work for others. For instance, they could receive food in return for working on a demesne field instead of the *düchung* with the actual work obligation. In such a relation they were called *mibog* (human lease). *Mibog* appear to have had freedom of mobility (Goldstein 1971a), because they were not bound by contract. At the same time, they were poor, without access to land.

The third category mentioned in the Chinese survey is that of the serfs. These were persons without contracts to cultivate their own land, who worked on demesne fields or did other types of work for estate holders and landlords. In return they received food and shelter. The serfs enjoyed very little freedom, were often very poor and belonged to a lord through same-sex descent (i.e. a son would belong to the same lord or estate as his father, and a daughter to the same as her mother). There were several subdivisions of this category, one being *tsheyog* – life-bound serfs who were totally dependent on their landlord.

It is difficult to ascertain the relative numbers of the various *trelpa*, *düchung* and serfs. Ugen Gombo indicates that around 40 per cent belonged to the *trelpa*, while 50 per cent belonged to the *düchung* category. This estimate is based on figures from Goldstein (1971a), Carrasco (1959) and Aziz (1978), as well as his own 'estimate of members of all strata in the area surrounding my village' (Gombo 1983: 68). However, there was sizeable variation in all villages and areas, and no population consensus has been conducted in terms of *kyesa*, which makes it problematic to generalize from the available accounts.

Writing near the turn of the previous century, Kawaguchi divided the common people into two groups, *tong ba* and *tong du*.¹¹ The former were superior – those who possessed some means and did not live in poverty. The latter, *tong du*, is explained as being those ‘engaged in menial service’ (Kawaguchi 1995[1909]: 439). Further, Kawaguchi wrote that the rank of the members of the *tong du* was independent of their financial situation. No ‘ordinary people’ would eat with them, nor did they intermarry with them (ibid.). In the literature on the Tibetan social system, little attention has been paid to this group of people that others did not want to dine with. Kawaguchi, travelling in Tibet nearly one hundred years ago, did not recognize these people as a distinct social group, outside the group of commoners. The description of the taboos concerning food (mixing of mouths) and marriage (sexual contact) indicates that the *tong du* he writes about are identical to *tomden*, the corpse-cutters, that Carrasco mentions. Carrasco briefly notes that ‘at the bottom of the social scale there are outcast groups, craft specialists, who have little connection with land’ (Carrasco 1959: 214). These outcasts in Central Tibet are, according to him, fishermen, butchers, smiths and corpse-cutters. He goes on to say: ‘These castes are endogamous, may only eat with caste-fellows, and are barred from entering the church’ (Carrasco 1959: 241). Similar characteristics are given in the Chinese survey *Social History of Tibet*. Here the third category is termed ‘inferior kind’ (*menrig*). In addition to the restrictions mentioned by Carrasco, it is noted that *menrig* and others cannot sit at the same level; furthermore, while the outcastes might financially become like the *trelpa* (taxpayers) this would not influence their rank as *menrig*. Kawaguchi further mentions that ‘mésalliances form a social class of their own’ (Kawaguchi 1995[1909]: 440), referring to marriages between outcastes and commoners. According to Kawaguchi, they ‘are in fact the lowest caste in Tibet’ (ibid.: 441). However, I did not find any evidence for this assumption among the informants of this study, nor in other literature.

According to the elderly Lhasa people interviewed, contact with low families was not strictly avoided in the traditional society. They confirmed that the taboos and restrictions were mostly related to eating and drinking, as well as sexual liaisons. Trying to define which occupations were seen as ‘unclean’ (*tsogpa*) can be difficult. The occupations mentioned by Carrasco seem to be commonly considered unclean, in particular the smiths (blacksmiths [*cag zoba* or *gara*], silversmiths [*ngul zoba*], goldsmiths [*ser zoba*]), the butchers (*shemba*), the fishermen (*nyebsa*) and the corpse-cutters (*tomden*). These occupations are identi-

fied as wrong-doings in terms of Buddhist doctrines of refraining from killing and not disturbing the spirits of the elements. In Lhasa, there were other, more peripheral groups considered to be unclean as well. These were carpenters (*shing zoba*), musicians or beggars (*longkhen*), and horse dealers (*tha tshongba*). The rationale behind the uncleanness connected to these occupations is not clear, but most of my informants expressed that the concept of pollution (*drip* [grip]) might have originated in India and been brought to Tibet along with the introduction of Buddhism.¹²

On the other end of the social hierarchy in traditional Tibet, we find the nobility. The noble families were the lay elite of the Tibetan political and social system, and they comprised a small number of people of some 150 to 200 families,¹³ and were subdivided into various categories. In her autobiography, Yuthok divides the nobility into four levels: the *yabshi* (yab gzhis), *depön* (mda' dpon), *midrag* (mi drag) and *gerpa* (sger pa) (Yuthok 1990), based on family history and political as well as financial position. *Yabshi* families held highest rank. They were the six families into which incarnations of the Dalai Lama have been born, and their descendants.¹⁴ Next in rank were the *depön*, being descendants of great men in Tibetan history. Some Tibetans claim that the *depön* families are descendants of the Buddhist kings of the eighth century. According to Yuthok, there were four *depön* families.¹⁵ The third subdivision of the nobility is the *midrag*, consisting of about 18 families who held high political positions.¹⁶ Members of these three subdivisions held the main political positions; they were also the financial elite of Tibet, administering multiple estates throughout the country. The majority of the noble families belonged to the fourth category, *gerpa*. Yuthok states that there were 150 families of the *gerpa* category, and it seems, although she is not clear on this, that the *gerpa* were families who administrated estates and rarely had political careers (Yuthok 1990).¹⁷

The categories of *yabshi*, *depön*, *midrag* and *gerpa* are not mentioned by Carrasco (1959) or Goldstein (1989). They categorize the nobility on the basis of their relations to land and political power, and wealth and rank, respectively. Carrasco divides the nobility into two main categories: the territorial chiefs and the bureaucratic nobility. A chief is a 'local ruler in the territory from which he draws his income, and that is his main or only political function'. Like the chiefs, the bureaucratic nobility have jurisdictional rights in their estates, but 'they hold their estates subject to the rendering of service to the state as officials, and as a reward for the rendering of such service' (Carrasco 1959: 215). Goldstein differentiates the nobility into 'a small group of about 30

higher-ranked families, known as *depön mitra*, and about 120–170 lower or “common” aristocratic families’ (Goldstein 1989: 6), according to whether a family held single or multiple estates.

When comparing these three ways of internally differentiating and ranking the noble families, it seems that family history and wealth are closely connected, as the families of the Dalai Lamas (*yabshi*) and the families of important Tibetans in the history (*depön*) also had the greatest number of estates and therefore the greatest wealth. Families with multiple estates correspond to the categories of *yabshi*, *depön* and *midrag* mentioned by Yuthok. Carrasco does not explicitly deal with the issue of single or multiple estates as a criterion for internal division, but it seems likely that those he calls the ‘bureaucratic nobility’, who had multiple political tasks, also held multiple estates.

Membership in the noble houses was hereditary and based on descent. In general, the offspring of a marriage became members of the father’s house. A patrilinear system of succession required a male heir; thus, if a marriage produced only daughters, a man could be adopted and take over the leading role in the household.¹⁸

Male members of the nobility were differentiated by seven ranks, which corresponded to political position (but not influence) and were not hereditary. The only members of the first rank were the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama.¹⁹ Normally, the only members of the second rank were the regent and the prime minister.²⁰ The members of the Cabinet, the four *shape* (council ministers), were all given third rank. Also some men of *yabshi* families, such as the older brothers of the Dalai Lama, held this rank. The fourth rank was the highest rank without particular appointments, and included military personnel. All officials held the fifth, sixth or seventh rank, and were often promoted holding the same position (Williamson 1938). *Depön* and *midrag* entered government service in the fourth rank. Members of the *yabshi* were of higher rank (third) even when they did not hold powerful positions. The *gerpa* officials entered the service in the seventh rank (Yuthok 1990).

The livelihoods of the nobility varied. Most noble families managed land and collected taxes from the farmers or nomads on their estates. Nobles in political positions in Lhasa who held many estates (*yabshi*, *depön* and *midrag*) had stewards who administered their land by proxy. The officials received a small salary for their work in the political administration, but had the main income from their estates. The remaining noble families, mostly of the *gerpa* category, administered their estates themselves and lived on the tax and the products of the demesne land of the estate.

The internal differentiation of the nobility should be kept in mind, as this book will focus on changes in the importance of nobility in Lhasa society, and in particular the relevance of the internal differentiation.

SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS AND RELATIONS

According to the elderly informants, group membership was obvious in pre-1959 Lhasa society. Lhasa was then a small-scale society, with only some 30,000 inhabitants. The degree of wealth indicated which social group a person belonged to, but, as noted above, financial means were not the sole criterion of rank. Speech and behaviour, as well as ways of dressing, were also important indicators of rank. The low and the noble families were the easiest to identify, and most often persons of these families were well known to the Lhasa inhabitants. The *menrig* were in general very poor, which was obvious from their appearance. Many 'clean' Tibetans claim that the *menrig*, the unclean, were physically dirty, and were for that reason easy to recognize (see also Ugen Gombo (1983) for a similar view). They lived on the outskirts of the town (such as the *ragyapa* who lived on Thieves' Island), and did not socialize much with other Tibetans. The noble families in Lhasa were generally wealthy, as a Lhasa residence was given to a family in addition to other estates in the provinces. The poorer noble families had only one small estate, and did not live in Lhasa. Thus, the nobles were easily identified by wealth. According to Yuthok (1990) (and confirmed by my older informants), nobles wore special clothes that commoners did not possess. Every nobleman should ideally wear one long turquoise earring, as a sign of his noble background. Also the quality of the wool used in clothes, the jewellery and the hats were status symbols for noblemen. Noblewomen could be recognized by the dresses and jewellery they wore, as well as their company of servants. Women of the nobility always wore *akor*, an ornament fastened to both sides of the hair, hiding the ears. There were no rules preventing others from wearing an *akor*, or other types of women's jewellery, but, according to my informants, non-noble women simply did not.²¹

Some *trelpa* (taxpayers) might have appeared to be noble from an outsider's view. According to Tibetans, however, a person's rank could always be deduced from appearance and code of conduct. Nobles, poor or rich, used the high honorific language. The Tibetan language is hierarchically structured, with complex honorific forms which reflected the social system of pre-Communist Tibetan society (Shakya

1994: 158). It is probably impossible at this point to uncover in detail how social distinctions were recognized in the former Tibetan society. In the literature, the issue is not discussed beyond status symbols, speech and behaviour; and the elderly Tibetans whom I interviewed did not emphasize other important ways for classification. I shall leave this problem here, and refer to the discussion in a later chapter.

Regarding social relations in Lhasa, the importance of social differentiation was significantly linked to age. For children, the issue of family background was not considered important. Both Taring (1994 [1970]) and Yuthok (1990) emphasize that the children of nobles often played with children of commoners – but not with the children of low people. Yuthok writes that the daughter of her nanny (who was a commoner) was like a sister to her. The two of them attended the same private school and spent much time together. At the same time, Yuthok notes that her commoner friend was allowed to eat only after the noble girls had finished (Yuthok 1990).

Adults of noble background did not avoid commoners, as they did with ‘low people’. Their relations with the commoners working on their estates and in their houses are described by noble and common sources alike as friendly and based on mutual respect (Yuthok 1990, Choedon 1978). When a party or picnic was arranged, the servants and workers would also take part (Bell 1928). However, it seems that people of noble and common backgrounds did not socialize unless they had a working relation. In Lhasa, noble circles were closed to non-nobles, and channels for social advancement were rigid and limited. One possibility was to become a skilful monk official, and then later disrobe but retain the high position in the political administration. This happened relatively often; the former monk would then be given a low-rank noble status (of the *gerpa* category), as well as a small estate. A second, and obviously less accessible possibility was that a woman in a non-noble family gave birth to a high-ranking *tulku*, a reincarnate lama (preferable the Dalai Lama or Panchen Lama), which would automatically ennoble the whole family. Also, there are some known cases of commoners who befriended the Dalai Lama and were ennobled by him personally,²² and young men of commoner background who presented themselves as financially and politically important (traders for instance) and became ennobled in order to hold positions in the Lhasa administration.

Social mobility has been a major issue in the academic debates about the classification of traditional Tibet. Discussing the social system and the group of commoners in particular raises the heated question of whether the social structure is to be termed feudal or not, and whether

the Tibetan farmers and nomads should be termed 'serfs'.²³ Goldstein has argued strongly for a feudal interpretation. As this book makes extensive use of his work, I find it essential to give my interpretation of his main points when dealing with the former social system. Goldstein considers the *trelpa* (taxpayer) and the *düchung* as 'serfs', which he defines as people who are tied, involuntarily and by virtue of birth, to land and to a lord, and who are under the judicial authority of a lord (Goldstein 1986: 81). On the basis of the status of the 'outside' taxpayers (*trelpa chi*), I shall argue that the term 'serf' does not apply as the translation of *miser*, and that the system should not be characterized as feudal. Goldstein himself notes that the *trelpa* of the government administered estates did not have obligations to cultivate the demesne fields of a landlord, and were not under direct authority of the estate steward or lord (Goldstein 1986). The *trelpa nang* families, who held land on a manorial estate, were not involuntarily bound to the estate. Rather, in a place where land was the prime source of livelihood, they were fortunate to have access to their own land – land that furthermore could be transmitted to the next generation without outside interference. Available figures indicate that the majority of the farming population were taxpayers (*trelpa*) and around 45 per cent of the arable land was cultivated by *trelpa chi* ('outside' taxpayers) (Epstein in Goldstein 1989: 9, Carrasco 1959: 86). Thus, by translating *miser* by the term 'serf' (including *trelpa*), Goldstein's presentation of the social structure of the former Tibetan society could be seen as misleading. Despite his claim to be objective and scientific (Goldstein 1986), Goldstein is in fact more in line with Chinese propaganda in his presentation of old Tibetan society as unjust, than are the Chinese social scientists and their government in the *Social History of Tibet*.²⁴ On the basis of the latter (Xizang Renmin Chubanshe 1987), as well as Michael (1982), I choose to translate *miser* as 'commoner' and 'citizen' rather than 'serf'.

Family background was thus an important principle for categorizing lay Tibetans within the social hierarchy. The criteria for rank within the main social hierarchy seem to have been, on the one hand, lay religious-based concepts of purity and morality and on the other hand, wealth and political positions. The three main social categories of noble, commoner and 'low people' were based on religious norms, while the subdivisions of each category were determined by economy and politics. A strong support for this assumption is the fact that a person of *menrig* might improve his or her financial situation (by becoming a *trelpa* [taxpayer]) and still remain *menrig*. One's family background

(*kyesa*) was inherited from both the father and the mother, and intermarriage between nobles and non-nobles was rare.

Family background, morality and religion were all criteria that would soon be challenged and opposed. On the other side of Tibet's eastern borders, a revolution was taking place. This revolution would bring about dramatic changes in Tibetan society, on all levels. When Chairman Mao in 1949 declared the People's Republic of China, few Tibetans could imagine the consequences that this would have for Tibet.

THE MAO ERA (1949–1976)

When the People's Liberation Army invaded Lhasa in 1950, the new Communist state did not aim solely at asserting political control over the territory: its task was also to promote fundamental social changes and to transform Tibet into a 'socialist society' (Shakya 1994, Kolås 1998).²⁵ A major problem was how to communicate the socialist ideas and propaganda. Not only were the terms and concepts central to Communism and Marxism nonexistent in the Tibetan language; the language itself had been viewed as sacred, and no popular literary genre had been developed (Shakya 1994: 154). It was important to develop new concepts in Tibetan – and one concept of particular significance was that of 'class'.

After the Chinese takeover, the Tibetan polity was only gradually eliminated.²⁶ The social system was closely connected to the polity and the distribution of land, and social divisions continued to exist throughout the 1950s. Between 1950 and 1959 there were no expropriations of estates, and no efforts were made to foment class struggle (Goldstein 1998). The Chinese government initiated what they called the 'United Front policy' where parts of the ruling elite were given a 'symbolic position of authority' (Smith 1996: 354) in order to smooth the transition of power and ultimately eliminate the traditional ruling class. The elites remained in their high positions, both socially and economically, and their children were sent to China to study in order to become the first Tibetan cadres (Bass 1998). However, after the Lhasa uprising of March 1959, which led to the flight of the Dalai Lama, together with most of the Tibetan government and some 100,000 Tibetans, Chinese social policies in Tibet changed. The United Front policy continued, but to a lesser extent and including only few individuals from the ruling elite, and rather incorporated communist-friendly Tibetans of the lower classes. In the aftermath of the Lhasa

uprising, the new government divided the Tibetans into those who had supported the revolt and those who had not, focusing also on their relations to land. This meant that the former aristocracy was labelled as opposing the government, and being enemies of the new rule. This was the first labelling exercise that the Chinese authorities had carried out in Tibet; later there was to be much more labelling of people into different classes and political categories (Shakya 1999).

At the end of 1959, the 'Democratic Reforms' were introduced. With the redistribution of land and property, a new set of classes was imposed on Tibetans, as the redistribution and collectivization was based on class origin. The nobility and others of the high classes (landholders) were not permitted to participate in the newly established communes. During the collectivization period of the 1960s, class background was applied as the organizing principle for all social, economic and political activity. This continued throughout the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) (Shakya 1994).

The new classification of Tibetans did not correspond to the former social system in Lhasa. The Communist classification system was based on Marxist concepts of the people's relation to the means of production, as well as their political consciousness. According to Paljor (1977), Tibetan farmers and townspeople were divided into six classes: reactionaries, serf owners, agents of serf owners, rich, middle-class and poor (serfs).²⁷ The noble families (*kudrak*) were defined into the classes of reactionaries and serf owners, taxpayers (*trelpa*) as agents of serf owners and rich or middle-class farmers, *düchung* as middle-class or poor, and others who had less than 25 per cent of their income left after annual expenditure were defined as poor or serfs (Choedon 1978). The classes of poor and serfs included beggars, *mibog* (human lease) and low people (*menrig*).²⁸

Reactionaries, serf owners and agents of serf owners were treated as enemies of the state and were punished and persecuted (Paljor 1977). Goldstein argues that in nomadic areas in Central Tibet, class-struggle sessions or self-criticism meetings (*tamdzing* ['thab 'dzing]) were restricted to those who had supported the uprising (in 1959) and the Dalai Lama, or those who had administered their estates particularly brutally (1994: 93). In Lhasa, however, the *tamdzing* was broader, including members of noble families as well as intellectuals, monks and nuns, and educated people in general.²⁹ The punishment was harsh; many nobles, monks and nuns were arrested, tortured and/or executed.

The collectivization of the early 1960s left the 'bad' classes in a difficult situation. Because the members of the high classes, including

the nobility, were not allowed to join a commune, their financial situation was even worse than that of the rest of the population, and many died (Goldstein 1994).³⁰ The land and estates of the nobility, the monasteries and the government had been confiscated and re-distributed to the lowest classes.³¹ During the day, nobles cleaned the streets for no pay, and at night attended self-criticism meetings (Paljor 1977). Then, with the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' (1966–76), the situation of the high classes (the reactionaries, the serf owners and the agents of serf owners) worsened. In China proper, the Cultural Revolution ended in 1969, but in Tibet only the death of Mao in 1976 put a stop to the activities of the Red Guards. These ten years were a cultural and social disaster for Tibet. Having the correct political attitude and belonging to the correct class were the major concerns, and nobles were again the targets of persecution.

During the years from 1959 until the end of the 1970s, the 'poor' and 'serfs' were wooed by the Chinese in various ways. Schools in Lhasa were open only to the children of the lowest classes. They became the Tibetan cadres, were sent to China for further education and were treated as the new elite of Chinese Tibetan society.

The following describes the period after the 1980s, which is a period characterized by little focus on class origin and *kyesa*. As such, the 1980s can be seen as the beginning of a new era in Tibet, where the focus was put on economic development rather than collectivization and Communism as we know it.³² This decline in the government's interest in class and *kyesa* is crucial for the institutional framework within which Tibetans operate in Lhasa today.

THE 1980S

On 22 May 1980,³³ Chinese Party Secretary Hu Yaobang landed at Gonggar airport in Tibet for a historical visit that set its mark on Tibet for some years to come. Hu was highly critical of the Party's policies in Tibet, and particularly the dominance of the Chinese cadres in the region. In a speech held in late May he said:

We feel that our party has let the Tibetan people down. We feel bad! The sole purpose of our Communist Party is to work for the happiness of the people, to do good things for them. We have worked nearly thirty years, but the lives of the Tibetan people have not notably improved. Are we [the Party] not to blame? (Hu Yaobang, quoted in Shakya 1999: 381)

Hu's visit gave Tibetans hope for a new period of freedom and real autonomy. One of his main points was to recruit more Tibetan cadres, so as to develop a greater degree of participation from the Tibetan population. For various reasons, this was not easy to carry out.³⁴ And with the failure to Tibetanize the cadres came a new emphasis on the position of the traditional elite (nobles and the clergy). Tibet's traditional elite still held the respect of the common people; now, instead of being attacked by the new elite, they were offered prominent positions within the political administration (Shakya 1999). By 1982 the Party claimed that over 600 former Tibetan officials held leading posts in the government and the Party (Shakya 1999: 39).

The 1980s marked the end of the collectivization period, which had been dominated by communes and mass education and a strong focus on class origin and family background. No longer were the 'poor' and the 'serfs' wooed by the Chinese authorities; instead, a strategy of promoting the traditional elite was again emphasized. These were both former monk officials and members of noble families, and as such hereditary family background in the Tibetan sense (*kyesa*) was again made relevant in political and social life in Tibet.

CONTEMPORARY LHASA

Social organization in today's Lhasa is best illustrated by focusing on the organization of work and residence. Although the period of collectivization of production has now passed, the individual remains within a strictly organized state structure. This system is in Chinese termed *danwei*, and in Tibetan *lekhang*,³⁵ and is often translated as work units (Lu 1993). In addition to the *danwei*, it is necessary to look at the educational system in Lhasa to grasp the context in which Tibetans of different family backgrounds (*kyesa*) socialize and meet. All Lhasa citizens, that is, all those with *hukou* (Chinese, meaning residence permit) in Lhasa, without restrictions are part of the educational system and/or work and residence system. The organization of work and residence, and of schooling, is based on quite different criteria than *kyesa*, and thus represents an important context for analysing the role of *kyesa* and in particular the nobility in contemporary Lhasa.

Danwei as a system describes the institutions and organizations of the state-run sector in China. Such units include party and state organs, as well as organizations that do not create material wealth, such as research and educational institutions, health-care and cultural organizations. The entities that do create material wealth, such as the

state-run enterprises, also possess the full characteristics of a work unit (Lu 1993). Other entities, such as urban collective enterprises and neighbourhood committees, are not work units, although they are components of what Lu terms 'the system of units' (1993). In urban Tibet, work and residence are organized into the unit system in precisely the same way as in urban China.

The *danwei* is the administrative system into which the citizens are organized. Together with the neighbourhood committees, the system of *danwei*, in theory, includes all city dwellers in China. Work units are multi-faceted, as they include production, means of securing stability (by controlling the individuals) and the organization of social benefits. Unit leaders are the mediators, the link between the State and the individual, and they are the administrators of governmental policies.³⁶ The leader of a work unit is responsible for those working there, and the individual 'belongs' to the work unit (Lu 1993).

[T]he employee's social activities are inseparable from his unit. Whatever he does, be it a marriage registration, checking into a hotel or buying a plane ticket, he has to show his employee's card or a letter of introduction from his unit. These are the certification of the individual's identity and the legitimacy of his activities. (Lu 1989: 100)

The unit not only controls the individuals, it also takes care of their every need. This means that access to scarce resources such as housing, health care and the various permits needed for obtaining goods, are gained through the work unit. In Lhasa it is particularly the access to higher salaries and various permits that are the most attractive benefits. Because of the limited ways of gaining access to social benefits, the individual workers depend on their work unit for covering these needs, but the work unit also keeps a tight control over their employees' actions (Christophersen 1994).

Only a minority of Tibetans in Tibet as a whole are affiliated with work units, but in Lhasa the situation is different. It has not been possible to obtain reliable statistics on the percentage of Tibetans living in work units, but the Chinese demographer Rong claims that in 1987, more than half of the Tibetan population in Lhasa lived in units (Rong 1991). It is my impression that Tibetans are increasingly interested in being part of a unit, and that the units represent an attractive future possibility.

On the other hand, the work units have a strong political aspect (such as the compulsory political meetings every week), and some

Tibetans do not wish to be part of such a system.³⁷ Apart from the work units, the alternative housing possibilities are to rent a flat or a house from the neighbourhood committees, or to rent (or buy) on the private market. These alternatives represent a more distant relation to the government than that found in the work units. The neighbourhood committee consists of local people living in a defined area or sharing a particular courtyard; and the committee members work for the government. To a certain extent, neighbours' activities are registered, but there are no weekly political meetings in the neighbourhoods, and the links to the government are not as clear and direct as in the work unit. Political activities in the courtyards vary with the political engagement of the members of the neighbourhood committee, and some are known to be very strict in requiring the correct political attitudes and behaviour from the tenants.

The second option – renting an apartment or a house privately – involves only vague and distant contact with the government, and a greater degree of freedom. In Lhasa, many traders and business people own private houses. Renting a room is common for Tibetans who lack a *hukou* for Lhasa, because without this permit, a person is not entitled to official services such as housing. Renting or owning a house or a flat is an expensive alternative, though it also provides a higher degree of political freedom. Generally, this alternative was not favoured by my informants, who said that such basic needs as health care and schooling are expensive and difficult to arrange for those outside the social system.

Besides the *danwei*, the school system is another important framework that Tibetans in Lhasa operate within. Ever since the reform policies were started in the 1960s, the Chinese authorities have stressed the educational development initiated by the government in Tibet. In an official pamphlet called 'Education in Tibet. Yesterday and Today', the official attitude of China's Communist Party (CCP) is formulated: 'In a nutshell, Tibetan education was backward and declining, as was also the case in politics, economics and social development' (Shang Jun'e 1998: 5). Education is stated to be an important part of the political reason for the Chinese presence in Tibet. The CCP claims that the educational system has been improved in many ways, one of the most important being the right to attend school. It is maintained that the school system in Tibet is now open to all citizens, and not only for the children of noble families, as they claim was the case in 'Old Tibet'. However, the good intentions to improve the educational system have in fact not been implemented in Tibet, and the general educational

level is far lower than in the rest of China. According to official statistics, 60 per cent of the Tibetan population are either illiterate or partly illiterate, and only 67 per cent of all Tibetan children attend school (Bass 1999).

The educational system in China is divided into two levels of compulsory schooling: primary school (six years) and junior middle school (three years). In addition, there is a senior middle school (three years) that is not compulsory. There are few schools available for Tibetans, and Tibetan children in rural areas rarely attend middle school at all (Save the Children 1997). However, this is not the case in Lhasa. Being the province capital, Lhasa has the best school facilities for the children, with numerous primary schools, as well as both junior and senior secondary middle schools.

As part of the implementation of the ideology of equality, education is offered to Tibetans of all social (and family) backgrounds. All Lhasa citizens are entitled to free schooling.³⁸ The criterion for assignment to the schools is place of residence as well as ethnicity, and the Tibetan children of different family backgrounds (*kyesa*) are to attend the same school and classes. Tibetan children from one work unit often attend the same school, whereas Chinese children attend the Chinese primary schools. The main difference between the Tibetan and Chinese schools and classes is the use of language.

KYESA IN THE WORK UNITS AND THE SCHOOLS

The institutional frameworks presented – the work unit and educational systems – are part of the daily context in Lhasa where social relations are established. They are intrinsic to the social organization of Lhasa Tibetans and hence imply a structuring of their social relations. All Lhasa citizens, i.e. those with a *hukou* for Lhasa, attend school (for a minimum of six years), and many establish long-lasting social relations there. Similarly, most people within the unit system work in only one or two units in the course of a lifetime, so social relations are built up over a long time here as well. The educational and unit systems represent an important part of the social arenas where Tibetans meet other Tibetans. We need to ask *who* they meet in these arenas – in terms of the composition of the school classes, and in terms of who are recruited to the units.

The first distinction made in the educational system is that of ethnicity and language. Both Chinese and Tibetan primary schools are available in Lhasa, and although some Tibetan children attend a

Chinese school, in general Tibetans and Chinese are separated. The intra-ethnic divisions in the school classes are based on socio-economic criteria, such as work position and educational level (residence in a work unit) rather than on *kyesa*. The school system is designed to mix Tibetan children with various *kyesa*. However, some Tibetans (both commoners and nobles) claim there is a tendency for children of noble families to attend certain schools. I have no evidence of this claim, as no specific data on this is available.

Recruitment to work units is organized through formal education and informal contacts.³⁹ During the final year of study, representatives of the school will allocate the graduating students to various units. With good contacts in a relevant unit,⁴⁰ one may request a special transfer. However, there seems to be only a limited degree of individual choice in terms of place (which area of Tibet or China, and which particular unit) and the nature of the work. The government thus provides the institutional frameworks within which Tibetans establish social relations, independent of *kyesa* and traditional criteria for rank and socializing.

All my younger informants have friends or acquaintances from both noble and common background. The social relations that they have across *kyesa* borders are mainly classmates from different levels of schooling (mostly from middle school and higher education) or colleagues (former or present). Thus, within the educational and the unit system, Tibetans meet and socialize in their daily lives with others from both noble and non-noble background, and the distinctions between a commoner and a noble are not obvious in terms of socio-economic position. In that sense, *kyesa* is no longer the relevant criterion for social contact that it was before the Chinese restructuring of Tibetan society. All the same, *kyesa* is made relevant today in daily life and in ritual settings, in formal and informal contexts alike.

CONTRADICTING VALUE SYSTEMS?

Through the school and work unit systems, Tibetans in Lhasa now have daily contacts with people from various family backgrounds, but in traditional Tibet, *kyesa* was an integral and natural principle for social division. In contemporary Lhasa, other criteria determine social relations, and perhaps dominate them. The old distinctions between the social categories have become blurred, and thus the policy of eradicating the features of pre-Communist Tibet has been partly successful if seen from a Chinese perspective. However, that does not

necessarily imply that *kyesa* is no longer made relevant in social relations, and the intention here is to look into when and why *kyesa* can still be said to be actively articulated and made relevant in everyday social relations, despite the vast socio-economic changes that have been implemented in Tibet and Lhasa since 1959.

As the socio-economic changes have not actually eradicated *kyesa* as a relevant concept, *kyesa* has to be understood to include other aspects than the purely socio-economic ones – aspects such as ritual purity, person and morality. I claim that these values are important to Tibetans in daily life. Whereas socio-economic changes may not necessarily have caused a total alteration in the system of *kyesa*, they represent new contexts where *kyesa* may or may not be made relevant.

Kyesa does not play any obvious part in the Chinese society that has been introduced into Tibet, as is especially clear from official propaganda. The main propaganda broadcasted and promoted in Tibet focuses on what is called the ‘unjust social system in the backwards Old Tibet’, and presents China as the solution with its policy of equality. Tsering Shakya notes that ‘[t]he Tibetan hierarchical structure [of the pre-Communist Tibetan society] is seen [by Chinese authorities] to be incompatible with the egalitarian ideology of the Chinese’ (Shakya 1994: 158). This is true on one level: egalitarianism has been presented as the ideology and value of the Communist Party. However, social equality has not been implemented in Lhasa or in China, and paradoxically a social class system has been introduced – but equality is nevertheless the broad focus of the rhetoric that is issued.

Underlying the two social systems are two different value systems or, as I shall argue in Chapter Six, two moral orders. Obviously it cannot be claimed that there is only one Chinese and one Tibetan value system present in Lhasa, but for the argument to be made here such a dichotomy serves a purpose. On the ‘Chinese’ side, the values communicated include atheism, economic development and the unity of the motherland. On the ‘Tibetan’ side, values such as religion (compassion and merit), tradition and Tibetanness (language in particular) dominate. These two value systems can be seen as dichotomies opposed and difficult to unite. The Chinese claim that in order to reap the benefits of prosperity and modernity, the Tibetan values (especially religion and tradition) must be abandoned.

However, we must bear in mind the *lack of equality* that Tibetans have experienced under Chinese rule. Thus, Tibetans see such ‘equality’ as mere rhetoric, and not an actual policy implemented in Tibet. Tibetans in Tibet today live with these differences, and although it is important

to point out that Tibetans do not necessarily dislike or oppose everything about the Chinese value system, they have to find a balance between what they understand as being 'Tibetan' and what they see as being 'Chinese'. It is within these coexisting value systems that *kyesa*, and the noble families in particular, will be analysed, examining the role – central or marginal – that hereditary social divisions have in the everyday life of Tibetans in contemporary Lhasa.

NOTES

1 Although published as late as 1996 by the Indian Cosmo Publications, MacDonald wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century.

2 See for instance 'The historical status of China's Tibet', pp. 223–32, published by China Intercontinental Press and distributed by the Chinese embassies in Western countries.

3 This is evident both in the autobiographies written by members of the nobility (Taring 1994 [1970], Yuthok 1990), academic publications written by Tibetan commoners (Dawa Norbu 1974, Rinchen Thargyal 1985) and some, Western academics (Miller 1987, 1988, Michael 1982).

4 *Chöri nyiden* (chos srid gnyis ldan) is also used, which usually refers to the Tibetan government of religion and politics (Phuntsog Wangyal 1975).

5 Chenresig (Sanskrit: Avalokiteshvara) is the bodhisattva of compassion in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. He is also seen to be the mythological ancestor of the Tibetan people.

6 Chinese accounts from 1959 estimate that 20 per cent were nomads and 60 per cent farmers, while 5 per cent were officials and 15 per cent were monks and nuns (Grunfeld 1996[1984]: 14).

7 Each incarnate lama (*tulku*) had a *labrang*, a household corporation consisting of all the past property of that line of incarnations, as well as all new wealth acquired by the current incarnation.

8 Hierarchy and rank within the monastic system were based either on descent (Sakyapa) or reincarnation (Gelugpa).

9 This division seems to correspond to Dumont's distinction between '*artha* (actions conforming to) selfish interest' and the distribution of power on the one hand, and '*dharma* (actions conforming to) universal order' and the scale of (religious) statuses called hierarchy on the other hand (Dumont 1970: 259). Dumont's main point is that *artha* is subordinate to *dharma*.

10 One of the publications available in Lhasa bookstores is a pamphlet called 'Human Rights in Tibet', written in German. It describes the Tibetan social hierarchy in a way that is foreign to any known perception of the social system of traditional Tibet (China Intercontinental Press 1994).

11 'Tong ba' and 'tong du' are the terms use by Kawaguchi, and the correct spelling of these words is unknown to me.

12 A study of *menrig* in Tibet is currently in progress (Fjeld, forthcoming).

13 Goldstein suggests 150 noble families (Goldstein 1989), Yuthok lists some 188 families (Yuthok 1990), Chinese sources suggest 197 noble families (White paper), while Prince Peter lists 205 families (Prince Peter 1954).

14 Samdrup Potrang (7th and 9th Dalai Lama), Lhalu (8th and 12th Dalai Lama), Yuthok (10th Dalai Lama), Phunkhang (11th Dalai Lama), Langdun (13th Dalai Lama), Taklha (14th Dalai Lama) (Yuthok 1990: 305).

15 Doring, Labrang Nyingma, Lhagyari, Ragashar (Yuthok 1990: 305)

16 Phala, Shatra, Rampa, Surkhang, Horkhang, Changlochen, Tethong, Taring, Shasur, Kungsang, Namseling, Ngabo, Sholkhang, Tsarong, Drumpa, Lhating, Sarjung and Shegarlingpa (Yuthok 1990: 305–306).

17 The names of the *gerpa* families will not be given here, both because of limited space and because these family names are unimportant in contemporary Lhasa, as will be made clear in the later chapters.

18 There are several examples of this practice, Tsarong and Lhalu being well known.

19 The Panchen Lama is the second most important lama in Tibet. His seat was in Tashilunpo monastery in Shigatse (Tsang region), and was historically in opposition to the Dalai Lama (Ü region). In 1995, when he was six years old, the current reincarnation of the Panchen Lama and his family were placed in house arrest in Beijing, and he is still recognized as the youngest political prisoner registered by Amnesty International. See Tibet Information Network and Human Rights Watch/Asia (1996) for information on the political dispute around the recognition of the current Panchen Lama.

20 *Lonchen* is often translated as 'prime minister'; however, this is not really an equivalent title, as the position is only in power in the absence of the Dalai Lama (Goldstein 1989). The second rank was also given as a courtesy title for instance to, the political officer of Sikkim (Williamson 1938).

21 See Yuthok (1990: 321) for a list of the jewellery worn by Tibetan women.

22 For instance, one commoner was ennobled by the 13th Dalai Lama after saving his life during a hazardous trip.

23 Carrasco discussed the issue already in 1959. Although there are similar traits between the European feudal system and the Tibetan system, he argued against transferring the term, and instead introduced the category of Oriental societies (from Wittfogel) which he saw as a better typology for describing the Tibetan social system.

24 For other arguments against Goldstein's classification of Tibetan society as feudal, see Rinchen Thargyal 1988, Miller 1987, 1988, and Michael 1982.

25 Tibet was considered to be in the feudal stage of the Marxist evolution to a 'socialist paradise'.

26 From 1950 to 1959, Tibet was divided into three entities: Lhasa (led by the Dalai Lama), Shigatse (led by the Panchen Lama) and Chamdo in Kham (led by the Chinese PLA). This administrative set-up broke down after the 1959 Lhasa uprising, which forced the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government to flee the country.

27 It seems that the classes varied across the population and areas of Tibet. The traders, for instance, were divided into other classes than the nomads or the farmers (Paljor 1977). However, the six classes mentioned in the text seem to be the general pattern for most of the Tibetan population.

28 Ståhl claims that in this class division, the majority of the Tibetans were defined *above* the Chinese poverty limit. Thus, the 'poor masses' became a minority in Tibet (Ståhl 1992). This supports my point that there were farmers of the 'outside taxpayers' category who had established contracts to land, thus becoming rather well-off financially.

29 There were three levels of *tamdzing*; the third and most serious level could end with the on-the-spot execution of the accused.

30 During the years of communes and collectivization, a serious famine spread in Tibet. This was caused by several factors, among them the necessity of feeding the Chinese cadres, the Chinese preference for wheat rather than barley (the traditional staple crop, which is well suited for the barren environment and cold climate in Tibet) and the bureaucratic problems of collecting and distributing the available food.

31 Most members of the nobility who had not been associated with any uprising received a small compensation for the loss of property.

32 Indeed, the party leaders have often referred to this policy as 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'.

33 The day before the anniversary of the signing of the 17-point agreement.

34 There was deep disagreement between the central government in Beijing and the Chinese and Tibetan cadres in Tibet regarding the new policies promoted by Hu Yaobang. The local cadres were mostly leftists who had risen to power during the Cultural Revolution (both Chinese and Tibetans) or who had been promoted to high positions because of their class and family background (Tibetans). For an analysis of Hu Yaobang's visit to Tibet and local resistance to his policies, see Shakya 1999: 380–398.

35 Most Tibetans use the Chinese term, despite the existence of a Tibet equivalent. The 'Chinese' identity of these work units might be one reason

for this. I have not been able to find the correct spelling of ‘*lekhang*’, but it might be an abbreviation of *las ru khag*.

36 In Tibetan society prior to the Chinese invasion, the Tibetans had only limited contact with the government in Lhasa. Most Tibetans were ignorant of (and uninterested in) the activities of the government (Goldstein 1989, Shakya 1999).

37 My informants generally saw these political meetings as a duty that they had to fulfil, although they would prefer not to. The meetings promote propaganda, and employees are supposed to appear interested in the policies of the cadres, as well as agreeing with their views and opinions. These meetings are not seen as a forum for political discussion.

38 Although there is no tuition, parents must pay a fee for the materials used (mainly books and pens), for electricity and heating of the school, and various other expenses the school might have.

39 In some units, such as the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), *kyesa* is one criterion for recruiting new members. However, these units are rare exceptions and are seen to be part of the government political administration, rather than an organization of work.

40 The unit should correspond, at least vaguely, to one’s education.

Chapter Two

Expressions of Rank in Daily Life

In contemporary Lhasa, interaction across *kyesa* borders is common and daily, both at school, in work places and neighbourhoods. In these interactions, *kyesa* is made relevant in various ways, and the categories of *miser*, *kudrak* and *menrig* are actively defined and discussed among Tibetans of all backgrounds. Let us return to the main social categories of pre-Communist Tibet. *Menrig* was the lowest ranking group in society, constituting 7–10 per cent of the Tibetan population (Gombo 1983:68). It included various occupations considered to be polluted and involving improper conduct for Buddhists (Carrasco 1959, Kawaguchi 1995 [1909]).¹ The absolute majority of the Tibetan population (including both nomads and farmers) were classified as *miser*, and within this group there were subcategories, defined in accordance to their relations to land.² The nobility (*kudrak*) constituted the highest ranking group among the lay population, holding political and economic power (Petech 1973, Goldstein 1989). Within the nobility there were seven individual ranks, divided into four categories of families (Petech 1973: 8).³ Inter-*kyesa* social interaction was very limited, and the noble circle was closed to non-nobles.

In the following, I shall present the social categories that exist in the new socio-economic system of contemporary Lhasa, so as to give a general approach to *kyesa*. The remaining chapters will lead into further detail of the contexts where *kyesa* is operative today: marriage practices (Chapter Three), cultural knowledge (Chapter Four) and transmission of knowledge (Chapter Five) as well as into the field of morality (Chapter Six).

*MENRIG – THE INFERIOR KIND*⁴

The data for this book have come mainly from commoners and nobles, because it was very difficult to establish contact with or interview

Tibetans from *menrig* families in Lhasa. The very existence of these problems, I feel, shows that *menrig* is a relevant social category today.⁵

After some months in Lhasa, I started to look for Tibetans of *menrig* background. Some of my informants had told me stories about *menrig*, and I asked one of them, Jigme,⁶ whether he could help me to meet somebody of such background. It turned out to be very difficult for him. At first, Jigme told me that he did not know any *menrig*, and he did not know of any *menrig* families. As he had already told me stories about *menrig*, I found it surprising and repeated the question later. This second time, Jigme said that he did know about *menrig*, but did not know them himself. He explained why he could not help me:

It is maybe not important to you, but many people see [contact with *menrig*] as a problem. If I take you to a *menrig* family, I will show people that I know *menrig* family. That is not good for me. I will tell the family that I see them as *menrig*, because that is the reason for you to visit and interview them. That will be a very difficult situation, both for me and for them. It is like telling them directly that they are polluted (*drib tsog*).

Jigme is reluctant to introduce me to *menrig* families for two reasons – his own reputation as being an acquaintance of *menrig*, and his recognition of the *menrig* family. His notion of *menrig* families indicates that they are not integrated in society, since Jigme is not willing to show others that he actually befriended *menrig* families. Jigme is worried about the reactions from others, both from his friends and contacts, but the type of reaction is unclear. His worries indicate that contact with *menrig* is seen to be negative. At the same time, he claims that it would be difficult for him actually to recognize a *menrig* family as such. There seems to be an unspoken agreement that one does not confront people with their low background, and they do not disclose it. As such, people may well socialize and meet (within certain limits) despite *menrig* background, but ‘clean’ people do not necessarily openly recognize the others as being ‘unclean people’ (*tsogpa*). It is not immediately obvious who is from a *menrig* background, as most have now chosen other occupations than that of their family tradition. Following the large Chinese immigration to Tibet, the occupations formerly assigned to *menrig* families have been taken over by Chinese workers who do not share the same ideas of pollution.⁷ With the occupational connection no longer being clear, *menrig* background is not as apparent. Furthermore, elderly Tibetans claim that there was a connection between physical and ritual uncleanness: *menrig* used to be dirtier (in clothes and



Figure 4. Two silver cups

The traditional Tibetan artisans are only to a small degree a visible part of Lhasa society today. Both goldsmiths and silversmiths experience strong competition from Chinese shops selling machine-made jewelry to lesser price. Tibetan silversmiths still produce the traditional cups and bowls for tea and chang, but in previous last years, Chinese silversmiths from Yunnan have established workshops in Thieves' Island producing the same traditional artifacts to significantly lower prices.

on the skin) than 'clean' Tibetans. Today, *menrig* have the same possibilities for keeping a physically clean appearance as do other Tibetans.

Many Tibetans express a wish to limit their contact with *menrig*. How, then, is *menrig* perceived by other Tibetans? One general idea found among my informants is that certain ways of interacting with *menrig* are unproblematic, whereas other types of conduct, such as sexual contact, mixing mouths (sharing cups), and using clothes or bedcovers of *menrig*, are connected with taboos. A break with these taboos will result in some reactions, and further the need for purifications. One young man called Wangdu told the following story of how he once tried to break these barriers:

Once I was with my friend, he is good, he is even from a noble family, and we were playing ball. His friends were low people, maybe blacksmiths or something. [My friend] doesn't care. We went to a place to drink beer, and when drinking beer we always share cups, you know. I

knew they were low people, but I thought that I should not care because my friend didn't care. Many people say you don't get sick if you share cups with these people, and I thought maybe they were right. So I drank beer with them. And I really didn't think much about getting sick. But the day after I woke up with small red things, like blisters, what are they called... [looking up in his dictionary], yes, spots. They were on my tongue and inside my mouth. You see? These people are not clean.

Wangdu points to the difference between playing ball (which he does not question) and sharing cups. Wangdu plays ball with *menrig* without paying attention to their background, and there are no taboos connected to this kind of activity. The main traditional taboos concerning *menrig* are those of sexual contact and sharing of cups, but these taboos are under evaluation and discussion, especially regarding the sharing of cups. Wangdu's noble friend, who brought him into contact with the *menrig*, does not consider sharing cups as taboo. Similar attitudes are found among other of my informants. One young man explains his view of the restrictions on interaction with *menrig*:

People think too much about the problem with blacksmiths (*gara*). They think they will be sick, that they are not clean. I don't believe in that. It only reflects their own problem. When they think they will be sick, they will be sick. It is easy.

A psychological perspective such as this is a usual way of explaining why people get sick after interacting with *menrig*, which is also mentioned by Wangdu above (he emphasizes that he did not think about getting sick when he was sharing cups with the *menrig* ball players). This idea – that a physical reaction only reflects the person's own beliefs – represents a competing rationale for interaction with *menrig* to the traditionalistic perspective of the older generation, who claim that the pollution of the *menrig* might bring illness and bad reincarnations in future lives.⁸ There seem to be an ongoing process of seeking legitimate explanations to what are perceived as differences between *menrig* and other Tibetans. Within this process is also the definition of who is to be seen as polluted among the *menrig*. In the pre-Communist period, numerous occupations were included in the *menrig* group, but today only a few are treated as 'polluted'. These might be seen as the core *menrig* families, as they are the occupations with a direct antithetical relation to Buddhist codes of conduct. In

Lhasa, I did not encounter any Tibetans, commoner or noble, who were concerned about the background of horse dealers or carpenters. Indeed, people often pointed out that they did not understand why these families should have such low rank. Lhamo, a young woman of commoner background, says:

Maybe the horse dealers were cheating people they made deals with. I don't know and really I don't think it is important. I don't know about these families. But some families really have done many bad things, and I don't feel comfortable being around them. Especially butchers. They kill and kill and kill. It is like they never think about religion. So I think when a person kills all his life, then his mind is no good. So, when the mind is polluted by not thinking about religion, you cannot do good actions. These people, the blacksmiths and the like, often have bad behaviour because they don't know how to behave in a good way.

Lhamo does not recognize the more marginal 'low families' (which elderly informants claimed were significant), as exemplified by the horse dealers. However, she does point out that other families, such as the butchers, are distinctly different from other Tibetans, and she prefers not to socialize with them. The activities of butchers, *tomden*, as well as blacksmiths (and to a certain degree silver- and goldsmiths) are identified directly with religion, while the other occupations are more difficult to explain for Tibetans. Butchers are engaged in killing, which is the cardinal sin of Tibetan Buddhism. Blacksmiths make the knives that are used for killing. The smiths in general use materials extracted from the earth, and interference with the earth and the earth spirits is considered wrongdoing. In the early literature on Tibetan societies, it is the smiths, the butchers and the *tomden* families that are recognized as the 'lowest strata', and there as well the connections with Buddhism is emphasized (Carrasco 1959, Kawaguchi 1995 [1909]). Comprehension is crucial for Tibetans when defining *menrig* today, and only the families with traditional occupations that are easily explicable as doing wrong according to religious doctrines are treated as *menrig*. Social relations including people from *menrig* families are under discussion between Tibetans, and it is something many of my informants reflect about individually. As is pointed out by Lhamo above, the connection between the mind, religion and conduct is important, and

some, but not all, occupations are seen to generate ‘bad mind’, which results in bad behaviour.

To conclude, *menrig* remain relevant for Tibetans in contemporary Lhasa in different ways. However, these ways are difficult to recognize. Many are reluctant to interact with *menrig*, as they see pollution to be transmitted by the mixing of mouths. Moreover, people do not want to acknowledge that they know *menrig*, as that could (among other things) result in negative reactions from others. At the same time, within certain limits, people do socialize with *menrig*, without their background being an explicit issue. The general taboos against sharing cups or bowls seem to exist in a similar way to pre-1959. However, not all of the subcategories of *menrig* are seen to be polluted and unclean today. Those still in the *menrig* category are the families whose traditional occupation is in direct opposition to the religious code of conduct. Thus, it seems that *menrig* background generates a need for reflection among young Tibetans of other backgrounds, as to whether they should acknowledge them and as such obey the traditional rationale of what the *menrig* are, or the psychological explanatory models of the consequences of extended social interaction with *menrig*.

MISER – COMMONERS

The *miser* category includes most of the Tibetan population. As opposed to *menrig*, it is difficult to ask Tibetans what defines the category of *miser* today. This inquiry was often met by a lack of comprehension, from informants of commoner and noble background alike. *Miser*, with all its subcategories, was largely a socio-economic description of relations to land (Goldstein 1971a, 1986, 1989, Stein 1972, Carrasco 1959). The dramatic changes in the social structures and a process of urbanization where most Tibetans in Lhasa no longer utilize the land directly seem to have ‘emptied’ the term *miser*.

Wangdu, whose story about getting spots from sharing a cup with *menrig* was quoted above, is a commoner. When asked about his family, he explained his background in this way:

There is nothing special about me or my family. We are just ordinary (*kyuma*) Tibetans, like most others. My mother was a personal servant of the wife of the Labrang Nyingma [noble family] and my father served the man [in the same family]. But now they are farmers. So it doesn’t matter what they were before, because their positions do not exist anymore.

Wangdu does not recognize his family background as important, or as anything special, because he is 'like most others'. He points out that his background is ordinary. Although his parents had special positions (which were hereditary, hence Wangdu would have held his father's position if the system had remained), Wangdu does not see them as relevant today. He emphasizes that his parents' positions no longer exist. However, the fact that the positions do not exist is not unique when compared with other positions of the pre-Chinese Tibetan society, for instance the posts in the political administration held by nobles. The ordinary aspect of the category of 'commoners' must be understood in terms of social memory. The positions held by commoners are not remembered as being important to Tibetan culture and identity, they are not remembered as part of tradition. Compared to the social memory of the positions of nobles, servants (like Wangdu's parents) are not recalled as significant contributors to Tibetan culture. This does not, of course, imply that the social memory of commoners is intrinsically valueless: their practices are important in terms of cultural continuity. The point here is rather how social memory is valued and how Tibetan culture is defined by Tibetans of all backgrounds, a topic that we shall return to in Chapter Four.

Tsering Drolma, a young commoner from Lhasa, said this about characterizing commoner's behaviour:

People behave in many different ways, some are very bad and others are just like nobles. It is the same with *menrig*, there are good and bad *menrig*, I think. But most people [commoners] behave like normal. You can see that some try to have a good appearance, they look like nobles: nice colours in their clothes, speak softly and they are very pleasant people. Always helping others. Sometimes it is really difficult to see where people are from (what place (*lungpa*) people are from).

Tsering Drolma also points to 'normality' with regard to the behaviour of commoners, but stresses that people may behave in various ways, both good and bad. Normality here means average or ordinary. She cannot define exactly what characterize the behaviour of commoners: there seem to be no specific norms; rather, that commoners follow the same norms as Tibetans in general. In terms of expected behaviour, the commoner background is not made relevant. Tsering Drolma points out that some commoners appear as nobles, and that she is not always able to see the distinctions. It is inter-

esting to note that commoners actively seek to measure up to standards of behaviour associated with nobles, both in term of dress, speech and general appearance.

KUDRAK – NOBLE FAMILIES

The underlying question in this book concerns how noble families are seen to be important and highly valued by non-noble Tibetans, and I shall in the following describe the category of *kudrak* in a somewhat more detailed manner than what have has done with *menrig* and commoners. The main perspective thus taken for the analysis of inter-*kyesa* relations is that of a commoner's point of view.

Nobles are talked about in various contexts, one of the most prevalent being gossip. Gossip is here understood as 'casual talk about the affairs of other people, typically including rumour and critical comments' (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 1995: 514). Gossip stories are told about known or unknown people, and may be true or fictitious, and it is a widespread form of communication in Lhasa. Gossip is found among Tibetans of different categories – men and women, young and old, commoner and noble – and most social arenas – at work, in the classroom, in the monasteries, at the market and in the teahouses. Below, two gossip stories are presented, and both typical in terms of treating love affairs and breaks with recognized rules of conduct.

The focus and topics for gossip vary, but two kinds of stories tend to dominate. First, romantic relationships are of great interest. These tales often include inter-*kyesa* relationships where the parents refuse to recognize the relationship, and stories about tragic love affairs between nobles and commoners flourish.

A man from a big family (*khyimtshang chenpo*) fell in love with a commoner girl. They were very happy, and he wanted to marry her. His father did not allow the marriage to take place, and insisted that his son should find a girl from a proper family. His father also prevented the son from meeting his girlfriend. The couple waited and waited, and did not marry anybody else. The man shaved his head even though he did not take any vows, he had the appearance of a monk. The woman continued to live with her mother, spending all her time caring and nursing for her. Both the man and the woman spent most of their time at home, and only went outside for necessi-

ties. After some 15 years, the man's father died. Then the couple met again and decided to move into his mother's house, demanding her to accept their marriage. When she refused to give her blessing, they threatened that she would have to move, which made her give her blessing to the marriage, which resulted in the three of them sharing the house. The couple married at last, and they were very happy. The wife treated her mother-in-law with great respect, just like her own mother. The couple finally found happiness.

The second kind of gossip stories often concerns a break with expected behaviour, and I found that a remarkable number of these tales are about nobles, such as the following:

Once in a class at the Teacher Training College, an incident happened with a girl named Drolma. She was from a noble family, but her father was dead, her mother was old and sick and she did not live with her mother. Both in class and elsewhere, Drolma was a very outspoken woman, not very silent or discreet at all. She often bragged about various things she had achieved, and she also bragged about her noble background. One day, when the class was working individually doing exercises, Drolma asked a classmate for help with the work (indicating that the friend should do the exercise instead of her). The other student said that she had to do it herself, but then Drolma got angry. The teacher was not in the classroom, and Drolma shouted at the class: 'You should help me, I am *kudrak* number 1!' The class only laughed at her, and nobody wanted to do the exercise for her. Then she got even more angry, but the teachers came in and she said nothing more. This was not the only time she had said this; once when she was with some friends at a teahouse, she also said to the woman serving tea: 'Give me tea quickly, I am *kudrak* number 1!'

First of all, these two stories indicate that *kyesa* exists today. The first story points to the importance of a proper marriage partner, and that *kyesa* is still seen by some to be the criterion for a suitable partner. Melhuus points out that gossip is a way to test out uncertain norms: through gossip, contested norms are established and made visible (Melhuus 1992, Melhuus and Borchrevink 1984). These aspects are

particularly prevalent in contexts of transitions. Not only does gossip manifest the interests of the people who participate in the storytelling; it also makes explicit what is seen to be abnormal or unacceptable, or, in Haviland's words, what interrupts the 'cultural rules', i.e. a break with usual conduct for the person in the story (1977). Both stories above give a picture of *who* is of interest to Tibetans, and might as such serve as a starting point for classification. Both stories include noble families and *kyesa* in general. Thus, the stories emphasize the relevance of a noble background, and to the interest that commoners show in members of noble families.

The first story, dealing with an inter-*kyesa* couple, points to one particular context where *kyesa* is made highly relevant: marriage. Although the nobleman and the commoner woman are not allowed to marry each other, there is a point of change in the story, as it is only the parents of the nobleman who do not accept the marriage. The young nobleman himself insists on this inter-*kyesa* marriage, as does the commoner girl. Her family is not mentioned, so we may assume that they do not oppose the marriage. Also, the storyteller seems to be on the side of the couple, because the story has a happy ending. This tale could be interpreted in terms of either the father or the son acting in a different way than expected, but here the story is told to reflect the difficulty one may encounter in a marriage with a noble, and highlights the fact that there is a significant difference between commoners and nobles.

The second story, about Drolma, is well known. Many of my informants had heard about 'kudrak no. 1', and people laughed at the tale. The story focuses on an important aspect of how nobles are perceived, namely the expected behaviour of noble Tibetans. Drolma acts quite contrary to what is perceived as 'noble behaviour', hence her actions are noted as remarkable and interesting. Bourdieu, writing about rites de passage and the French nobility, states that merely because they are noble, the members of the nobility are obliged to follow the strict rules of the nobility. Any break with these rules and expectations creates chaos, but can also awaken interest among non-members of the group (Bourdieu 1996). Similarly, as the gossip stories above indicate, commoners in Lhasa become interested in the noble family members precisely because of these breaks with expected behaviour. When Drolma demands favours from her classmates, she points loudly to her noble background, and brags about her earlier achievements. These acts are all seen to be rude and indiscreet. Her claim of being noble and her demand for respect is a contradiction of

the very definition of nobles in Tibet, as the main perception of nobles is that they are humble, discreet and generally not dominating in social situations.

Apart from being a focus of gossip in Lhasa, nobles are, maybe more importantly, talked about in other contexts as well. Tibetans in general have opinions about what it means to be noble today and who the nobles are, and all my informants know someone from a noble family. Two examples will illustrate some of the differences in how nobles are valued among commoners, and show the discrepancy between idea and action in terms of attitudes towards nobles.

Yeshe, a 35-year old man who lives in a work unit in Lhasa, was one of the first to introduce me to the nobles in Lhasa, saying:

... if you want to learn about Tibetan culture and traditions, you should talk to the nobles. They know much about these things, and many other things as well. They are special people, with special knowledge. They have so many contacts in Lhasa, they have many relatives, and I am sure that they would help you, because they are always very eager to help others. They are nice people, always polite and humble [*semchung*: small-minded].

Yeshe emphasizes the knowledge of the nobles, both of Tibetan culture and traditions, and the nobles' attitude and actions towards others – their helpfulness and polite way of relating to others. He expresses a positive attitude because of their knowledge, which he terms 'special knowledge'. The connection between noble families and cultural knowledge is of major importance, and will be the topic of discussion in the following chapters of this book.

As an example of the other end at the scale, Dawa Tsering is indeed negative when speaking of noble families. However, his actual behaviour towards nobles does not correspond to his statements, as became apparent during one interview we conducted together. Dawa Tsering and I were seated in a rickshaw, on the way to an interview with a nobleman whom Dawa Tsering knew from before, as they had worked together for three years. We talked about the family history of the man we were going to meet; his family previously held positions in the administration of the Panchen Lama in Shigatse. Our conversation started with the administrative system of the Tibetan government, and Dawa Tsering told me about the unfairness in the distribution of land and wealth in the 'old society'. He then declared that he strongly disliked nobles and the former nobility:

I don't like them. I hate them. They treated their servants badly, and they had all the land and power in the old society. It was unfair. The people of Tibet were really not able to do anything with their lives, they could only please their masters. Many people say now that the nobles have better knowledge on Tibet, but it is not true, because that all depends on their education now. They do not respect me or other ordinary Tibetans, their politeness is false.

Dawa Tsering is clearly negative towards the nobles, not only on behalf of himself, but also on behalf of the commoners (people of Tibet). His anger is related both to historical processes and to personal experiences of the present. His main point is the *kudrak*'s misuse of power, having had the economic power and the power to decide about their workers' lives, which, he claims, they misused. These are the views of the Chinese authorities as well, expressed through various public channels. Although Dawa Tsering's views correspond with the official version of the nobility's role in the former Tibetan society, he is not merely copying the propaganda or passively being influenced by these claims. Rather, it seems he is evaluating the information available, and deciding upon what he thinks is accurate and valuable. He concludes that nobles do not possess more knowledge or better behaviour than educated people in general. On the personal level, Dawa Tsering feels mistreated by nobles: he does not feel confident that the politeness they show him is honest. He questions the nobles' intentions with their actions, and concludes that their 'good behaviour' is phoney. Dawa Tsering does not agree with the notion of nobles as holders of cultural knowledge (as expressed by Yeshe above), and I believe that his own background as a student of Tibetan studies in China (mainland) is crucial for this view. His own knowledge of Tibetan society and culture is wide-ranging, and he disagrees with the practice of attributing to *kudrak* knowledge of more value than his own knowledge. The background for Dawa Tsering's attitudes may not be obvious, but he is clearly negative. What is interesting to note is that Dawa Tsering's behaviour does not correspond with how he talks about *kudrak*.

When we arrived at the nobleman's house, Dawa Tsering did not seem to be angry or tense, even though he had just finished his last angry sentence shortly before we came to the house. When we met the nobleman, Dawa Tsering addressed him in polite language and bowed low, and it appeared to be a scene of showing respect. This continued throughout the interview. Dawa Tsering acted politely and humbly, as

indeed he had done during the other interviews we conducted together. There were no signs of disrespect or anger. Later I observed him in a similar situation in his office, when he was talking to his colleague, a noblewoman younger than himself. Dawa Tsering was talking softly, using polite words and phrases. He appeared indeed humble and respectful. Orally expressed attitudes are in Dawa Tsering's case much more negative than actually observed behaviour. This discrepancy could be interpreted in various ways. I shall argue that his 'correct' behaviour, i.e. behaviour according to the codes for interactions with *kudrak*, indicate both that there is a strong social pressure from Tibetans to act in a humble manner towards *kudrak* and that, by means of this behaviour, Dawa Tsering was presenting himself as a 'good person'. This connection between how to act towards nobles and self-presentation will be discussed in Chapter Six. Apart from self-presentation, Dawa Tsering's negative attitude must be seen as a statement on the category of *kudrak*, whereas his actions when meeting a nobleman he knew, were directed towards a particular individual.

In general, both Yeshe's and Dawa Tsering's attitudes towards nobles must be understood as being expressed towards the social category of *kudrak* (with its historical connections) rather than the individuals of noble background. There is no 'nobility' as such in Lhasa today, and the internal differentiations of the noble category are vast. Members of noble families see themselves and their background in different ways, and appear both in accordance with and contrary to the stereotypes, as will be exemplified below.

Lobsang Dargye is a Lhasa man in his late 40s and the son of a high-ranking officer in the former Tibetan administration. Lobsang Dargye works as a teacher and lives together with his wife and their children in a work unit in Lhasa. Two house attendants (*phomo*) work in the household. They cook, clean and care for the garden and outside areas.⁹ Lobsang Dargye is a well-known man in Lhasa, both for being a very competent teacher and a particularly good person. A former pupil of his talked of him, saying that 'he is always smiling and being nice to the students, and he is never rude to anyone'. Lobsang Dargye is humble and polite in his appearance. He speaks softly and is very attentive when meeting people. When I met him for the first time, and I explained my project and my interest in noble families, he denied his knowledge of these matters, claiming his ignorance and lack of skill in paying attention. He advised me rather to talk to some other people he knew, and promised to introduce me to these acquaintances. Later, when we met again, we talked about his family and their relatives, and

Lobsang Dargye gradually emerged as a person with great knowledge of noble families in Lhasa. He is very conscious about his family background, although he never mentions his noble background to others. Rather, he considers it as impolite and unacceptable to expose his family background directly. The years of the Cultural Revolution are still clear in his mind: then a noble family background could cause serious problems.

I just say I am an ordinary teacher [*gegen kyuma*]. During those years [the Cultural Revolution] when people asked me more, I used to lie. It was very bad for me, because I want to tell the truth always. I don't like lying. Now, if I say I am ordinary, they don't ask me more and I don't have to say anything wrong.

Although Lobsang Dargye prefers not to admit or bring attention to his noble background, he has an interest in his family relations. He has detailed knowledge of his family history and relatives, such as the complicated marriage alliances with other noble families. When asked, he explains the lives of his father, his mother, his father's father, his mother's father, as well as the alliances that they formed. Bi-linearity is important when discussing family history, and valuable, as the number of significant relatives increases, which provides a larger social network. His parents often talk of their relatives and the history they have experienced, and Lobsang Dargye 'likes to know', he says. Their background as nobles is important to them, and they often discuss their family's former role in Tibetan politics and history.

Being *kudrak*, it seems, is an important part of family identity and interest for Lobsang Dargye and his family. At the same time, Lobsang Dargye is not willing to admit that he has knowledge about noble families and the history of the nobility. He stresses his own incompetence, always referring to others. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, being humble is closely related to showing respect and politeness, and is an ideal for behaviour. Being humble does not necessarily indicate that Lobsang Dargye does not possess knowledge, but rather that he is acting in accordance with his background. When meeting people, he is humble and polite, regardless of the rank of the other person. He is respectful towards others in order to express a humble attitude himself. At the same time, he is well aware of the high position of his family and acts accordingly. He is humble, but conscious of his high rank – or rather, part of being conscious is being humble. Thus, Lobsang Dargye can be seen as a typical noble: with a long and known family history and

well-established cultural knowledge, with humble behaviour and showing respect towards others. Obviously, not all *kudrak* correspond with this characteristic, although they are believed by commoners to do so. The following gives an example of a *kudrak* without a strong interest in or knowledge of his own background.

Ngawang is almost 30 years old. He works at a technical job in a work unit in Lhasa. He is from a former *gerpa* family, which, before 1959, had a small estate in Southern Tibet. Since the 1960s, his father has been teaching Tibetan language in Lhasa. His mother died in 1996, and Ngawang now lives with his father and younger sister. The material standard of the house is simple, the family do not stand out as special at the campus, and Ngawang claims that he does not consider himself to be different from other Tibetans. Ngawang does not know much about his family, relatives or ancestors. He is well aware that his parents are from noble families, but when asked, he does not know his own family name:

I don't remember these names. I know my mother told me not long ago, but I have forgotten them. My mother never talks much about it, because it does not matter anymore. My father used to tell me about the teaching work that he did. That was more important than what happened before.

Even though Ngawang is from a noble family, he is not particularly conscious of his background. His behaviour is correct in terms of being humble and polite and using the polite language, and some would say that he, in order to be humble, does not want to amplify his noble background, which would be in accordance with the expectations of noble behaviour. However, it is my contention that he actually does not see himself as noble, mostly because he does not recognize the distinction between a middle-ranking noble and a commoner. First of all, his parents never emphasized their family history to Ngawang: what they focused on was the work they both did after the Chinese take-over. As noted earlier, *kudrak* background became potentially and politically controversial, and this particular family background was not accentuated for decades. In Ngawang's family, their family history was simply not re-activated – his parents chose to emphasize more recent periods. Hence, Ngawang has never learned to appreciate their family history and background. He is very proud of her parents' deeds in terms of teaching Tibetan children their mother tongue, although he himself does not master literary Tibetan. Secondly, and related to this, his

family was a *gerpa*, and as such their role in the former Tibetan system was merely of economic character. None of his family members held important positions in the Tibetan administration; they merely managed estates. When the socio-economic system was changed, the *gerpa* families no longer had a particular role to fulfil. By contrast, other noble families were part of the political administration and as such had other connotations to them – for instance, culture, politics and expertise. Moreover, Ngawang does not come from a family with a long and well-known history. Most Tibetans are unfamiliar with his father's work or position, and he does not get feedback on his family background from people who do not know him (as opposed to Lobsang Dargye above). His family background is not visible. Ngawang does recognize certain noble families in Lhasa, and he respects them for their store of knowledge and their behaviour. These families are famous 'big families' (*khyimtshang chenpo*), whose members have remained visible in Lhasa society. Ngawang does not see himself as one of them. He calls them *kudrak*, while he calls his family *kyuma* (ordinary). Ngawang is atypical in terms of the stereotypes of nobles; he does not have a long, well-known family history; he does not know about his family and their relatives; he is not well versed in the written Tibetan language; he is not conscious of addressing everybody with polite language.

The differences between Lobsang Dargye and Ngawang indicate that *kudrak* is not a homogeneous social category. Rather, we may say that it consists of individuals who see themselves differently, also in terms of family background.

A NEW INTERNAL DIVISION

Despite individual differences, my informants claim to be able to recognize a *kudrak* from a commoner. The differences can be quite subtle, and my informants are correct in saying that people from outside Lhasa cannot see the distinctions.¹⁰

Tsering Drolma, who was quoted above characterizing commoners' behaviour, explains how she can recognize a *kudrak*:

When you are from Lhasa, you just know. Lhasa is not a big place, even though there are many people here now, and if you are from here, you know who is noble and who is not. But I think there is a difference in how the nobles dress also. The women often wear *chuba* and their blouses are in beautiful colours. Not like the nomads at all, they

don't use such bright colours. The blouses always look good together with the aprons. ... If you hear them talk, they use very good polite language and you can also see that they walk and behave in a specially quiet way. As if they are shy [*ngotsha minpo*].

Recognizing *kudrak* is thus a matter of being familiar with the subtle signs. However, Lhasa Tibetans will not always be able to differentiate commoners and *kudrak* on the basis of dress and languages, as many commoners present themselves within the same frames. More important is that Tsering Drolma claims to know who is noble and not in Lhasa, due to the small scale of Lhasa city. This is true only to a certain extent, and includes only a limited number of the *kudrak* families. Some families are famous, and most Lhasa Tibetans know about the members of these families, whom they have heard about in their parent's stories, gossip and public media. When noble families are talked about and presented in the media, their family names are used. The varying naming practices between commoners and nobles are relevant for recognizing *kudrak*. Traditionally, only personal names are given in Tibet. These might be numerous (most often two) and they are given by the parents or a lama. Names have a religious basis, such as Drolma (the Buddha of mercy) and Gyalbo ('king', referring to the sacred kings), or they may be names of the day when the baby was born, such as Lhakpa (Wednesday), or Pempa (Saturday). Also, names may refer to appreciated natural phenomena, such as Nyima (the sun) and Ösel (light). Some Tibetans say that *kudrak* do not use weekdays for names, but prefer religious or historical names; however, I have not found clear evidence of this. As opposed to non-noble Tibetans, *kudrak* also have family names in addition to personal and given names. Although some have argued that all Tibetans have surnames (identifying surnames with traditional clan names), it is only the noble families who actively use a family name today.¹¹ These noble names were originally not surnames, but the name of the house where the family lived (Bell 1928), or the estate that they managed (Peteck 1973). Noble families are often spoken of as members of a house, for instance 'the house of Lha-gyari' (Karsten 1979). Before the Chinese invasion, the noble families had houses of various sizes in the Barkhor, the old quarter of Lhasa. When the houses were confiscated by the Chinese authorities during the 'socialist transformation' period, the names remained with the families, and are still in use today, even if the houses that they refer to have actually been demolished. Thus, one

obvious difference between commoner and *kudrak* today is the use of a family name.

However, not all of the approximately 200 *kudrak* family names are known to Tibetans in Lhasa today, and some families are more famous than others. Bearing in mind the characteristics of Lobsang Dargye and Ngawang above, a new way of subdividing the category of *kudrak* is emerging. With the divisions of *yabshi*, *depön*, *mitrag* and *gerpa* of the former Tibetan society (Yuthok 1990) no longer operative, a distinction is rather made between big (*chenpo*) and small families (*chungchung*). The big families include Lobsang Dargye's family and other families with well-known ancestors and family history, such as Lhalu, Tsarong, Surkhang, Labrang Nyingma, Trimön, Ragashar and Shatrak. Members of these families have contributed in some particular way to the history of Tibet. In addition, those noble families that have been given dominant roles in Tibet since the Chinese takeover, such as Ngapö, Shape and Changlochen, are included in the *khyimtshang chenpo* category. These families do not necessarily have long and well-known family histories, although many do, but they have become known within the new social and political system. Their family names are also known to most Tibetans in Lhasa. The second category, the 'small families', consists of noble families who have not held prominent positions before or after the Chinese takeover, and who predominantly had economic rather than political positions. Carrasco refers to this part of the nobility as 'territorial chiefs', whose sole political function was to rule the area they drew their income from (Carrasco 1959: 215). The family names of these *khyimtshang chungchung* are generally not known to the people of Lhasa, unless they have actually been introduced to members of that particular family. This internal division is to a certain extent apparent today as well, and results in a redefinition of *kudrak*. *Kudrak* now is seen to be those families (*khyimtshang chenpo*) that Carrasco terms the 'bureaucratic nobility', i.e. those with positions in the political administration. The 'territorial chiefs', on the other hand, must normally reconfirm and re-activate their identity as noble. In such perspective, one may say that Ngawang does not activate or reconfirm his 'nobleness' in interaction with other Tibetans; hence, his background is not emphasized. There are various ways of reconfirming 'nobleness', and this will be discussed in the following chapters.

THUPTEN AND WANGCHUK

It is particularly at the bottom (*menrig*) and the top (*kudrak*) of the former social hierarchy that we find *kyesa* made relevant in social relations. The body of commoners is rather seen as being the ‘normal’ and ordinary Tibetan population. The social reforms from 1959 until the 1970s, and the re-organization of Lhasa society, have introduced other organizing principles than *kyesa*, but *kyesa* is seen by Lhasa Tibetans to be an important aspect for differentiation and rank. Distinctions between Tibetans of different family background are observable in notions of different behaviour, and must, with the exception of commoners, be interpreted not as evaluation of individual behaviour, but as behaviour characteristic for the social category. I shall describe two situations that include the same people: Thupten, a commoner, and his colleague Wangchuk, a nobleman. These two situations are indicative and typical in terms of describing how daily social relations are influenced by *kyesa*; I have observed similar situations in various contexts in Lhasa.

Thupten, aged 37, works in a library in Lhasa. He grew up in a village close to Lhasa, and he often visits his parents, who still live there. Thupten went to school both in his village area and later in Lhasa. He has been living in Lhasa for the past eight years and enjoys city life. When he started working at the library, he was provided with housing on the premises. He still lives in the same house, together with his wife and their five-year-old daughter. His wife is from Nakchu, a nomad area in the northern part of Tibet. Thupten’s office is rather small, although he shares it with three colleagues. The four have the same work description and identical positions in the library; thus there is no head of office among them. All his colleagues are Tibetans, all live on the library premises and they socialize with each other outside the office. Thupten as well as one male and one female colleague are from commoner families, while the fourth person, Wangchuk, is from a noble family. Thupten and Wangchuk have worked together for three years already, and, according to Thupten, they know each other well. One day while I visited Thupten in his office, an interesting change of ‘atmosphere’ occurred in terms of how he acted towards his colleagues. This shift of behaviour became evident when Wangchuk entered and left the room. At first there were only Thupten, a woman called Pema and myself present in the office. They had just received new religious texts, which they were going to register and systematize, and we talked about the texts and the work required in order to make a good

catalogue system. The office is organized so that the desks are in pairs facing each other, with the cluster of desks forming a big square. During our conversation, Thupten was sitting at one side of the desk, keeping a distance between the chair and the desk. He sat with his legs crossed, leaning back in the chair, his arms gesticulating. Thupten and Pema talked animatedly about the importance of preserving the old religious texts and other job-related topics. After about ten minutes, Wangchuk came into the room. Thupten then rose from the chair, and in order to introduce us, he said: 'He is the expert in the office, he knows about the books and the texts. More than we do.' After having said this, he started to remove some paper and tidy up Wangchuk's side of the desk. While doing this, his body was bent forward, stooping, and it seemed he was making himself small. He pushed his head forward and down, stretching his neck. He kept his hands close together when moving the papers and did not look straight at Wangchuk, but rather focused his glance between him and the desk. Wangchuk insisted that it was not necessary to clean his desk, and repeated this until Thupten had finished. When the desk had been cleared, Thupten turned to Wangchuk in a subtle and quick manner, before he sat down at his side of the desk (facing Wangchuk). Wangchuk sat down also. Thupten was sitting very still, keeping his legs together and his hands folded in his lap. He kept his voice at a lower volume and used the honorific and polite forms, for instance 'lo' (for confirmation, like nodding), in every sentence. They talked about Wangchuk's mother who had been in hospital for some time. Wangchuk also used polite words and phrases and talked in a very low voice. Pema remained silent. After approximately ten minutes, Wangchuk again left the room. Pema and Thupten both paid attention to him leaving, half rising from their chairs and stooping while seeing him off. After Wangchuk had left, they sat down in the same chairs. Now Thupten kept his legs apart and again his arms were not folded. After a few words about the health of Wangchuk's mother, they continued their talk on religious texts. Thupten spoke more loudly than he had with Wangchuk, using the colloquial Tibetan and not the honorific forms.

Before proceeding with this analysis, let us look at a meeting that occurred between Thupten and Wangchuk at a teahouse (*jakhang*) during a long lunch break. Daily routines keep colleagues together at work units, and the common organization of both work and residence results in frequent contact between colleagues. Colleagues interact in their daily work, going to the *jakhang* together and sometimes spend time at a bar in the evening. Topics of discussions vary, but only seldom

demand personal or political involvement from the participants. Practical matters, such as moving house, renting a car or having visitors from afar, are discussed with great interest. In this informal setting, people who share offices continue their relations, although in a different way. At the *jakhang*, the tone is far more jovial than in the offices. Thupten and Wangchuk often go to the *jakhang*; sometimes they come together and share a table, and other times they meet there and share tables with other colleagues. The two of them are not considered to be friends (by other colleagues).

One day at the *jakhang*, Thupten and a man called Dorje Chime, another library employee, were sitting together. They were talking and laughing, flirting with the girl serving tea. Wangchuk also came to the *jakhang* and sat down at their table. They exchanged some joke about the girl serving, saying she was a pretty farm girl. The conversation between Thupten and Dorje Chime continued, but now they were attentive towards Wangchuk as they talked. Their use of language shifted as they addressed him, from colloquial to honorific Tibetan. Dorje Chime also used the honorific language. The jokes were told directly to Wangchuk, although everyone joined in the laughter. The body language of Thupten and Dorje Chime changed as well, from an extensive use of their hands for gestures to a more 'controlled' body language marked by fewer outgoing movements. Thupten 'folded' his body, sitting with his legs tight and his hands mainly in his lap. The arrival and presence of Wangchuk influenced both Thupten and Dorje Chime's manner of speech and their body language.

Several points can be made from these two incidents. We can clearly see that *kyesa* and rank are made relevant. In the office, Thupten acts differently towards Pema, his commoner colleague, and Wangchuk, his noble colleague. When Pema and Thupten are in the office alone, Thupten uses colloquial Tibetan. He talks more loudly and gesticulates with his hands. This, I believe, is not an expression of gender, but of *kyesa*, as the presence of a noblewoman generate the same change of behaviour. When Wangchuk enters the room, Thupten changes his use of words and phrases to honorific levels of Tibetan and employs more controlled body language. Both speech and body language are crucial in expressing respect, and just as Tibetan language has two honorific levels, ways of conduct have various honorific expressions. The body language used by Thupten is standardized, both in terms of being an integral part of his behaviour and as being a set of codes of polite behaviour that Tibetans in general relate to. To stoop and to appear

humble (make oneself small) are ways of expressing respect, observed in various contexts, in particular towards members of noble families.

Knowledge of how to express respect is embodied and automatic, in the sense that Thupten does not reflect on whether he should stoop or not, he just does. This kind of bodily practice is what Connerton terms ‘incorporating practices’, i.e. social practices that send messages ‘that a sender or senders impart by means of their own current bodily activity, the transmission occurring only during the time that their bodies are present to sustain that particular activity’ (1989: 72). Connerton argues that incorporating practices might be highly structured and completely predictable, but, because of their automatic aspect, need not be recognized as isolated incidences of behaviour. In such a perspective, Thupten automatically acts in this particular way in the presence of his nobleman colleague, as he has been corrected by living models, i.e. people who exhibit correct behaviour. Nobles themselves help define what is correct behaviour,¹² because they appear as role models to commoner Tibetans, and the ideal behaviour in the presence of nobles is related to the ideals for behaviour in general. When asked about his relations with his colleagues, Wangchuk said that in his family they all use polite language to address each other, therefore he is used to that level of the language and it is natural for him. As long as the person he is speaking with is not much younger than himself, he uses honorific language to everybody, including his colleagues. This means that in return his colleagues are supposed to use honorific language to him. From the case above, there seem to be no contextual differences in how Thupten and Wangchuk communicate. Both in the office and at the teahouse, their relations are marked by respect and humbleness based on their different *kyesa* background. When I asked Thupten if he acts differently towards Pema than he does towards Wangchuk, he answered in the affirmative, saying: ‘You know that Wangchuk-la is from a noble family, and we speak politely to him. Also, he is the expert in the office, the one who knows about religion and books’. Hence, polite speech and behaviour might be termed ‘incorporative practices’, but must be understood as things that the agent is aware of, and to a certain extent actively chooses to engage in, on the basis of certain qualities attributed to the noble.

SUMMARY

Although *kyesa* is an important criterion for classification that also influences interaction among Tibetans, the groups of people defined in

the *kyesa* categories must not be considered homogeneous. Tibetans, both commoners and nobles, view their family background differently. *Menrig*, commoners and *kudrak* must not be understood as social groups consisting of people who ‘recurrently interact in an interconnected set of roles – that is, positions and capacities’ (Keesing 1976: 321). Rather, these terms must be seen to represent social categories, as people are ‘grouped conceptually because of some relevant features that they share’ (ibid.). Tibetans identify each other with these categories, and this social classification influences their daily interaction in formal and informal contexts. Following both the change in definition of *menrig* and the new internal division of *kudrak*, it seems that the body of commoners is growing at the expense of both the bottom and the top of the social hierarchy.

My main interest here is the role and position of the noble families today, i.e. how nobles are perceived by non-noble Tibetans. There are particularly three social fields within which noble background appears relevant for Tibetans in Lhasa today: marriage practice, knowledge and codes of conduct or morality. The following chapter discusses family background within the context of marriage, and in particular the involved issues in the process of determining a life-long partner.

NOTES

1 The main occupations were *cag zoba* or *gara* (blacksmiths), *ngul zoba* (silversmiths), *ser zoba* (goldsmiths), *shemba* (butchers), *nyeba* (fishermen) and *togden* (corpse-cutters). In addition, *shingba* (carpenters), *longkhen* (begging musicians) and *tha tshongba* (horse dealers) were included in the group of *menrig* in Lhasa.

2 Main groups were *mibog* (workers without contracts to land), *düchung* (individual contracts to land), *trelpa* (hereditary contracts to land from either a noble family or a monastery, or directly from the government) and serfs/slaves.

3 The main groups were *yabshi* (families into which the Dalai Lamas have been born), *depön* (families with histories back to the Buddhist kings), *midrag* (families of important political position holders) and *gerpa* (families of holders of estates and lower posts in the administration).

4 *smad* translates as ‘inferior’, and *rigs* as ‘kind’, indicating the low rank of this category of Tibetans. Other terms used are *gara* (although this term translates as blacksmith in particular, but it is also used as a general term for ‘low ‘people’), *rig tsogpa* (unlean kind), *rig nge* (bad, evil kind), *rig dugchag* (bad kind) and *yawa*.

5 A study of *menrig* in rural Tibet is currently in progress, focusing on the participation of the low ranked families in the village community, and analysing Tibetan concepts of pollution, and polluted people in general (Fjeld fourthcoming).

6 This is not the person's real name, and a standard use of pseudonyms is practised throughout this book.

7 Among Chinese, hairdressers are conceived as polluted, and today many Chinese beauty parlours also function as brothels. However, it is not clear whether these ideas of pollution became prevalent before or after the combination of beauty parlours and brothels, but pollution by birth is not a known Chinese concept (Rune Svarverud, personal communication).

8 Among different scenarios, being reincarnated into the hungry ghost realm for 500 years was mentioned.

9 Hosting a young girl for cooking and cleaning is very usual in Lhasa, among Tibetans from all backgrounds. The girls are often from poor rural areas around Lhasa. They are usually not paid salaries, but receive food and lodging, and, such as in Wangchuk's family, school support.

10 Nomads and pilgrims from other parts of Tibet are usually unable to recognize any *kudrak* today. Similarly, I could only seldom point out a *kudrak* at, for instance, the market.

11 Machong (1990) argues that Tibetans have, since early history, had a tradition of using surnames. However, few Tibetans are aware of their clan name.

12 The cultural power in terms of defining 'Tibetanness' will be dealt with in Chapter Six.

Chapter Three

Marriage

'People without future plans are like people without souls'
– Tibetan proverb

Various sources of data shed light on family background, and verbal statements manifest how people express their views on the issue. It is crucial, however, to focus also on praxis, on what people actually do in relevant situations. Here I shall focus on both practice, manifested in three different marriages, and oral statements, aiming to show how these marriages were talked about and commented upon. Because of the discrepancy between how Tibetans talk about *kyesa* and how they actually interact with members of *menrig* or *kudrak* families, focusing on marriage practices can serve to bring out some values related to *kyesa*. Tibetans in Lhasa choose, to a certain extent, their marriage partners, and *kyesa* is expressed through their choices. Although changes can be seen in the traditional process of arranging a marriage, *kyesa* is regarded as significant for marriage constellations. Two approaches will be employed: a discussion of endogamous practices and a discussion of the 'ideal' partner.

MARRIAGE: PRACTICE AND VALUE

The institution of marriage has constituted a central field in social anthropological studies, and the multi-functional aspects of marriage have also been among the more intriguing questions within Tibetan studies. What constitutes 'marriage' has been widely discussed, as the great variations in the practice have become known. In the 1950s, the dominant definition saw marriage as 'the union of man and woman such that the children born from the woman are recognized as legitimate by the parents' (Notes and Queries 1951). This definition, however, does not recognize the various functions that marriage had in traditional Tibetan society (and in rural areas of Tibet today), where polyandry, as well as polygyny and polygyandry, were common forms of

marriage. These forms of marriage were based on a socio-economic rationale where the allocation of male labour and securing the transfer of undivided land from one generation to the next were crucial to the marriage institution (Goldstein 1971b, Ben Jiao 2001). Further, among the ruling elite, marriage was the main strategy of forming alliances with influential families in order to improve one's own status in the administrative hierarchy in Lhasa (Petech 1973, Taring 1994 [1970]).

Today, a significant line could be drawn between the marriage practices in the urban and rural areas of Tibet. In the rural areas, and especially in Shigatse prefecture, there is an ongoing revival of the traditional polygamous marriage forms (Ben Jiao 2001),¹ despite the fact that polygamy of any kind is illegal in China. In the urban areas, on the other hand, government control is tighter and one finds very few polygamous marriages. It is not only a question of prohibition; rather, Tibetans in Lhasa express a preference for monogamy and base this on both the demanding nature of a polygamous marriage and the absence of the socio-economic rationale for polygamy. Instead, my informants raise the legitimacy of a child as the main function of marriage today. Because of the strict population policies in China and Tibet, legitimacy of the children is crucial, for both the couple and the government. In order to gain status as a legitimate inhabitant of Lhasa, a child must have a residence permit (Chinese: *hukou*). A *hukou* can be granted only to a child whose parents are legally married and who possess a permit to produce a baby, and can only be applied for by married parents, but is possible to obtain elsewhere by economic means.² Thus, although involving other aspects as well, in Lhasa marriage has a formal function in terms of bestowing legitimacy on a child. This does not, of course, imply that the marriage institution is not multi-functional today, but rather that the issue of legitimacy is the main purpose expressed by Tibetans in Lhasa. However, marriage remains a way to improve social position, in a similar way that can be found in various regions in the world.

A focus on marriage practices, and particularly the choice of a partner, can elucidate some of the values related to *kyesa*. The focus will be put on what is expressed as being important in the choice of a marriage partner, and how these values manifest themselves in actual marriage practices. There are several reasons for focusing on marriage. Firstly, getting married is an act regarded as very important by Tibetans, and it is part of the future plans that people actively make. When discussing the future, people show what they consider valuable, and what their wishes are – and very often these wishes will include a spouse.

Secondly, marriage and household were one of the social arenas where *kyesa* clearly regulated a person's actions in pre-Communist Tibetan society in Lhasa (Bell 1928, Taring 1994 [1970]), and as such, there already exists a connection between *kyesa* and marriage. Thirdly, marriage is a conservative social institution and provides a context of study in which values are expressed more directly.³ Studying marriage practices enables us to isolate which elements are seen as related to family background, and how these are explained.

ARRANGED MARRIAGES

Marriage practices in Lhasa have been undergoing great changes since the Chinese invasion of Tibet, leading to a greater degree of choice for the young people today. Relevant for a discussion about urban contemporary marriage practices is what Tibetans refer to as traditional marriages. Marriage has been studied by several scholars (see e.g. Bell 1928, Aziz 1978), and particularly the widespread polyandrous marriage system found in most parts of Tibet (Prince Peter 1963, Levine 1988, Levine and Silk 1997, Goldstein 1971b, Ben Jiao 2001). Also, autobiographies written by noble and by commoner Tibetans deal with the issue of traditional marriage forms (Taring 1994 [1970], Dhondrup Choeden 1978, Kunsang Paljor 1970, Dawa Norbu 1987, Yuthok 1990, Goldstein, Siebenschuh and Tashi Tsering 1998).

Before 1959, marriage was predominantly a politico-economic institution, a means of forming alliances between families. For nobles and commoners alike, the marriages were arranged by the parents, although there were cases when a young couple initiated an (informal) marriage themselves (*kha thug*) (Dhondrup Choeden 1978, Dawa Norbu 1987). *Kha thug* marriages seem to have been more frequent among commoners (and especially families without land) than among the ruling elite, indicating that marriage was not only an instrument to build alliances with other families, but also a strategy for developing and expanding the household and managing the land throughout generations.

According to my older informants in Lhasa, the ritual of marriage among commoners followed the same patterns as among the nobility, although commoners experienced financial constraints. For instance, a commoner bride would, instead of riding a pregnant horse as was the practice of the nobility, be led by some male members of her family to the groom's family (Taring 1994 [1970], Bell 1928). Marriage preparations followed set rules, and, my informants claim, each particular

family had limited possibilities to diverge from these rules. The girl's parents would aim at finding a man from a family of the same or higher rank, while the boy's parents could consider a girl from a family of equal or lower rank. The formal initiative always came from the boy's family, I was told. When a marriage proposal was given, the young man was informed or he might even have initiated the process himself. Several girls were considered, and their names and horoscopes were taken to an astrologer or a lama for consultation. The prospective groom would assist the parents in choosing the bride on the basis of the lama or astrologer's report. The girl considered, on the other hand, was not informed until the decision was made, and usually she was unaware of the marriage until the day the ceremony took place. These rules for marriage are idealized, and most likely many exceptions and other practices were found, also in pre-1959 Lhasa. The point to be made here is rather that marriage was thought to be an institution used by parents to strengthen the household and to build alliances, and within that context *kyesa* was central to the choice of a partner. Rank in general, together with economy, were guiding principles for the arrangement of a marriage, especially among the nobility.

To illustrate a marriage arrangement and the relevant issues of the further analysis of marriage in contemporary Lhasa, I shall describe one such marriage, as told by a nobleman called Phuntsok Gesang. His story is similar to the experience told by other, lower ranking noblemen. Phuntsok Gesang was the youngest of three sons, and as a child he was much engaged in religious matters. From early years he wanted to become a monk, but his parents did not agree, as they had plans for him to form a marriage alliance with an influential family in the area. The parents first presented him to a girl from a family from Medrogongar (east of Lhasa), but Phuntsok Gesang refused because he did not like her, he said. Later, the parents indicated two other alternative brides; in both cases the families' male members were high-ranking officials in the administration of the Panchen Lama in Shigatse. Phuntsok Gesang was then not allowed to meet the two girls, and was only given information about their families. However, he did check by himself whether the girls were pretty or not. His parents consulted a lama who then found one of the girls to be the best alternative, and then they sent a marriage proposal to the girl's family, who accepted the offer. Only after the marriage document was signed did the young couple meet for the first time. This marriage was an agreement between two families, not just the couple. The marriage document was signed by witnesses and seen to be a guarantee for a solid marriage.

Phuntsok Gesang's story indicates that the marriage was arranged by the parents, with very little influence from the groom and even less from the bride. The groom neither initiated the process (on the contrary, he wanted to join a monastery), nor chose the alternative brides, nor did he make the final decision. His freedom of choice was limited, although not absent, as he could refuse a girl if, for some reason, he did not like her, as he did with the first girl presented to him. One also notes the more peripheral role of the bride. She was not informed about the arrangements before the decision had been taken; moreover, it was the groom's family who had the final word. Further, it is clear that the main consideration of his parents was to form alliances with powerful and influential families in the area. Indeed, according to Phuntsok Gesang, this was the crucial element of the marriage. Lastly, essential to the marriage was the reliance on astrology and/or a lama consultation to help choose the spouse. In recent times all these characteristics have changed, albeit to varying degrees.

Since the re-classification of Tibetans into classes, inter-*kyesa* marriages have been encouraged by the Chinese authorities. This was particularly evident during the Cultural Revolution, when explicit policies of mixed marriages, both inter-class and inter-ethnic, were introduced. The so-called 'enemies of the state' – nuns, monks, lamas, nobles and rich farmers – were forced into marriages with people of the 'correct' class background, such as 'poor' and 'serfs' (including poor farmers, nomads, workers and *menrig*). The practice of parents arranging marriages was abandoned, and marriage based on mutual attraction was encouraged as a part of the new 'liberation' brought by the Chinese. As Dhondup Choeden remarks, 'this freedom [of 'love marriage'] rests in the context of their insistence on considerations of class, political consciousness and work convenience' (Dhondrup Choeden 1978:21). During the Cultural Revolution, numerous mixed marriages were contracted; many later divorced, others still live together.

In contemporary Lhasa, after decades of social and cultural changes, the marriage institution is seen and acted upon differently than it was in urban Tibet before 1959. In general one can see a process of liberalisation in terms of pre-marital sexual relations in Lhasa, which in turn alters the arrangement of marriage and leaves a greater possibility for the couple to initiate their own marriage. Also, the process of urbanization in general, where young Tibetans move to Lhasa after completing their education, has led to a greater distance between parents and their children when they reach the suitable age for marriage.

PRE-MARITAL RELATIONS

Friendships and more distant relationships, such as acquaintanceships, are established at school and at work and maintained in one's spare time. Cross-gender friendship is generally accepted, although only seldom will one woman and one man be alone in the same room. Relationships between friends or acquaintances might lead to some form of a 'love relation'. Among my informants both men and women had several (usually one or two) love relations before marriage. The length of these pre-marital 'love relations' varies greatly, and some – but not all – of these relations were sexual. Love relations are accepted, but both young men and women say that they prefer to marry a person without any sexual experience. It is often mentioned that a sexual relation should only be initiated if one has the intention of getting married, but this does not seem to be the case in many Lhasa Tibetans' experiences. Women who have pre-marital sexual relations are more often sanctioned than men, and words like *gog lo* (something used, old or second-hand) and even *chelmo* ('chal mo, female fornicator or a promiscuous woman) are heard when describing women who engage in sex without getting married.⁴ Despite these negative descriptions, many young Lhasa Tibetans are sexually active before marriage. These relations are easily established across *kyesa* boundaries, and many love relations are found between classmates of commoner and noble backgrounds. This was frequent also in pre-Chinese Tibet, where nobles and commoners had love affairs both before and during marriage (Dawa Norbu 1987, Yuthok 1990).

Love relations seem to be accepted by parents up until a certain age, and often 25 is mentioned as the age limit of pre-marital relations.⁵ My informants claim that the pressure from their parents to get married increases after this age. A marriage could be initiated by the man himself or his parents, and the woman is not expected to be active in this process, but frequently her family pushes to formalize the relation. Today most marriage arrangements in Lhasa are based on mutual affection, initiated by the man and discussed with the woman before getting the approval of the parents on both sides. It is typical of parents to say that their children can be with whomever they want as long as they ask them for advice before marrying. To a certain extent this seems to be true, as many young Tibetans do have partners unbeknownst to their parents. The couples meet in their spare time at campus, in each other's houses (if they live apart from their parents), in restaurants, and some (less 'decent' girls) meet in karaoke bars, in tea houses or in

nightclubs (*nangma*). Whereas young people are allowed to have pre-marital partners of their own choice, it is well known that parents involve themselves if marriage is being considered. Many of our informants want to have a partner that is approved by their parents – both because they value their opinion, and because they prefer to have a partner who is accepted, not only as a pre-marital partner, but also as a potential spouse. As one man said it: ‘My parents know what is best for me, and because I respect them, I don’t go against their will. Even if their decision says the opposite of what I would prefer, I accept their will. They know better than me.’ However, the main point to here is that most young Tibetans in this study had some experience in relations with the opposite sex before they agreed on marriage, and their choice of a pre-marital partner was not under direct parental supervision or guidance. Thus, they often have experience of partners from different family backgrounds before marrying. When marriage is discussed, however, *kyesa* is observed by Tibetans with varying significance. In the following, we shall see how *kyesa* is expressed through marriage practices and particularly in the choice of a spouse. The lack of parental opposition affects the continuity of cultural values and practices, but should not be understood as the sole explanation for the preference of a partner with a high-rank family background (*rig thobo*).

ENDOAMOUS PRACTICES

Endogamy, the obligation to marry within certain social limits, is a practice known in numerous societies, although the social borders of endogamous groups are variously defined. In traditional Tibetan societies, endogamy governed marriage practice (Aziz 1978). Marriages between people of the same family background were the most common and were considered the ideal for a proper marriage. In contemporary Lhasa, however, the principle of endogamy is up for discussion. Most of my informants agree that Tibetans should marry only Tibetans, in order for the Tibetan people to ‘survive’ within China. It is well known in Lhasa and in the exile settlements that the Dalai Lama encourages intra-ethnic marriages, and following his advice is a strong incentive to marry fellow Tibetans.

When it comes to using *kyesa* for defining the social limits of endogamy, however, there are contradicting attitudes among Tibetans today. In discussing marriage, older Tibetans emphasize the need for a shared understanding of the relationship between the future married couple. This notion of shared or mutual understanding is expressed in

various ways, such as having similar jobs or being from the same village, but what is particularly stressed is a suitable and corresponding family background. Gesang Wangdu, a 70-year-old nobleman, explains this in the following way:

For me it is important that my children marry someone who is like them. Therefore *kudrak* are preferred, but not because they are *kudrak* but because they are the same as us. If the persons do not have something in common, it will create problems, just like a marriage between a foreigner and a Tibetan. It could not work. It is important that the person who is to marry a *kudrak* knows how to treat a *kudrak*, how to behave well, you know, that they have the same culture. A commoner doesn't know how to talk to a *kudrak*, and for a long life together, they will need a common understanding.

Gesang Wangdu expresses a distinct difference between *kudrak*, such as himself, and commoners, pointing to the lack of a common understanding, or a common culture. He compares the difference between commoners and nobles with those of Tibetans and foreigners, underlying a notion of cultural difference between nobles and commoners. Tibetans often say that foreigners do not know how to act in Tibetan contexts, implying that they always will remain as cultural amateurs. In the same way, then, commoners remain unable to act according to *kudrak* norms, and this will, Gesang Wangdu claims, make a marriage problematic. Underlying this is a notion of a significant difference in how people of the different social categories think and act. As pointed out in Chapter Two, Tibetans express expectations that people's behaviour will be identified with their family background. Stereotypes of different behaviour are found both among people within the category as well as outside. Gesang Wangdu presupposes that nobles interact in a certain way with other nobles, and that commoners interact differently with nobles, and as such, commoners will not be able to communicate as nobles do with each other. Nobles are known to act in a humble or modest manner in all social contexts, and they are expected to use the polite language, preferably at all times, but at least to people older than themselves or with higher authority than themselves. They are seen to act politely towards each other. Gesang Wangdu's expression might be interpreted in terms of humbleness, indicating an opinion that non-nobles could not fully learn to act in a modest and humble manner, a manner culturally connected to the nobility. Thus, the en-

dogamous principle based on *kyesa* is seen to be important for a marriage in order to enable the married couple to communicate and treat each other according to expectations.

When discussing intra-*kyesa* marriages, one ideal is often brought up, namely the idea of ‘keeping the family clean’. This ideal refers to both endogamous and exogamous principles, in terms of defining who family members can mix with in order to ‘keep the family clean’. First, how is this cleanness or purity perceived? There are two different perceptions and meanings of clean (*tsangma*), depending on context – one relating to *menrig* and one relating to *kudrak*. With regards to *menrig*, keeping the family clean refers to not allowing marriage of a commoner or *kudrak* with *menrig*, in order to avoid mixed offspring, and as such avoiding pollution (*drib*) of the (patri-) lineage (*rü gyüd*). On the other hand, referring to the *kudrak* point of view, keeping the family clean signals that in order to remain clearly and purely as a *kudrak* family or lineage, marriages with commoners should not be allowed. Both perspectives refer to the identity and categorization of the offspring of mixed marriages. As noted in Chapter One, Kawaguchi, writing in 1909, claimed that the offspring of the intermarriages of commoners and *menrig* ‘are the lowest caste in Tibet’ (Kawaguchi 1995[1909]: 441). This claim is not accurate with regard to today’s Lhasa, where the children of a commoner and a *menrig* are seen to be slightly less polluted and more ‘pure’ than the offspring of two *menrig*. On the other hand, the children of a commoner and a *kudrak* seem to be less noble and more common than children of two *kudrak* parents. Transference of *kyesa*, or belonging to a social category, is often explained with a *chang*-metaphor. *Chang* is a mildly alcoholic beer-like beverage made from barley, and is found throughout the Tibetan ethnographic region. In the process of making, the *chang* could be boiled several times. The first round of boiling provides a strong taste and a high percentage of alcohol.⁶ After the second round, both the taste and alcohol content will be weaker. For every round of boiling there will be a decrease in alcohol and taste, until there is nothing left and the beverage will be thrown away. In a similar way, family background is defined as ‘strong’ or ‘pure’ when both parents are from the same social category; the background becomes weaker, and less pure, with each round of inter-*kyesa* marriage and new generations of children.

The classification of a person is based on both the mother and the father, but if one is *menrig*, he or she will be seen to be dominant. If the father is *menrig*, and the mother is a commoner, their children will be

unclean, and likewise if the mother is *menrig* and the father is a commoner. Basically, it is believed that if a 'clean' person has sexual contact with somebody from an unclean lineage, he or she will become polluted, and as a result, their children will also be polluted. The children will, however, be considered less impure than a person whose parents are both *menrig*, and who have been *menrig* for several generations. Interestingly, the opposite holds true in the case of the noble families, as membership requires that both parents are of noble background. If the mother is a commoner and the father is a noble, the child will not be considered a full noble. He or she might be described as partly *kudrak*, but will not automatically be seen as *kudrak*. No new words have been created to term categories of mixed background; one will simply say that the person's mother (or father) is *menrig* or *kudrak*.

Defending the principle of endogamy is seen by many Tibetans (and the Chinese authorities) as being backward and of negative value, and only rarely would young Tibetans argue strongly against a marriage across *kyesa* borders. Most of my informants expressed a 'liberal' view with regard to the spouse of their children; they would not interfere in the choice of a partner, they said. However, they made a clear exception in the case of marriage with *menrig*.

Considering the views illustrated by Gesang Wangdu above, what happens with mixed marriages? The most extreme form of inter-*kyesa* marriage would be between a *kudrak* and a *menrig*. However, no data confirming the existence of such cases have appeared, and we did not encounter any mixed marriages of this constellation, nor were any of my informants aware of such marriages. Thus, a marriage between a commoner and a *menrig* will be presented, in order to illustrate some of the consequences of an inter-*kyesa* marriage. This story was told to me by Wanggyal, a 40-year-old man from Ngari lives and works in Lhasa, and who is a childhood friend of the commoner man of the story:

Norbu lives in Ngari, Western Tibet. We grew up together. Some years ago, Norbu fell in love with a very beautiful woman, but she is from a *gara* (blacksmith) family. Norbu is from an ordinary family of farmers [i.e. a commoner] so it was not easy with her background. But they became a couple, and they were both very happy. Then Norbu told people that he wanted to marry her, despite her *gara* background. Everybody tried to convince him about the risk involved, and we tried to make him change his mind. But when Norbu discussed the problem of her background with his parents, and they did not agree with his

choice, he didn't pay attention to their opinion and married her anyway. So he cut off his relations with his family. But Norbu was happy even without his parents. During the first years of the marriage they had two children. In Ngari, they spent time with other *menrig* and with other people who did not pay attention to his wife's family background. Because of people's general fear of being polluted, they did not eat or drink with commoners. Sometimes people brought their own cups, and they drank tea together, but this was not very often. When the children grew older, the problems appeared, as people started to pay attention to the children's *gara* mother. It was as if nobody paid attention to the fact that their father was 'pure', and at school the children had no friends, nor did they participate in the other children's activities. Their classmates at school did not play with them, nor did they want to eat with them. So after some years, Norbu was very sorry that he had married this woman after all. Although he was happy with her, he regretted the marriage because of the children's problems. He said he would not have married her if he had really known that their children would experience this kind of trouble.

The reactions to a marriage between a *menrig* and a commoner are indeed strong. According to Wanggyal, first of all, Norbu's friends and family aimed at persuading him to refrain from marrying this *gara* woman, and his parents even cut off contact with him after he married. The couple's social network was limited to other *menrig* families and to some commoners who, when socializing, observed the taboo against sharing cups. Most importantly, the children of this mixed marriage were seen to be polluted, like their mother, and were excluded from the community of classmates. This story is based on second-hand information, and Norbu's perspective cannot be analysed further. However, the point that I want to make here is that of the outside reactions to commoner-*menrig* marriages, and the way Wanggyal tells the story brings out some interesting considerations. He points to the negative aspects, and claims that Norbu regrets the marriage, indicating a considerable social risk involved in marrying a *menrig*.

When asked about this marriage constellation, my informants' answers can be summed up in three points. Firstly, the reactions from 'society' are crucial; secondly, it is not legitimate to openly defend

endogamy; thirdly, Norbu should have known better than to marry a *gara* woman. Many explain their reluctant attitude towards marriage with *menrig* as a result of the harsh outside reactions to such sexual alliances. Dawa Tsering, who was quoted earlier as being critical towards *kudrak* and the role of *kyesa*, explains his position in the following way:

If it only depended on myself, I would not refuse a marriage between my daughter and a *gara*. But others do not agree and that will give them problems as a married couple. That is why I will not allow it. For their own sake, I don't want my children to be treated as outsiders.

Although Dawa Tsering says he is not personally opposed to a marriage with *menrig*, he would not allow such a marriage for his daughter. His statement could be interpreted either as a signal that collective pressure dominates to the extent that individuals act against their personal opinion, or as a signal that it is not politically legitimate to openly defend endogamy, and that Dawa Tsering is hiding his opinion by focusing on the outside reactions instead of his own personal views. To a certain degree, I believe that both alternatives are plausible explanations.

Most of my informants claim that they personally disagree with the principle of endogamy. Wanggyal, who told the story about Norbu, says: 'For me, people can marry whoever they want to marry, it doesn't matter about background. The important thing is that they like each other and that their families like each other.' With this, he both claims freedom of choice and indicates the important role of the two families. It is unlikely that commoner parents would be willing to accept a *menrig* family, because elderly Tibetans openly express a dislike of socializing with *menrig*. This complicates the task of finding out if Tibetans actually believe in equality for the lower ranked, if it only depended on themselves. We cannot read people's minds. However, I would argue that among young Tibetans there is a solid scepticism concerning marriage with *menrig*, and endogamy within 'clean' categories is seen to be a better solution. On the other hand, outside reactions influence individual opinion as well, and whereas they may not alter the individual opinion, they can confirm the reluctant attitudes of the individual. These outside reactions are seen to be opposed to the individual, but it is the individual who constitutes these reactions. By not allowing his daughter to marry a *gara* man because of the collective pressure, Dawa Tsering himself contributes to the formation of public opinion.

Independent of the underlying rationale, most of my informants claim that they would not have married a *gara* woman, and that Norbu knew that he was not acting in a rational way. Wanggyal would not have married her because he knew the problems – both of the taboos but also for the children, he claims. Restrictions on sharing cups and food are strong, but these activities can be limited to the private sphere, where others do not have to participate. Also, people do bring their own cups if they visit them, and as such ease social interaction. The children, on the other hand, cannot be protected against negative attitudes and offensive practices, and this proved to be the main objection voiced by my informants. Norbu did what maybe most Lhasa people would not do, he took the social risk involved in marrying for love. As Wanggyal tells the story, it seems that Norbu was not fully aware of the social reality for *menrig*, as it seems that he regretted his marriage in the end. Probably the consequences for mixed children are more severe in Ngari (Western Tibet) than in Lhasa, as the villages in Ngari are small compared to the capital, but in principle similar processes are found regarding marriages with *menrig* in Lhasa.

Inter-*kyesa* marriages between commoners and nobles are far more frequent. These marriage constellations are not seen to be controversial in Lhasa, and should not be compared directly with marriages with *menrig*. However, in cases of marriages between commoners and nobles, we also observe a certain discrepancy between idea and action in terms of how inter-*kyesa* marriages are talked about and how marriage practice is actually accomplished. We shall turn to a planned, but later reversed, marriage between a commoner man and a noblewoman. The arguments for not accepting an inter-*kyesa* marriage follow the ideas of ‘cultural differences’ between nobles and non-nobles, as claimed by Gesang Wangdu above, but differ in terms of emphasizing the importance of the knowledge attributed to noble families.

YANGZOM AND HER FATHER

When discussing marriage between commoners and nobles, there seems to be general agreement that these marriage constellations are frequent. As such, public resistance is low, as opposed to marriage with *menrig*. Both nobles and commoners deny that endogamous practices are found among the nobles. However, the way nobles see themselves and how commoners are perceived act to influence marriage practice, reinforcing endogamy – as the following case will show.

Yangzom is the daughter of Tsewang, a Tibetan teacher and scholar. Both her father and mother are from middle-ranking *kudrak* families. To recall the new sub-categories of the *kudrak* suggested in Chapter Two, both of Yangzom's parents are from 'small families' (*khyimtshang chungchung*) that have not had any particular political influence within Tibetan history. Her father, Tsewang, was classified by the Chinese authorities as a *zhing me kudrak*, nobles without much land and who did not oppose the invasion, and because of that, his family was not targeted by the authorities during the 1950s and 1960s, when the *zhing yö kudrak* (the multi-estate holding *kudrak* families thought to have been participating in the opposition) were imprisoned and punished. Rather, Tsewang chose to serve at one of the institutes in China where he taught Tibetan students. He was known to be an excellent teacher of Tibetan language, its grammar in particular, and was identified by his students as a 'voice of modern Tibetans'. During his years at the institute in China, he often raised the question of social inequality and social justice, and his former students quote him as saying that all Tibetans should be equal, independent of their political or family background. Because of Tsewang's position at the institute, the family lived in China for more than 30 years. Yangzom grew up and attended Chinese schools, and later she received her education in Tibetan studies at the same institute where her father taught. While at the institute, she fell in love with a Tibetan classmate – Tashi, from a farmer family in Kham (eastern Tibet) who had moved to China to study. They were together as a couple for three years there. Tashi and Yangzom often spent time at her parents' house, as Tashi did not have any family where he lived. According to Yangzom, her father and Tashi got on well during this period. Later, when Yangzom moved to Lhasa with her parents, Tashi was transferred in order to work at a unit (Chinese: *danwei*) in the same city. The two remained a couple in Lhasa. After a year's time, when Tashi turned 25 years old, he wanted to marry Yangzom, who was then 24. The two had then been together for more than four years, but were living in separate places. Yangzom said that by then they wished to marry so they could have a child and start a family. She asked her parents for permission to marry Tashi, but they both refused. According to Yangzom, her father explained that he did not accept her choice of partner, because Tashi was not a good Tibetan man. He claimed that Tashi did not speak Tibetan well, and as such, he was 'just like a Chinese'. During an interview, Yangzom's father said that he could not agree to his daughter marrying Tashi as long as Tashi did not know anything about Tibet; it would not be good for her, he

claimed. He was worried that, as Tashi had not lived long in Central Tibet, he did not know enough about Tibetan culture and traditions. 'Knowing the language is the basis of knowing the culture of a place', Tsewang said, and on that ground he refused to approve of her choice.

The dispute between Yangzom and her father illustrates the parents' influence on a marriage. Although most marriages in Lhasa today are said by Tibetans to be based on mutual affection, the couple does not necessarily have the final decision. Yangzom and Tashi were known as a couple, but they were not in a position to choose their marriage themselves. Regarding her parents' acceptance of the relationship, there seems to be a significant difference between a love relation and a potential marriage. During the four years that Yangzom and Tashi were a couple, Tsewang did not react towards Tashi in a negative way. On the contrary, the two were on good terms with each other, according to Yangzom. It was not until the question of marriage was raised that her father reacted negatively. According to Tsewang, Yangzom's mother was worried about the marriage as well. The mother, for her part, claimed that she did not have any influence on the decision.

At first, Yangzom did not accept her father's refusal, and said she would marry Tashi anyway. She said that going against her parents' will was not easy for her, but as she strongly believed that it was best for her to marry Tashi, she wanted to try hard to make them understand that. When she told her parents that she did not accept their answer, they threatened her, saying that if she married Tashi, she would never be welcome in their house and they would no longer regard her as their daughter. Yangzom said that she was not surprised by this reaction, because she knew that it was very disrespectful to go against her father in the first place. She did not want to risk being abandoned (Tashi did not have family in Lhasa, so they would then be without close relatives), and in the end she agreed not to marry Tashi.

Shortly after, Yangzom married another Tibetan man from Lhasa. He is the grandson of a former minister in the Tibetan administration, and the son of Tsewang's friend, and a businessman. Yangzom did not know him personally, although she knew of him. They met on three occasions before the wedding. Yangzom was unhappy about this marriage, but she bowed to her father's wish, she says. She felt that her possibilities to resist were limited because she had already argued with her parents, and now she wanted to normalize relations by being respectful. However, her marriage has proven to be difficult, as her husband drinks too much alcohol and gambles with their money. Yangzom says that although she dislikes her husband, she is not too

bothered by the marriage because her husband is a trader, and he therefore frequently leaves Lhasa for long periods of time. According to one of her former classmates, her husband is 'too short, not smart and too fond of alcohol, which makes Yangzom unhappy'. As for Tashi, he later married another Tibetan woman in Lhasa.

Yangzom's father had the authority to stop his daughter's marriage. She married a man she did not know and whom she did not want, but who was her father's choice. What is notable is that, unlike the situation in other societies with arranged marriages, Yangzom had already had a four-year-long relationship with another man, and this was the man she wanted to marry. She would have preferred her boyfriend to become her spouse. Yangzom might have refused to follow her father's will, but she did not. Only seldom have I come across young Tibetans going against the will of their parents. A strongly expressed value in respecting experience and wisdom is found among young Tibetans, and also there is a sense of existential gratitude towards one's parents because they have provided life itself. Yangzom acted 'properly' in agreeing to accept her father's alternative for spouse, she did not go against his advise, and her classmates agree that she had no other possibilities.

Following this case, the crucial question seems to be: why did Tsewang refuse this marriage, based as it was on mutual affection? Several factors complicate the answer. During the process of marriage discussions, Tsewang was teaching the ideology of equality to his students, including both Tashi and Yangzom. He did not openly favour the nobility or other high-ranking groups of Tibetans (or Chinese), but made a point of including students from all social levels in his classes, and often gave private instruction to the students with some learning disabilities. Tsewang inspired the students in their learning, emphasizing that everybody could gain a good knowledge of Tibetan studies. Thus, his refusal of his daughter's marriage was not in line with what he had been teaching. There is a problem concerning ideas and statements of social inequality and *khyesa*, as *khyesa* is seen as a feature of the old (pre-Communist) Tibetan society. Defending endogamy as a principle of marriage is thus not politically accepted today. Tibet is under a socialist ideology, where the official policy states that there exists no social inequality in the People's Republic of China. Thus, Tsewang's positive statements to his students, of a society built not on *khyesa* but on social equality, might be interpreted in terms of political pressure on teachers, i.e. he had to proclaim the ideology of the Party. However, there is an inconsistency in Tsewang's ideal and practice, one

that cannot be explained adequately, but which results in a practice of endogamy. I shall argue that Tsewang's reasons for not accepting the marriage are also found in his ideas of what kind of knowledge *kudrak* possess, and how he values this knowledge.

Yangzom is not concerned with Tashi's rural background as opposed to her own *kudrak* background. On the other hand, her father claims that his main reason for opposing her marriage is that Tashi is 'just like a Chinese'. According to Tsewang's definition, Tashi's lack of knowledge of Tibetan traditions and culture makes him less Tibetan and more Chinese. Distinctions between 'Tibetans' and 'Chinese' are not exclusively based on ethnicity, as Tibetans may act more or less 'Chinese' contextually. Being Tibetan, however, is also a matter of attitude. What constitutes a Tibetan or a Chinese, is not rigid but is something constantly negotiated and changing. Tsewang considers Tashi more Chinese than Tibetan because of his background. Compared to Central Tibet, Tibetans in Kham are much more integrated with the Chinese population, and the knowledge of Tibetan language is limited in certain areas. Moreover, the Kham dialect does not include the honorific level of the language. Tsewang, being a scholar of Tibetan grammar, sees the language as an important part of Tibetan culture. Tashi, who is not fluent in Tibetan, and especially not in the Lhasa dialect, is thus seen as being ignorant of Tibetan culture. Since Tashi is not very familiar with the honorific levels of Tibetan language, he is not able to speak like a *kudrak* or in a way proper to *kudrak*.

Although there may also be other reasons, such as the fact that Tsewang's preferred son-in-law was the son of his friend, or that he has a strong urban (Lhasa) bias and dislikes Khampas in general,⁷ I nevertheless find it likely that lack of cultural knowledge is the main reason why Tsewang did not want his daughter to marry Tashi. At least, Tsewang's arguments illustrate the significance of *kyesa*, as well as pointing to an interesting connection made between nobles and notions of what constitutes a 'good Tibetan person'. His refusal manifests important aspects of the relation between nobles and non-nobles; his notions of nobles and knowledge can help to highlight the significance of the nobles today. First, it is important to note the main argument given by Tsewang – that Tashi is 'just like a Chinese'. In other words, he is not Tibetan enough to marry a Tibetan woman. Tsewang defines a 'Tibetan' to be someone who has knowledge of Tibet, i.e. of its culture, language and traditions. He claims that Tashi does not have this knowledge, or at least not enough of it. On the other hand, some of their classmates from the class in China told me that Tashi was a very

'good man', he was studying Lhasa dialect and was making good progress. They said that he would try to speak Tibetan with everybody, but that they often answered in Chinese, because that was more convenient (Kham dialect is quite different from the high-Tibetan of Lhasa). Tashi was also known to have a beautiful voice, and knew many Tibetan folk songs that he often performed at parties and gatherings. Tsewang surely knew this, because they had celebrated Losar (new year) together several times during their stay in China. Why then did Tsewang prefer the son of his friend from a high-ranking noble family? When Yangzom married, her father was happy, as he believed that this man was a 'good Tibetan' in the sense that he had knowledge of Lhasa society and Tibetan traditions. Her husband does not have any formal education in Tibetan studies, neither in language nor traditions (such as folk songs). All the same, Tsewang claims that he is more knowledgeable about Tibet than Tashi, who had been a student of his in China, studying Tibetan language and history. It seems that a noble family background brings expectations of a high level of knowledge. I have also noted that Yangzom's husband does not act in line with expectations of noble behaviour: he drinks and gambles extensively. In spite of this, Tsewang still considers him to be a better marriage partner for his daughter than a farmer's son from Kham. Interesting relations between *kyesa* and behaviour, and breaks with codes of conduct, will be discussed below.

In sum, although endogamy is not directly promoted and defended as a principle by Tibetans, perceptions of social reactions to inter-*kyesa* marriages might result in a practice of endogamy, within the *menrig* and within the *kudrak*. On the other hand, there seems to be a generation gap in terms of acceptance of inter-*kyesa* marriages. Yangzom's father, an elderly man, refused and actually hindered his daughter's marriage, but the young couple, as well as their classmates and friends, were willing to accept such a marriage. The younger generation seems to embrace marriages between commoners and nobles without raising objections. This does not seem to be the case with marriages between *menrig* and commoners, as both young and older Tibetans express various reservations towards such marriages. I did not find any cases of inter-*kyesa* marriages that involved *menrig* in Lhasa, but I found numerous marriages involving commoners and nobles. Since the Chinese invasion, great changes have taken place in the context of marriage, not only in the process of arranging the marriage but also in the constellation of the partners. Because marriages between commoners and nobles occur frequently, we shall now proceed to the

qualities valued in a spouse, as these are expressed in discussions of a failed marriage.

KYESA AS AN INDICATOR OF BEHAVIOUR

Let us now turn to the second context in which *kyesa*, and noble background in particular, is made relevant and expressed through marriage. Nobles are attractive marriage partners to other nobles, but also to commoners, as can be observed in several ways. Goldstein, quoting his study among Pala nomads of Western Tibet, notes a similar observation:

Current marriage patterns also illustrate the re-emergence of traditional attitudes and values. A number of today's wealthy nomads, for example, favourably consider a potential spouse who has a high-status family background from the old society, and most nomads now refuse to marry those from the traditional 'unclean' stratum. (Goldstein 1994: 105)

Now, why are members of noble families (those with 'a high-status family background from the old society') considered to be favourable marriage partners? The focus here will not be put on cultural revitalization, which is the overall frame of Goldstein's article, but rather, I want to look into the relations between *kyesa* (and nobles in particular) and the concept of being a 'good person'. Instead of describing a marriage between a commoner and a noble, or quoting Tibetans on their reasons for wanting to marry into a noble family, I have chosen to discuss a failed marriage between two commoners in order to illustrate some of the problems my informants try to avoid in their marriage. These problems are often described in terms of *kyesa* and social background, and in the discussion of this failed marriage an interesting connection between *kyesa* and personality and behaviour emerges.

Tsering and Lobsang lived as a married couple at a work unit in Lhasa, where Lobsang works, while Tsering, her husband, works outside in a small private enterprise where he copies and translates religious texts. They lived together with Lobsang's 4-year-old son from her first marriage, and Tsering shared responsibility for the boy. The marriage of Tsering and Lobsang was not without problems, which was well known to people at the work unit. The background of the marriage was rather controversial, as Tsering was a novice at the prestigious Drepung monastery when he met Lobsang, and he decided to disrobe in order to marry her. Their relationship seems to have been characterized by

quarrels and fights from the beginning. During one term, Tsering often came to my room in order to practice his English, and we would talk about his problematic situation. He would sometimes have bruises and scratches on his face and hands. It turned out that he and his wife often fought, and that Lobsang would become very aggressive. Tsering was highly upset about the situation:

I do not know what to do ... she is crazy, without manners. Once she even left the gas bottle open before she left the house in anger. Her son was there with me, and we could both have died. But I noticed the smell of leaking gas. She is a really bad woman. She does not know how to behave. Everybody tells me that it doesn't matter from where your wife is, as long as she is a good person. But if she was from a better family she would not do this to me. Her family are farmers, they are not from Lhasa. Maybe her parents did not teach her to be a good person.

A year later Tsering divorced Lobsang. He said that they had one last big fight. The same evening some friends had gone with Tsering to remove his things from her house, and Tsering had temporarily moved in with a colleague. At the time, many people at the work unit were engaged in their problems, and the divorce became a topic for discussion at the teahouse and in the offices. People were shocked by the way Lobsang had treated Tsering and supported his decision to leave, even though divorce is generally seen as improper conduct.

Two people are involved in this failed marriage, and their roles are talked about by others in Lhasa. Tsering is in general seen to be the 'good person' who has been treated in an unjust and improper way. People talk of him as someone who took care of Lobsang's son and who was knowledgeable about religion because he had been a monk in Drepung monastery. He is seen as a former novice, but also as a helpful man. Lobsang, on the other hand, is said to have bad manners, and not to know how to behave properly. Lobsang had acted very much outside the rules for wifely behaviour. She had treated her husband badly, by not respecting him, and worse, she was being violent towards him. According to a colleague, her family were farmers from a rural area, and they did not have much knowledge, he said. So, when she moved to Lhasa, Lobsang paid scant attention to religion. 'Without knowledge and religion, a person does not have any guidance', one female colleague said. Lobsang is seen to come from a bad family who failed to provide her with knowledge of codes of conduct.

Sonam Dorje, a commoner student from Lhasa, comments on the story of Tsering and Lobsang. He had earlier said that what was most important in a future wife was that she should have a good personality and good manners. Sonam Dorje does not know Lobsang or Tsering, but he is pleased to hear an example that fits well with his point about the importance of personality. 'A good personality depends on your level of knowledge, and you have to learn how to behave', he says. Learning how to behave is either done in school or at home, and some families have good knowledge, while others are not that well informed. The question is thus what determines whether a person has the knowledge needed in order to act in what is seen to be a proper way. The divorce of Lobsang and Tsering was a topic of discussion, and once at the teahouse, some of Lobsang's colleagues were talking about her behaviour. One man, who does not know Lobsang directly, but who lives close to her within the work unit, said the following:

I have heard their fights many times, you know. She was screaming at him, saying all kinds of bad things. I don't understand how she could do these things. I know that many women treat their husbands badly, but it was too much with her. Her family must be bad. Imagine a *kudrak* woman doing these things, yelling and shouting and beating up her husband.

At this, the others laughed. He went on to say:

Women should be humble, and not so loud. Kudrak women know how to be with people, they are pleasant and good. If her family was better, then maybe she would have learned as well.

This man disagrees with the actions of Lobsang, and evaluates what she has done as being bad. The only suggestions he presents for understanding her actions is that of her family and her parent's inability to give her a proper upbringing. He then compares Lobsang's actions with what he sees as the conduct of *kudrak* women – thereby indicating a certain inclination to the latter. Throughout this book, I will argue that notions of right conduct and *kyesa* are intimately linked. As shown in Chapter Two, it is such notions that are made relevant when defining the social category of nobles today. Jacobsen-Widding has, in an article on dignity and morality among the Fulani in West Africa, proposed that certain valued behaviour (self-mastery in the Fulani case) is a way to express social personhood, and to show what it is to be a person among other persons. She suggests that in certain

societies a person is defined 'to be just a representative of a particular social category, and it is in this capacity, rather than in his or her capacity as an individual, that he or she is assigned a particular social value' (Jacobsen-Widding 1997: 52). Similarly, when dealing with nobles and noble behaviour, we should distinguish between the social person and the individual person, as these two entities often do not coincide. When Tibetans discuss Lobsang's actions against Tsering and make comparison's with noblewomen, it is the noble social person that is discussed. In terms of social personhood, it seems that good behaviour is identified with, or even an intrinsic part of, noble family background. On the individual level, however, great variations in conduct are also acknowledged by Tibetans.

During the various discussions of Lobsang and Tsering's divorce, people's ideas and wishes for their own future marriage partners became apparent. Notions of ideal partners and their qualities were shared by most of my young informants: a spouse should have a good personality, preferably good finances and a well-established social network. A good personality has numerous connotations – e.g. a person who shows respectful behaviour, humbleness, politeness and helpfulness, who does not drink, gamble or smoke, but who cares for her or his parents, is a devoted Buddhist, has high morals and a good behaviour, is knowledgeable about Tibet and Tibetan traditions, is generous and kind. Most of these qualities could be identified with notions of the category of *kudrak*. I showed in Chapter Two that nobles are considered to be people with polite behaviour, knowledge of Tibetan traditions, helpful and humble, and as such, notions of nobles correspond to notions of a 'good personality'. Further, nobles will generally have well-established social contacts – a social network – because they, to a high degree, keep track of their kinship connections (cf. Taring 1994 [1970]). Also, good finances depend on social network. Thus, it seems that positive qualities of a person, and of a future marriage partner, are easily identified with the stereotyped notions of a noble background. What we can see emerging is an intertwined relationship involving *kyesa*, personality and moral conduct.

The comments made on Lobsang and Tsering's divorce point to the possibility of learning how to become a 'good person' and, as such, do good actions, and the role of family in that process. Sonam Dorje, the student quoted above, expresses the connection between knowledge and behaviour in this way:

Knowledge is so important in many different ways. It is important to know about the world, and about religion,

and about our society. But knowledge has one most important function that makes it essential to your life: knowledge can subdue you, subdue you to do good actions.

Sonam Dorje points to knowledge as being essential for learning good conduct. Likewise, Lobsang's colleagues at the teahouse claimed that Lobsang had never been taught right conduct, and that was seen as the reason for her bad conduct. This learning process is seen in different spheres, both within the family and through the educational system. Sonam Dorje distinguishes between knowledge of religion, society and the world, and knowledge that influences behaviour. Other Tibetans, however, claim that all knowledge and education lead to better conduct. Dechen, a noblewoman in Lhasa, explains her view:

The difference between noble Tibetans and common people is about knowledge. If common people had the same knowledge and education available, both in history and now in the family, the difference between common people and nobles that there is today would not have existed. If common people got the same knowledge, they would act in the same way as nobles.

Dechen's explanation indicates an idea that *kudrak* have realized the full potential of a person – a potential which everyone could realise, if the knowledge and necessary education were available. As such, a noble person comes to be the ideal Tibetan person, a role model for commoners on how to act 'properly'. The following two chapters inquire into the relationship between knowledge and *kyesa*, and into transmission of valuable knowledge in the various spheres of learning.

NOTES

1 I am currently involved in a project on the revival of polyandry in rural areas in Shigatse prefecture; the results are expected to be published in 2005.

2 Many Tibetans have to pay fines for having a baby without a permit. These fines vary from about 2,000–3,500 yuan (average monthly income for a family is some 1,000 yuan), and provide the parents with a *hukou* and hence the registration of the child as a legal citizen.

3 Similarly, in India, where the caste system is becoming less and less relevant in social situations, caste identity remains the main criterion for marriage arrangement.

4 *Gog lo* is also used in rural areas about a divorced woman. I have not been able to find an established way of spelling this expression, but *gog* seems to refer to something old, as in *rgan gog*, meaning 'elderly'.

5 A bride's age is especially important in a potential marriage, and a woman is said to be most suitable when she is between 18 – 25 years old.

6 Most Tibetans will not boil the barley more than once, because the first boiling round gives the preferred taste and alcoholic strength.

7 Many Lhasa Tibetans express some scepticism when talking about Khampas, as they are known traditionally to be fierce, violent and untrustworthy. Nevertheless, educated Khampas are well accepted in Lhasa.

Chapter Four

Keepers of Cultural Knowledge

‘We need to ask who creates and defines cultural meaning’

– Keesing 1987: 161–162

Since the Chinese invasion in 1951 much has happened regarding the position of the former nobility in Lhasa – both dramatic changes and a remarkable degree of continuity. The number of commoners is growing at the expense of the *kudrak* and *menrig*. A new way of subdividing the members of *kudrak* families has been suggested: families that merely played an economic role in the Tibetan administration, i.e. the small families, more or less equivalent to the *gerpa* category, and the families that had both a political and an economic role, i.e. the big families (*khyimtshang chenpo*), corresponding roughly to the *yabshi*, *depön* and *midrag* categories (but including some of the more influential *gerpa* families).

A *kudrak* family background remains significant in daily life, as is apparent in social relations with friends and colleagues and with regard to marriage partners – but why is this so? We have seen that *kyesa* is closely intertwined with ‘conduct’, and that the foundation for right conduct is seen to be knowledge. This chapter deals with how local notions of cultural knowledge are identified with *kudrak*, and analyses these relations between *kyesa* and knowledge. In the example discussed in the previous chapter, concerning the marriage of Yangzom and Tashi, we saw that her father argued against the marriage on the ground that Tashi was not knowledgeable about Tibetan culture and traditions. The ‘knowledge’ referred to here is knowledge of *bökyi rigzhung*, meaning ‘Tibetan culture’. This term also includes tradition or custom, *lugsöl*. In order to exemplify knowledge of what is locally defined to be ‘Tibetan culture’, four fields of knowledge are brought forward: knowledge of history, of religion, of the honorific language (*zhesa*) and of how to prepare for *Losar* (the New Year). These four elements were emphasized by my informants as the most important parts of *bökyi rigzhung*. Notions of Tibetan culture are closely linked to national

identity, and both religion and history, as well as honorific expressions (language) and extensive rituals and festivals (*Losar*), constitute important elements of what defines 'Tibetanness'.¹ Commoners in Lhasa claim that the knowledge held by the nobles about Tibet is different from what they themselves possess, and *kudrak* knowledge is defined to be of higher value. It is this idea of the nobles as cultural experts that is central in the present chapter, and statements of the above mentioned kind will be discussed with regard to how nobles are seen to be related to 'Tibetan culture' (religion, history, language and the celebration of festivals).

In Tibetan and other Himalayan societies (Ladakh in particular), commoners often perceive the lay elite and the religious elite as being the cultural experts. The Western researcher is frequently referred to high-ranking families and lamas for inquiries of local culture and traditions, although this process has not yet been systematized by scholars of the region (Van Beek, personal communication). In a broader perspective, anthropologists have pointed to the importance of focusing on the process of distributing and controlling knowledge (Barth 1975, Poole 1982, Keesing 1987). Anthropological studies of distribution and power of knowledge have generally focused on religious and ritual knowledge, rather than on lay knowledge (cf. Barth 1975, 1995, Turner 1967, Lewis 1980). Literature on the process of transmission of religious knowledge, and often esoteric in kind, is relevant for understanding the distribution of cultural knowledge – and, more importantly, people's notions about distribution. We shall see that in Lhasa there is an element of secrecy and inaccessibility concerning the distribution of cultural knowledge. Keesing argues strongly against the way particular directions in symbolic anthropology have interpreted culture as shared:

[V]iews of cultures as collective phenomena, of symbols and meanings as public and shared, need to be qualified by a view of knowledge as *distributed and controlled* ... *Who knows what* becomes a serious question.. Cultures as 'texts' ... are differently construed, by men and women, young and old, experts and non-experts.' (Keesing 1987: 161)

Keesing suggests that even in small-scale societies, the distribution of cultural knowledge is often complex. He claims that '[t]hough anyone *can* know genealogies, tales of ancestors and old battles, procedures of ritual, major complexes of societally oriented magic, in fact most people command only superficial knowledge' (ibid.: 162). Following Keesing, I shall explore the local notions of who defines, creates and

keeps cultural knowledge, in order to interpret the dynamics of inter-*kyesa* relations. Local understanding of knowledge and its distribution can shed light upon power relations, and in particular the power to create and define cultural meanings.

In his study of knowledge and rituals among the Baktaman of Papua New Guinea, Fredrik Barth suggests that discussion of knowledge should be focused in the following way:

- a) the synchronic structure of knowledge, b) the learning process of the individual, and the meta-learning it entails as to what is knowledge, c) the dynamics of this tradition of knowledge in communication and transmission, particularly what are the conditions of credibility and confirmation ... (Barth 1975: 218)

Inspired by Barth's methodological suggestion, this chapter describes the knowledge of discussion and defines the 'structure' of cultural knowledge as it is explained by Tibetans. In the following chapter, the focus will be put on the learning process and how knowledge of Tibetan culture can be obtained. This leads to a discussion of the distinctions of knowledge gained from various sources. An analysis of the validity and authenticity of knowledge is crucial as a way of understanding the close connection between a particular knowledge and *kyesa*.

Barth (1975, 1994) discusses the importance of dissemination of religious knowledge in Indonesia and Melanesia. He points out that whereas secrecy is crucial for the status of a Baktaman priest in Melanesia, the ability to teach others is most important for the Muslim guru of Bali – in other words, the two types of religious experts maintain their power of knowledge by opposite practices. In Tibet, the ability to teach is seen as less important than the ability to achieve advanced, and often esoteric tantric, knowledge. Although religious teachings are passed down from teacher to student in specifically defined learning forums (lectures, monasteries, meditation and rituals), and as such differ from how lay knowledge is transmitted, I claim that the question of validity and authenticity of the knowledge is similar, whether religious or secular. The cultural experts, here the members of *kudrak* families, are not so much the transmitters of knowledge as they are its keepers. The knowledge that they possess is considered by Tibetans in general to be valuable, even though the *kudrak* do not necessarily teach and share what they know.

HISTORY AND RELIGION

Kudrak families in general have a strong connection to Tibetan history, both ancient and modern, through their ancestors and through their direct participation in the Tibetan government and administration in the independent period. These connections become significant in an analysis of relations between commoner and noble Tibetans today and the current relevance of family background (*kyesa*).

Tibetan history, particularly the ancient periods of the religious kings, is regarded as an inalienable part of Tibetan culture, and events in the ancient history of Tibet are seen as having shaped and defined today's cultural identities. Thus, the local definition of Tibetan culture is very much dependent on notions of history, and Tibetans in general are deeply interested in historical events. In the same propaganda that is used to counter Tibetan notions of history, culture is politicized. Religion must be understood as an important facet of both Tibetan history and culture. The ancient history is closely interwoven with the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet, both 'because Buddhism came to influence all areas of Tibetan life, and because the history of their country is closely connected with Buddhism in the minds of Tibetans' (Powers 1995: 121). Finding strictly historical presentations of Tibet is indeed problematic. As Giuseppe Tucci has noted, in Tibetan historical sources 'true historical facts are reduced to a minimum' and are often hidden in pious texts (quoted in Powers 1995: 121). When Tucci wrote this in 1949, reliance on objective and unbiased historical facts was somewhat more fundamental among Western researchers than is the case in today's post-modernist times; nevertheless, it must be recognized that Tibetan historical sources are characterized by a focus on extraordinary and supernatural events and persons. Not only is Tibetan history marked by religion, Tibetans also consider an understanding of the historical context of religion to be crucial for their personal religious practice. Belief in Buddhism, filled with its mystical and spiritual events and figures, makes ancient history relevant to the present-day lives of Tibetans. Dechen, a young academic in Lhasa, says this about religion and history:

When Buddhism was introduced to Tibet, we [Tibetans] got our national identity. We are Tibetans because we are all Buddhists. To be able to practice and live as a good Buddhist, it is important to know about historical happenings of Buddhism, such as the life of Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal,² the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama and

the Buddhist kings. Because if you don't know, then you don't understand what it is that you believe in.

For most Tibetans, commoners and nobles alike, religion plays a dominant role in daily life, and knowledge of important religious events is seen to be crucial in order to succeed with correct and effective religious practices.³ The importance of ancient history is thus recognized in the life of every Tibetan Buddhist as an integral part of religious practice. The events surrounding certain religious-historical persons and the ancient history that they are part of gain relevance through this integration into daily life.

There are several points that could be made with respect to noble families and ancient history: their ancestors and family history, the relation with the Buddhist kings and their role in the writing of Tibetan history. The noble families have, by definition, a known and recorded family history, especially the *yabshi* and *depön*.⁴ The ancestors of these families are known historical figures, who are believed to have contributed greatly to the development of Tibetan culture.⁵ The family names of the nobles refer to an estate or a house where the family lived or which it administered throughout history. These names are in many cases seen to be established by the ancestors. For instance, in the first chapter of her autobiography, the noblewoman Rinchen Drolma Taring points out the importance of the ancestors for the present status of her family. Taring starts her book by writing:

My father, Tsarong *Shap-pe* Wangchuk Gyalpo, was descended from the earliest and most celebrated Tibetan physician, Yutok Yonten Gonpo, who wrote several classical medical works and lived during the reign of King Trison Detsen (AD 755–797). Yonten Gonpo is said to have visited India to study Sanskrit medicine at Nalanda University. A block print biography, of a hundred and forty-nine leaves, exists in the Government Medical College in Lhasa and stated that he lived to be a hundred and twenty-five; it contained most interesting diagrams and drawings by Yonten Gonpo. It is also mentioned that gods and demons presented him with an immense quantity of turquoise and other precious stones by heaping them on the roof of his house. Hence he was called Yuthok (*Yu* = turquoise; *Thok* = roof). (Taring 1994 [1970]: 16).⁶

Yuthok is a well-known family in Tibet today, and in Lhasa the bridge of the Yuthok house is still a landmark. The family is also well known in among exile Tibetans. Classification of a noble family's rank depends on the family history – the ancestors and their deeds. Thus, family

history is recorded. All noble families were supposed to keep a collective biography of the family, although some of the smaller families did not produce these. Each successive generation updated these biographies, including marriage alliances, land holdings, trade, tax, donations and the positions of the male family members in political institutions. A historical document was not permitted to be removed from the family estate or house where it was kept, and when the land was redistributed and houses were confiscated, most of the biographies were lost.⁷ All the same, the knowledge of the family histories remains. The known family history links its members both to the historical persons and to the periods within which they operated. The ancestors of the traditionally highest ranking families are well known Tibetans who are believed to have contributed positively to the development of the Tibetan (national) identity. Yuthok Yonten Gonpo, mentioned above, is a name known to Tibetans in general. He represents the uniqueness of Tibetan medicine and is said to be the person who introduced this medicine to Tibet.

Just as the Yuthok family (and the Tsarong and Surkhang families [Yuthok 1990]) are descendants of a physician who lived during the reign of Trison Detsen, the nobility in general is seen to possess a special relation with the Buddhist kings and the sacral kingship. The myth of the first Tibetan Buddhist king (Nyatri Tsenpo) claims his origin to be a dynasty in India (Snellgrove 1995 [1957]). One description of his background is written by Shakabpa, a former Tibetan minister:

According to Buddhist tradition, the Tibetan kings traced their ancestry to the son of a noble family of Magadha in Bihar, India, who is said to have been born with long blue eyebrows, a full set of teeth, and webbed fingers. His father, Mak Gyapa, hid the child out of shame, and when he grew up, he wandered into Tibet. (Shakabpa 1984 [1967]: 23)

The connection between the nobility and the Buddhist kings was strengthened during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (618–650),⁸ the most famous and, according to my informants, the most important king of Tibet. He is recognized as the first of three religious kings (*chögyel*). Songtsen Gampo initiated several projects with major impact on Tibetan society; he united Tibet with Nepal and China by marrying a princess from each of the two countries, and thereby expanding the Tibetan empire. Moreover, he is said to have developed the written Tibetan language⁹ and, most importantly, he erected the first Buddhist

temples and is honoured for initiating the first dissemination of Buddhism to Tibet (Snellgrove 1995 [1957]:144). In order to administer his expanding kingdom, Songsten Gampo appointed six governors. These ministers distributed land to the people and divided the population into 'classes', based on livelihood (Shakabpa 1985 [1967]). The ministers of the kings after Songtsen Gampo's reign played a prominent role in the establishment and preservation of Buddhism. They protected the doctrine against practitioners of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion, and made offerings to Buddhist deities for the benefit of all Tibetan people. Hence, the nobility, the descendants of the kings and the early ministers, have been important in preserving Tibet as a Buddhist country. The sacred kingdom, from the early seventh to mid-ninth century, is held to be the greatest period of Tibetan history, when Tibet was an expanding power in Asia and the pre-Buddhist beliefs were defeated by Buddhism.

The second historical period of major interest to my informants is the period of the 20th century, before the Chinese invasion. This period is marked by the reign of the 13th Dalai Lama (a leader whom Tibetans remember with great respect) and independence. In a similar way that noble families have significant connections to historical persons in ancient periods, kinship with persons who held important positions in the modern period of Tibetan history connects nobles in a special way to recent history. The period from 1913 to 1951 is a controversial issue in Lhasa; although Tibet held 'total control of its own internal and external affairs' (Goldstein 1989: xix), the Chinese never accepted this as a *de facto* independent period. Chinese propaganda attacks the political, economic and social system of this time, and claims that Tibet was a local government under the centralized power of Beijing. Most Tibetans view the period of independence as the time when Tibetan culture and religion flourished – a time without Chinese influence and degeneration of Tibetan practices. The importance of the pre-1950 period will be discussed below, especially the role of noble families at the time. As described extensively in Chapter One, noble families, together with the clergy, constituted the political leadership in the former Tibetan system. Noblemen held political positions and participated in the political and important events of the period. As a part of the political administration they were close to the Dalai Lama, who had, and still has (although a different reincarnation) an enormous importance for most Tibetans (Shakya 1999, De Voe 1984).

A second point of significance regarding noble families and modern history is their role as protectors of dharma (the religious doctrine).

The background for this is the relationship between laity and the clergy in Tibetan societies. I shall not go into detail on this vast topic,¹⁰ but let me point to one of the conspicuous practices where *kyesa* is of significance, namely the making of religious offerings (*chö* [mchod]). Crucial to Tibetan Buddhist practices is the act of offering to a (personal) lama, to deities and protectors, and to temples and monasteries in general.¹¹ The practice of offering is a way of thanking and expressing obeisance to the deities in the temples and monasteries, as well as giving an opportunity to ask that particular wishes be granted (Chan 1994).¹² All these offerings demand substantial economic resources, bringing a ‘correlation ... between virtue and wealth’ (Samuel 1993:217).

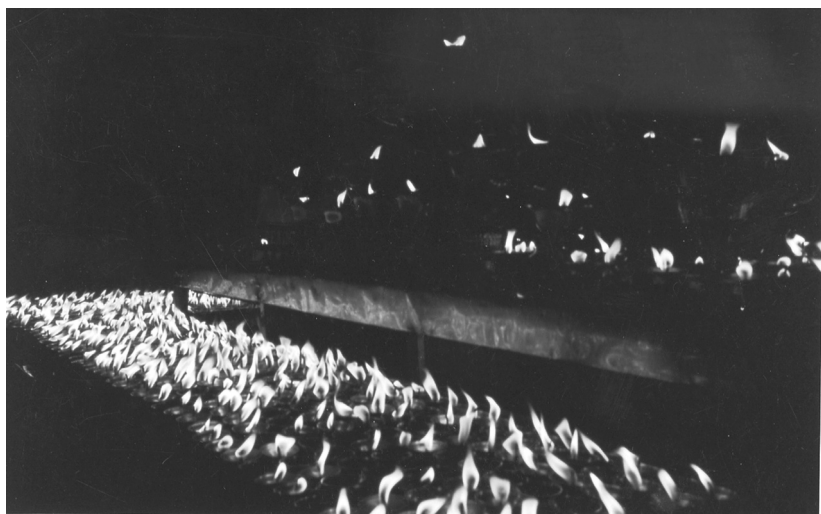


Figure 5. Butter lamps

Offering is a central aspect to Tibetan Buddhist practice, and one of the most common ways in Lhasa is the offering of butter to the butter lamps. The fire of the butter lamp should ideally never cease.

The close connection between nobles and history, thus, concerns both ancient history and the recent period of independence, and not only relates to nobles as the former government of Tibet, but also their contribution to Buddhist institutions. As will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter, this particular historical connection proves to be crucial for understanding noble families and their role as cultural experts in Lhasa today.

ZHESA – HONORIFIC LANGUAGE

When discussing Tibetanness, language is crucial. Not only is Tibetan a proper language of its own, but the use of honorific levels (*zhesa*) also distinguishes Tibetan from all other languages in the region. I claim that there is a growing interest in Tibet for the use of *zhesa*, not only among the traditional users but also among educated Tibetans in general.

The Tibetan spoken language can be divided into basically three dialects (*Lhasa ke*, *Kham ke* and *Amdo ke*). The written language is the same throughout the Tibetan area and is considered by Tibetans to be significant to the Tibetan national identity. Here I shall deal only with the *Lhasa ke* – the Tibetan dialect used in U and Tsang in Central Tibet. The Tibetan language is complex in terms of vocabulary and levels. As Tsering Shakya points out: ‘The spoken language [is] hierarchically structured, with complex honorific rules of verbal discourse which reflect... the traditional stratification of Tibetan society’ (1994: 158). Tibetan language can be divided into two levels of politeness: common colloquial Tibetan, which is used in daily life with people of one’s own or, most often, lower rank; and the honorific level, *zhesa*, which is also used in daily life but with people of equal or higher rank than oneself, and by people of high rank. Further, some verbs also have a ‘humilific’ level, expressing a humble act towards somebody with higher rank.¹³ Thus, there are two different terms for most verbs, nouns and for some adjectives.¹⁴ *Zhesa* is required in verbal discourse with people of a higher age or position (social, political or religious), although the use of *zhesa* varies to a great extent, both regionally and socially, among Tibetans. Some Tibetans do not use *zhesa* at all, because they lack the skills, or they actively disapprove of the importance of such language and the distinctions its use entails. Some young Tibetans in Lhasa argue that *zhesa* brings with it an unnecessarily complex language situation that only strengthens established structures of rank and social levels, which they do not find accurate or relevant today. Instead they prefer to show respect and politeness through behavioural methods, such as being helpful and humble towards other people. However, most of my informants appreciate the possibilities provided by the honorific levels of the language, arguing that using *zhesa* makes it easy to act politely and good towards others, and moreover that *zhesa* is an inalienable part of Tibetan culture. As Pema Drolkar, a commoner woman, expresses it:

The Tibetan language is not a backward language [as claimed by the Chinese]. It is an old language and an

important Buddhist language as well. Many people say that Chinese is such a special language, you know: from old times and with all those characters. But Tibetan is even more so. We have polite words that we use to show respect, and Chinese do not understand that. They don't think it is important to be polite to anybody, that is a big difference between Tibetans and Chinese people. *Zhesa* makes Tibetan a sophisticated and good language, a method for good behaviour.

Zhesa is used as an argument against the propaganda that defines Tibetan culture as inferior to the Chinese, because *zhesa* provides a way for good behaviour. Many Tibetans emphasize respectful behaviour as a core difference between Tibetan and Chinese people, and *zhesa* enables people to act politely and thus act in a good way – as opposed to the Chinese language, which does not directly provide such methods. Tibetans who argue against the use of *zhesa* do not argue against being polite: on the contrary, politeness is seen as an important value and regulative for behaviour.

For most of my informants, *zhesa* is not just something you choose to use or not use. It is, as one said, 'a natural part of communication'. *Zhesa* is required when meeting with certain people, and preferred when interacting with most people. Not only does *zhesa* enable people to show respect and thus act politely; lack of knowledge of *zhesa* might limit social relations, as it might 'force' a person to remain silent or avoid certain high-ranking people. In Chapter Two, I presented a nobleman called Wangchuk, who works at a library together with Thubten, and showed how the presence of Wangchuk influenced the behaviour of his colleagues, both in the office and at the teahouse. Wangchuk is married to Tsomo, and in order to illustrate one of the ways lack of knowledge of *zhesa* can limit daily and personal relations, I shall retell her story.

Tsomo, who is 35 years old, works at a unit in Lhasa. She has higher education from Xining in Qinghai province (former Amdo). Tsomo grew up with her parents in a village in the northern part of Central Tibet. There are many Chinese settlers in that area, and Tsomo became more familiar with the dominating Chinese language. Her knowledge of Tibetan language is not well developed, and she prefers to write in Chinese characters. Having finished school, Tsomo was sent to Lhasa to work. Shortly after moving there, she met Wangchuk, who was a colleague of one of her former classmates. They became a couple, and

after two years he asked her to marry him. Tsomo was very surprised, she says, as he is from a very 'good' family. She had never met his parents, only his younger brother and sister. She agreed to marry him, and her parents were thrilled by the news. She remembers, 'they never thought I would marry a *kudrak*'. Wangchuk's father was more sceptical, but he did not hinder the marriage, and embraced Tsomo as a part of the family. Tsomo describes the wedding celebration as very difficult, because Wangchuk's family and relatives are all *kudrak*, and she did not know *zhesa* well at that time:

I only knew some words for small talk, but not enough to really converse with someone. It was very embarrassing. I wanted to be polite and act good with them, but I didn't know if I knew the right words. Maybe I said something impolite. I did not talk to anyone, just remained silent. That was better. My husband said it was the best way also, until I had learned more.

Her mother and father (she had no other family or relatives present at the wedding) knew *zhesa* and thus managed well. The situation did not change after the wedding, and Tsomo was embarrassed when meeting Wangchuk's father. She could not speak with him, because she wanted to be polite and to show him respect. If she spoke with him in colloquial Tibetan she would not signal politeness, but rather disrespect. Wangchuk reaffirms the problem: 'It is very embarrassing for my wife when she meets with my father, because she wants to be good to him, but she does not have a way of showing it.' They are both making an effort to solve this problem, as Wangchuk is now teaching Tsomo *zhesa*. He says,

She is learning every day, and that is good for her. She wants to learn, but when she was young there were so many Chinese in the area she grew up, and therefore she had to learn Chinese. The Chinese don't like *zhesa*, they say it is a language for the serf owners, but it is not. It is an important part of Tibetan tradition. In my family we have always used *zhesa*, except for some years during the Cultural Revolution when the situation was very bad. I think it is important to continue this tradition. Therefore, my wife should learn so that she can visit my parents without any problems. My father says that it is not a problem for him [that Tsomo addresses him in colloquial

language], but it is important to learn so that she does not have to be embarrassed to meet high [ranking] people.

Tsomo agrees about the importance of *zhesa*, and she is eager to learn. Similar to Pema Drolkar above, Wangchuk describes *zhesa* as a way of showing respect. Learning the honorific forms depends on both place of residence and the political period of schooling. Tsomo started primary school in 1967. That was the year after the onset of the Cultural Revolution, a period where *zhesa* was banned not only from the schools but also from general use.¹⁵ During the following decade, *zhesa* could hardly be heard and Tsomo's parents refrained from using it. However, during her stay in Lhasa she has acquired knowledge of quite a lot of *zhesa* words and phrases. Today, children growing up in Lhasa learn 'common *zhesa*' during their childhood, both from their parents and others in their environment and use it extensively. This level of knowledge is termed 'common honorific' and covers only parts of *zhesa*. It is important to distinguish between 'common *zhesa*' (*zhesa kyuma*) and 'full *zhesa*' (termed only *zhesa*), as the latter is what is required when meeting high-ranking persons or others worthy of respect. Although Tsomo does know some 'common *zhesa*' she does not talk with her father-in-law. Lhasa people claim that *zhesa* is 'natural' for Tibetans, meaning it does not have to be taught. However, while commoners learn 'common *zhesa*', *kudrak* learn the full honorific language.

Acquiring *zhesa* can be seen in terms of family background (*kyesa*). *Zhesa* has been a far more integral part of daily verbal discourse within noble families than among non-nobles. Many noble families use *zhesa* daily when addressing each other, as is the case in Wangchuk's family. The honorific language is also called *kudrak ke*, the *kudrak* language. *Zhesa* has been used extensively among the nobility for centuries and remains closely identified with the *kudrak* families today. As we saw in Chapter Two, the mere presence of a *kudrak*, in an office or at a tea-house, changes the use of language, both spoken and body language, from colloquial to honorific. Many of my informants told that they use *zhesa* every day, and in particular when they speak with nobles. Since *kudrak* families use it as their everyday language, they are well versed in *zhesa*. Today, as earlier, it is a 'natural part' of growing up in a noble family. On the other hand, many young Tibetans of all family backgrounds are eager to learn the full honorific language, not only 'common honorific', and the differences in the levels of knowledge of *zhesa* among young nobles and non-nobles have become blurred. Many

nobles use *zhesa* in interaction with people from all backgrounds (except the polluted families, but including Chinese leaders), depending only on the person's age. Using *zhesa* in daily life is seen as a way of expressing politeness and respect, which, as will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter Six, is a crucial part of the ideal of behaviour. The language that characterized the former nobility (*kudrak ke*) is being transformed into a shared (or Tibetan) cultural practice, and as such it acknowledges the nobles as cultural experts, while at the same time it undermines their position as the elite.

LOSAR – THE NEW YEAR

It is obvious that noble families have a particular connection to both history, religion and *zhesa*, and these connections might provide the nobles with a potentially special knowledge. As such, we can understand as accurate the notions found among commoners of *kudrak* possessing valuable knowledge. In the following, I shall focus on a less explicit kind of relation between nobles and knowledge, namely the knowledge of festivals such as *losar*. Not only can nobles be seen as keepers and custodians of cultural knowledge; they are also role models for commoners, which is illustrated by the preparation and celebration of *losar*:

Losar is the main ritual and social event in the Tibetan calendar as it marks the coming of the new year. The festival itself lasts for five to seven days, although the holidays of *losar* cover almost a month.¹⁶ As the Tibetan calendar is based on the lunar cycle, the time of *losar* varies from early February to mid-March. *Losar* is a social festival when family and relatives, and friends and neighbours celebrate together (Strøm 1995). My informants often pointed out that the first days are the most important days of the year, both personally and spiritually, and it is a time for purification and renewal. In traditional Tibet, the celebration of *losar* was dominated by *mönlam chenmo*, the great prayer festival, that started on the 4th day of the new year and lasted to the 25th day (ibid.). However, ever since 1987 *mönlam chenmo* has been prohibited in Tibet,¹⁷ making the religious aspect of the celebration of *losar* today less obvious.

To my informants, *losar* is first and foremost a social event, where social relations are re-affirmed and appreciated. It is also a festival that allows them to be Tibetans; this is a purely Tibetan festival, as the Chinese have their own New Year festival. During *losar*, Tibetans wear their best traditional clothes, sing Tibetan songs, socialize with other



Figure 6 .Offerings of butter lamps and food

During the celebration of the New Year, heaps of food and other offerings are presented in people's homes in order to secure prosperity and a fresh start. The celebration of traditional festivals is one of important elements of what is expressed by Tibetans to be Tibetan culture today.

Tibetans in a setting inspired by the pre-Communist period. The celebration of *losar* starts with preparations initiated by women, one or sometimes two weeks before *losar*. The women, or a *phomo* (young female house attendant), first clean the house thoroughly and then bring out the *chemar* (phyee mar), a beautifully decorated container to put the barley and other offerings in) and make and buy food offerings for the altar. Biscuits and cakes and litres of *chang* (barley beer) are made by the women (or regular beer is bought by the men), and large amounts of food are made and purchased. The altar and house in general are full of fruits and cakes.

During the period of preparation the significance of the festival is often discussed. Chundak, a young commoner Tibetan woman, expressed herself in this way:

Losar is the most important festival of the year. Then we can start everything anew, isn't it? We stay with our family and visit our relatives and friends. Some of my relatives I see only during *losar*. *Losar* is important for Tibetan so-

ciety as well, because then we take care of our traditions. Therefore I am very eager to prepare *losar* the right way. Like the first day, we are supposed to stay in the house and not go out at all, while other days we should visit and get visitors and it is all very much fun. Some songs and dances are very popular for *losar* as well, and I want to know these so that I can celebrate properly.

Losar is not celebrated in arbitrary ways, there are rules and regulations for the practice. How are the 'right ways' of the *losar* celebration defined, and by whom? Chundak interprets *losar* in a broader perspective, including Tibetan society as such. *Losar* is part of Tibetan tradition, a tradition that needs care and maintenance, and Chundak expresses a wish to participate in this process. For inspiration, she says, 'I just look to the *kudrak* around where I live, to see what they are doing.' She follows the practice of the nobles she knows or knows about. The definition of a correct way of celebrating is not expressed by *kudrak*, for Chundak it is merely a matter of watching what the *kudrak* do, how they prepare, what they buy, how they decorate the interior of the house, when they invite people to their homes, when they visit relatives or friends, when the children go out to play. The relation between commoners and nobles could be interpreted as the latter being role models for the former. Most of my commoner informants could easily describe the doings of *losar*, and they did not actively investigate into noble practices, but they would notice if the practice of a noble family differed from their own, and in that case they would correct their own doings.¹⁸ However, I have no specific examples of commoners changing their *losar* practice because of a noticed discrepancy between what they do and what a noble family does. Also, there is no data suggesting a substantial different *losar* practice among commoners and nobles.

In this context, however, the main point is that commoners express feelings of inferiority in their knowledge about such an important traditional festival as *losar* and perceive nobles as role models. It is unclear whether nobles actually have more extensive or more detailed knowledge of the form and content of *losar* celebrations, most probably they do not. The notion of nobles as cultural experts, whether accurate or not, refers to the local definition of Tibetan culture. In what follows, we will turn to the local process of reifying culture, and the central role of nobles in the collective remembering of the past.

DEFINING 'CULTURE' AS *KUDRAK* PRACTICES

Nobles are both role models and cultural experts, and implied in this is a notion of the *kudrak* way as being the right or correct cultural practice. Commoners can be seen to strive to conduct themselves like the nobles, and by doing so they believe they preserve and maintain Tibetan culture and traditions in the original form. I suggest that through the connection with the pre-Chinese Tibetan historical periods, nobles come to be the experts of the 'culture' that they have the power to define. In the local process of defining Tibetan culture (*bökyi rigzhung*), the past is made essential. Thus, a discussion of *bökyi rigzhung*, the role of the former nobility concerning social memory will bring forward significant knowledge with regards to the persistence of *kyesa* and the remaining high rank of *kudrak* families.

Connerton points out that there is an obvious connection between the hierarchy of power and the elite's ability to control social memory (1989). The control of the past is also crucial in nation building, in order to create an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983; see also Eriksen 1992). In such perspective, it seems that the power of the *kudrak* families is still operative, as they are able to define social memory and to thus define Tibetan culture. This is clearly a constant struggle between Tibetans and the Chinese authorities, as the control of the past has been made a central issue in the political conflict in Tibet.

What, then, are the local perceptions of Tibetan culture? I would argue that 'culture' is seen locally as harmonious and distinct *kudrak* practices that are identified with a certain period in time, namely pre-1959. Tibetan culture and customs of today are seen to be strongly influenced by the Chinese presence in terms of being changed and no longer the 'original' Tibetan culture. What, then, is the original Tibetan culture? This, of course, exists neither on a theoretical nor an empirical level, since culture is never static, but is rather an ongoing ever-changing process. All the same, Tibetans seek to identify a time when their culture was *more* Tibetan, i.e. *less* Chinese, and this period is believed to be found in the years prior to 1950: the independent period of modern Tibetan history. The claimed backwardness of Tibetan culture is a recurrent theme in political campaigns, and young Tibetans are constantly discussing the definition of Tibetan culture and traditions, as culture has become politicized in the official rhetoric and propaganda.

When discussing Tibetan culture and customs (*lugsöl*), Tibetans refer to the past, as the conversation below indicates. One day at the teahouse, Wösel and Sonam, who both work at the nearby carpet factory, discussed different practices of dealing with the dead in Lhasa:

Now they [the Chinese] have built a fire factory [crematorium] here, where they burn the bodies ... It is so bad. The smoke makes me feel sick and it is not a proper way to deal with dead people. In Tibetan culture we give the bodies to the birds [sky burials], that is a much better way because the bodies can be of some use, said Sonam.

Yes, you are right, and we have always practised sky burial and it is the best way to do it. Before there was no question of what to do when a person died, it was natural to give the flesh to the birds. Now the Chinese have changed everything into Chinese culture, and they want Tibetans to change in the same way. I think we must keep our own culture, the way it was before the Chinese came here, Wösel commented.

Both Wösel and Sonam regard the cultural transformations after the Chinese takeover as non-Tibetan: as practices initiated by the Chinese at the expense of Tibetan culture. Tibetan culture is referred to as ‘the way it was before the Chinese came’, i. e. the independent period. During conversations with Tibetans in Lhasa, I asked questions where I used the phrase ‘Tibetan culture’ (*bökyi rigzhung*), for instance: ‘Do you consider the yoghurt festival (*zhotön*) to be part of Tibetan culture?’; ‘What is most characteristic of Tibetan culture?’; ‘Do you think Bon religion is part of Tibetan culture?’. These questions were repeatedly answered in the past tense, with reference to the pre-Communist period, such as ‘*zhotön* used to be celebrated by all Tibetans, it was a festival for Tibet. I think it was an important part of Tibetan culture, yes.’ The *zhotön* festival is still celebrated in Tibet, although in a moderated form; however, the answers given do not reflect the present time.

As I have pointed out in the section dealing with honorific language, there seems to be an ongoing process of commoners being engaged in ‘*kudrak* traditions’, such as using the full *zhesa*. Similarly, commoner women tend to wear the *chuba* (traditional Tibetan dress) in the way noble women do. The colours characteristic of noblewomen’s dresses are now fashionable among commoners as well, making differences in

appearance less obvious with regard to *kyesa*. Thus, in the local process of defining Tibetan culture and traditions, *kudrak* – and in particular what is believed to be *kudrak* practices from before 1950 – come to be perceived by Tibetans in general as expressions of an original ‘Tibetan culture’.



Figure 7. A newly built house in Lhasa

The representation of Tibetan culture in Lhasa today very much resembles noble culture, as we know it from before the Chinese takeover. This house stands in a recreational area outside Lhasa, and area said by Tibetans in Lhasa to be ‘a very Tibetan place’, and is built as a copy of a traditional house of a noble family.

Important for social memory and defining culture is the elite’s power to document the past. Writing is crucial with regard to memory, and in many societies writing is ‘envisioned as an adjunct to memory’ (Fentress and Wickham 1992: 9). In Tibet, there are four types of written historical material: individual biographies from centuries ago, collective family biographies, individual biographies written after 1959 (both in exile and in Lhasa), and foreigners’ documentation of their visits to Tibet. In Tibetan societies there has been a long tradition of writing biographies and autobiographies (*namthar*). The *namthar* documents describe various issues – marriage practices, travels, trade, folk beliefs, tax system, etc. These documents were written by, or about, lamas and noblemen, and some are now being published both in Lhasa and Chengdu, as well as in India and in the West. In addition, through-

out history, the influential noble families have kept collective biographies documenting their family history. The tradition of writing autobiographies has continued, particularly after the exodus from Tibet in 1959. In exile, Tibetans have published several autobiographies about their lives in Tibet. Like the early *namthar*, these documents describe various cultural practices from a noble (or religious) perspective. These authors are predominately members of the former nobility (Yuthok 1990, Taring 1994 [1970], Shakabpa 1984 [1967], Shuguba 1995). Thus, the historical documentation found within the tradition of writing biographies provides information only on the elite among the laity and the clergy, with scant reference to the lives of commoners. Although these publications are written in English and are available to only some few Tibetans in Lhasa, they are known to exist. The few foreigners who visited Lhasa in the pre-Chinese period have published books depicting social and cultural life of that period. They enjoyed the hospitality of the nobles (for instance Bell 1928, Harrer 1953, Chapman 1990 [1940]) and we can assume that their understanding of Tibetan culture and society was influenced by their interaction with (close to) only nobles in Lhasa. Hence, the written documentation of the pre-Chinese period of Tibetan history mainly reflects the lives of the laity and the clergy elites, with only an indirect focus on commoners.¹⁹ As such, in a local process of defining Tibetan culture, the cultural practices that are imparted from the pre-Chinese period are from a *kudrak* perspective. This, I believe, is one aspect of the process whereby pre-1959 *kudrak* cultural practices have come to define commoner culture in contemporary Lhasa.

In such a process, where noble families have the power to define social memory and are perceived by commoners to be cultural experts, they come to represent the past. They are seen as manifesting and embodying the former greatness of Tibet and Tibetan civilization. In the political context of today, Tibetans and Tibetan culture are constantly described in negative terms by the public media and propaganda in China. This negative approach influences people, and many of my informants expressed deep feelings of inferiority towards the Chinese, as well as an uncertainty in terms of their own identity.²⁰ As a result of the strong focus on the unity of all peoples in China, Tibetan culture and identity (as opposed to being a Chinese citizen) has become politicized, and Tibetan traditions and customs are targeted in political campaigns. In this political environment, the noble families become the representatives of the pre-Chinese period, seen as a time when expressions of 'Tibetanness' flourished. Thus, noble

families come to be historical symbols, of freedom and resistance, as well as of Tibetan cultural greatness in general. The historical periods to which the nobility are connected, both through descent and position, are those times when Tibet controlled its own territory.

NOTES

1 The issue of a Tibetan national identity has been much discussed among scholars working in exile-Tibetan settlements (Ekvall 1960, Alexander 1971, Corlin 1975, Klienger 1989, Strøm 1995). Various systems for definition and classification have been suggested, based on territory, descent, language, *tsampa* as staple food or religion as core criterion. However, despite the religious diversity in Lhasa (Franke 1929, Fang 1989, Gaboreau 1995), there seem to be agreement that 'on a higher and more inclusive level the criterion was religious belief' (Strøm 1995: 45).

2 Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) is believed to have brought Buddhism to Tibet for the first time and Yeshe Tsogyal (Saraswati) is one of his consorts.

3 Much of Tibetan Buddhist practice is concerned with multiplying the effect of the good deeds. On certain auspicious days – for instance, the anniversary of the parinirvana of Buddha Sakyamuni – the meritorious effect of offerings and prayers is said to be multiplied 1,000-fold. Thus, efficacy is part of religious practice.

4 *Yabshi* are those families (and their descendants) into which Dalai Lamas have been born. *Depön* consist of four families believed to be directly related to the Buddhist kings of ancient Tibetan history. There seems to be disagreement on the definition of *depön*, some defining them simply as one of the highest-ranking groups of *kudrak* families with enormous land holdings (Yuthok 1990). My informants defined them, however, as descendants of the Buddhist kings.

5 For an overview of the ancestors of some noble families, see Petech (1973), Prince Peter (1954).

6 The text body starts on page 16, the previous pages being preface etc.

7 Most of the documents were destroyed, but some are in Chinese custody, such as the Ragashar family history (E. Gene Smith, personal communication).

8 Snellgrove mentions only the year of Songtsen Gampo's death, 650 (1995[1957]: 135), while Powers notes the beginning of his rule to be approximately 618 (1995: 126).

9 Songtsen Gampo sent Thumi Sambatha and a group of scholars to India (Kashmir) to study Sanskrit and develop a Tibetan script.

10 See Strøm 1995: 149–171, for a detailed study of the relationship between the clergy and the laity.

11 Offerings could be made in both money and in kind (barley, *chang*, butter), and giving a child as a monk or a nun is also seen as an offering.

12 Today, however, many Lhasa Tibetans say that it is merely the nomads who engage in religious activities. In wintertime, pilgrims enter Lhasa and their religious practices are highly valued by Lhasa Tibetans – although the pilgrims who engage in extensive begging while in Lhasa are looked down upon.

13 The honorific versions of the words might have the same stem although many do not. The words can be similar or very different from each other, for instance words for ‘body’: the common word is *zugpo* (gzugs po) and the honorific is *kuzug* (sku gzugs), or as in ‘to do’ where *che* (chas) is the common word and *nang* (gnang) is the honorific. The ‘humilific’ level often does not have the same stem, such as ‘to give’: common word is *tre* (sprad), honorific is *nang* (gnang) and *phul* (phul) is the humilific form.

14 There is a third honorific level used only on rare and special occasions, such as interviews with the highest ranking *tulkus* (some of my informants claimed they would use this third level only to the Dalai Lama) or certain political leaders (if the Party Secretary was Tibetan he would be approached with this third honorific level). Only very few of the younger Tibetans master the third honorific level.

15 During the Cultural Revolution, *zhesa* was abandoned and a simplified writing system was launched. At the end of this period, however, these language restrictions and reforms were no longer emphasized, and *zhesa* is now openly in use, even in the official media such as the *Tibet Daily*.

16 The official holiday of *losar* is 10 days. However, most Tibetans (including the leaders who control the employees’ days of absence) are engaged in the preparations that start two weeks before the actual new year day, and celebrate two weeks into the new year.

17 *Mönlam chenmo* was considered to be of the greatest significance for the well-being of Tibet, its government and inhabitants. In 1987 monks from Drepung staged a pro-independence demonstration during *mönlam chenmo*, which resulted in a declaration of martial law. The Chinese government decided to ban the festival from that year.

18 In a similar manner one can argue that noblewomen are role models today in terms of dress codes and fashion. Many noblewomen wear *chuba*, and non-nobles take notice and get inspired. *Chuba* is increasingly a fashion among young Tibetan women in Lhasa today, and this is often claimed by Tibetans to be because of the noble dressing practice.

19 In recent years biographies of commoners are being published outside Tibet. These also describe life in Tibet. However, these biographies mainly deal with the period under Chinese rule, rather than the independent period (see Craig 1999). An exception is Tashi Tsering's autobiography (Goldstein, Siebenschuh and Tashi Tsering 1998).

20 Hanna Havnevik has described similar scenarios with regard to Tibetan nuns who have fled to India (Havnevik 1990).

Chapter Five

The Value of Inherited Knowledge

Why is cultural knowledge believed to be restricted to the members of noble families, and thus seen to be inaccessible? Why does knowledge of Tibetan culture (*bökyi rigzhung*) persist in being limited to nobles, even when commoners study Tibetan subjects? In order to analyse the difference between 'knowledge' and 'education' I shall argue that the issue of authenticity is significant. A focus both on Chinese official practices in Lhasa and on Tibetan cultural values and beliefs regarding transmission of valid knowledge is suggested.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF KYESA AND KUDRAK

Today there is neither recognition of the principle of *kyesa*, nor of the existence of *kudrak* families in Tibetan society. Tibet, as China in general, is officially proclaimed to be a society without social class differences and social inequalities. According to the Chinese government, the former Tibetan social system is to be termed 'Old Tibet'; it has been abolished and changed, through 'democratic reforms', into the 'New Tibet' (China Reconstructs Press, 1988). The 'New Tibet' implies social justice and equality, as well as modernity. As noted in the Introduction to this book, in the official discourse of social equality, the former nobility (now termed the serf-owners) are the main group accused of exploiting the Tibetan people. In this rhetoric, the situation of the so-called serfs is described as desperately poor, and the serf-owners as an abusive elite with no feelings for their workers. The main content of this propaganda is that the Chinese have now brought justice to the Tibetan people by transferring power from the traditional elite (*kudrak* families, monasteries and government) to the 'masses'. Through this policy, the Chinese claim, they have eradicated the social hierarchy based on *kyesa*.

However, I shall argue that the Chinese government to a certain extent has played and continues to play an active role in the persistence of the principle of *kyesa*, and in particular of maintaining the category of *kudrak*. This is evident in various ways. Firstly, the basis for participation in Tibetan society is class identity.¹ As explained in Chapter One, the point of departure for dividing Tibetans into economic social classes (according to the Marxist classification) was the existing politico-economic hierarchy of Tibetan society. Although reversed in hierarchical ranking, the new class system reflects some aspects of the former Tibetan social hierarchy. The highest-ranking groups of Tibetan society were divided into three classes, and as such they were made recognizable as distinctly different from the so-called masses (the remaining Tibetans). Secondly, through the United Front policy launched in the earlier period after the Chinese invasion (1950–60), some of the members of the former elite were retained in (symbolic) positions of authority, and noble families were as such recognized as being different from other Tibetans. Also, the children of *kudrak* families (and in particular the government officials in Lhasa) were in the early period sent away to China to study (Shakya 1999), and they returned to Lhasa as a new educated elite. Thirdly, during the establishment of Institutes for Nationalities in the various Tibetan areas outside the TAR, teachers were mainly recruited from the government officials of the Tibetan administration, both *kudrak* and former monk officials (Bass 1998). Being employed as teachers, the former officials were acknowledged as cultural experts. Finally, the establishment of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), in Beijing and later in Lhasa, reconfirmed the United Front policy and the practice of employing former officials as Tibet experts.

The political administrative system in China (and as such in Tibet) is divided into four bodies: Chinese Communist Party; the People's Government; the People's Congress; and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC). Within this system, Tibetan *kudrak*, among others, are represented in the latter body, the CPPCC (*chasi trölsog* [chab srid gros tshogs]). However, these four political levels are not equal in terms of political influence. At political meetings the members of the CPPCC have the right to speak, but not to vote. A Tibetan in Lhasa says,

The four-fold political administration represents nothing more than bureaucracy. It is only the Party that has any influence or power, they are the only ones who can decide

upon policies. The Government has almost no influence, the Congress even less, and the Consultative Committee is pointless: a political joke.

Whereas this scholar has a negative opinion of the administrative system, many Tibetans do respect and admire the members of the CPPCC. And indeed, this respect and admiration seems to be the idea behind appointing certain people to the committee. As Tsering Shakya notes: 'This [the CPPCC] is a forum to which the Communists have appointed non-party members who are deemed to be influential in forming public opinion (in Tibet mainly high *rinpoches*² and former members of the aristocracy)' (Shakya 1999: xxvi). In Lhasa, as throughout China, most members of the CPPCC are Chinese (celebrities such as pop stars and actors); of the Tibetans represented, the majority are nobles and *tulkus*. Several Tibetans from high-ranking *kudrak* families are members of the CPPCC in Lhasa. The CPPCC arranges meetings where new policies are introduced, and these meetings are broadcasted on TV and radio. During the meetings the members either give speeches about the value of the policies to be introduced, or are merely present, signalling their supportive attitude. Hence, they are used to legitimate the new policies introduced at the meetings. These policies or projects presented (or defended) by *kudrak* at Tibet CPPCC relate to cultural issues, such as the use of Tibetan language in the school system, rebuilding and modernizing the Barkhor area, restoring certain monasteries or destroying others.

One of the vice-chairmen of the Tibet CPPCC is Lhalu Tsewang Dorje, who is a high-profile *kudrak* in Lhasa.³ He was the minister of defence of the Tibetan government during the Chinese invasion. His family belonged to the group of *yabshi*, and his life story is known to many Tibetans. Lhalu's example illustrates the situation of some noble families and the paradox of how they are treated by the Chinese and how they are seen by common Tibetans.

During the periods of resistance in the 1950s (both in Amdo, where he was stationed, and in Lhasa during the 1959 uprising), Lhalu was known for actively opposing the Chinese presence. Tibetans told me that he, as the Minister of Defence, was fighting against the Chinese, but lost the fight because of poor equipment and the low number of soldiers. They called him a hero. In 1959, after the Lhasa uprising, Lhalu was arrested and sent to jail for conspiring against the Chinese Communists. He spent some 15 years in hard labour camps (*laogai* in Chinese). When he was released at the end of the 1970s, he moved to

the countryside where he settled down as a poor farmer. While Lhalu was trying to survive in this farming area, he was approached by representatives of the government. They offered him a good and secure position in the CPPCC, where he was guaranteed a big house, a monthly salary and a high position. Lhalu accepted the offer. He has since risen in the ranks and now holds one of the 21 vice-chairmen seats. He is, together with Ngapö in Beijing, the highest-profiled Tibetan in the government administration. Lhalu appears at various official events. He is quoted in numerous publications, and was, for instance, interviewed in *Tibetans on Tibet*, an English-language publication dealing with aspects of society, both in 'Old' and 'New' Tibet (China Reconstruction Press, 1988). This is only one of numerous publications dealing with social and cultural conditions in Tibet in which *kudrak*, *tulkus* and celebrities appear. The chapter on Lhalu is entitled 'I was Commander-in-Chief of the Rebel Army':

...[I]n 1959, I took part in the rebellion of the Tibetan upper class and was even appointed commander-in-chief of the rebel troops. Now I am the vice-chairman of the Political Consultative Conference of the Tibet autonomous region. When I look back upon my complicated life, all sorts of thoughts well up, and I am eager to express them. (China Reconstructs Press 1988: 168).

Lhalu then 'expresses these thoughts', explaining that he was misled by the imperialist and reactionary Tibetans. He further describes the Chinese invasion in Chinese terms, claiming that there was a 'peaceful liberation' and that the resistance was only found among his kind, the 'serf-owners', who were protecting their own power. He claims that the Chinese PLA troops treated Tibetans well, and that he himself was impressed by the soldiers and cadres (ibid.: 169). All in all, in the interview he defines the Chinese reforms and presence in Tibet as very positive, and expresses gratitude towards the Chinese. His autobiography, which is read by young Tibetans with great interest, was published in Tibetan in 1993. Jigme, a young Tibetan educated in Beijing, says: 'Many biographies can tell us something about society, and I liked to read about Lhalu because he is a hero. He was right there in the difficult situations he is describing.' To many Tibetans, the autobiographies of Lhalu and other nobles represent a truer and less biased presentation of the political and social reforms. However, these autobiographies are most likely not written by the *kudrak* themselves. Sampho, a former member of the CPPCC, now living in exile in India, explains that his 'autobiography' was in fact written by somebody else;

his name was affixed to it and it was published by the Chinese (Shakya 1999: xxvi).⁴

What effects could be seen of this practice of employing *kudrak* to legitimate new policies and influence opinion? First of all I believe that, to a certain extent, Lhalu and others in similar positions do have a legitimizing effect with regard to the implementation of policies in Lhasa today. Most of my informants respected Lhalu, Shatra and others of the CPPCC, and as such the United Front policy has been effective. It might seem odd that Lhalu is not perceived as a renegade by Tibetans, but I will argue that he is respected as a *kudrak* and a *yabshi*, rather than as being a part of the Chinese government. My informants identify Lhalu mainly as being from a unique *yabshi* family (the only family that two Dalai Lamas have been born into), and I believe this is related to the new subdivision of the noble families that I have suggested in Chapter Two. Lhalu is one of the best known *kudrak* in Lhasa, and he is from a *khyimtshang chenpo*, a 'big family'. For members of these famous and old noble families, what they actually do is not as important as their *kyesa*; they are still regarded as 'good Tibetans'.⁵ Lhalu, having agreed upon being part of the Chinese government, is not acting according to what is otherwise expected of noble Tibetans, and being part of the Chinese government could be perceived as a violation of the principle of 'loving Tibet'. However, this is not the case with Lhalu. Rather, in oral discourse, commoners defend Lhalu's choices. Commoner as well as noble Tibetans consider Lhalu's situation and life story when evaluating his position today, making both his *kyesa* background and his present official position relevant. It is my impression then, that Lhalu is neither viewed as a renegade, but nor has he a strongly legitimizing effect. Rather, Tibetans in general see him first and foremost as a *yabshi* (the noble families of the Dalai Lamas), who was formerly a minister and who has now chosen convenience. They acknowledge his choice of living in an easy way. Thus, Tibetans analyse the behaviour of *kudrak* in terms of complexity, making different aspects relevant for rank.⁶

Although people like Lhalu are not regarded as representatives of the government, their presence at political meetings must be understood as having some effect on public opinion. Employing *kudrak* in the political administration diminishes the moral dichotomy between Tibetan-Chinese, and good-bad. Nobles are in general seen to be opposed to the Chinese presence, as they were the ministers of the Dalai Lama and led the uprising in 1959. In addition, the members of the former nobility have been attacked and punished by the Chinese in

various periods of modern political history. By employing nobles and thus associating nobles with the Chinese government, some of the symbols of opposition become weakened. Furthermore, by installing certain nobles in special (high-ranking) positions, the Chinese acknowledge *kyesa* as a valuable background. The policies that the members of the CPPCC ‘evaluate’ concern Tibetan cultural (and social) issues. As such, the practice of employing *kudrak* in the political administration contradicts the official policy of counteracting social differences based on *kyesa*, but reconfirms the *kudrak* as cultural experts and as significant.

KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION

Knowledge is seen by my informants to be important and at the same time identified with *kudrak* families. Earlier I argued that official practices reinforce these connections. I shall examine the possibilities of accumulating cultural knowledge, focusing on Tibetan beliefs and practices regarding types of knowledge and the importance of the process of transmission.

In Chapter Three, I described in some detail the *kudrak* family of Tsewang and his daughter Yangzom, and her two potential marriage partners. Yangzom was not allowed by her father to marry Tashi, her classmate from an institute for nationalities in China because, according to Tsewang, Tashi was not significantly knowledgeable about Tibetan matters. Tsewang argued that his daughter should marry somebody with good knowledge, somebody he claimed to be ‘more Tibetan’, and suggested the son of his *kudrak* friend. He was engaged in trade and business, and had no higher education. At first sight it seems that Tashi, who studied Tibetan subjects at the institute of nationalities for four years, held a higher level of knowledge of Tibetan issues than Yangzom’s husband, who left school at the age of 16. However, Tsewang did not see it that way. Why was Yangzom’s husband seen as possessing more highly valued knowledge than Tashi?

My argumentation consists of two parts, one focusing on the educational system as such, and the other on the practices ensuring quality and truth, i.e. authenticity, in the transmission of knowledge. The main institutions of learning in Tibet are schools and monasteries.⁷ I shall focus on schools in order to interpret what *kind* of knowledge is available to all citizens. My argument is that there is a fundamental difference in what is gained in school and what is found within the family, and particularly *kudrak* families. Further, I shall show

that, similar to the case of religious knowledge found in the monastic system (Barth 1994, Strøm 1995), the process of transferring knowledge is crucial for its value and quality. This point is of particular significance in the context of political disagreement.

First, let us turn to the educational system. Education is now easily available in Lhasa, and all Tibetan children (that is, all those with valid residence permits) have a right to attend school. Education in Tibet has undergone great changes since the Chinese takeover in 1950, in terms of availability, curriculum and the teaching medium. During the first 15 years after the Chinese takeover, little was done to improve education in Tibet, and the few primary schools that were set up in Lhasa were attended mostly by children of the Tibetan elite (noble families).⁸ As mentioned, *kudrak* children were also sent to China to study (Bass 1998, Shakya 1999).⁹ The period from the mid-1960s to the end of the Cultural Revolution, was characterized by a Mao-initiated policy of promoting quantity rather than quality in terms of schooling, resulting in poor education for the masses. Indeed, a great number of non-nobles received education during these years, but the content of this education was problematic. The teachings were limited to political propaganda, to ideology, and did not provide knowledge of Tibetan society or culture. The Chinese language was the medium of instruction, and anything that could be labelled 'nationality' (Tibetan culture and traditions, including language) came under attack. From 1978, under Deng Xiaoping, however, the emphasis shifted to quality, focusing on 'developed provinces over less developed provinces, urban education over rural education, elite education over mass education, higher education over basic education' (Bass 1998: 49). The return to the 'quality oriented' strategy of the early 1960s brought a renewed recognition of the diverse needs of the minorities, allowing 'anything that is not suited to Tibet's conditions ... to be rejected or modified' (Hu Yaobang, quoted in Bass 1998: 50).¹⁰ However, in the early 1990s, new policies were launched in Tibet, introducing (Chinese) patriotism as the primary ideology of the educational system.¹¹ The campaigns were aimed at all generations, but young people were particularly targeted, so the schools became the main forums for patriotic education. Since 1994, this patriotic education has been firmly integrated into all levels of the educational system. As pointed out by the TAR Party Secretary, Chen Kuiyuan, in an article called 'Speech on Education in Tibet', printed in *Tibet Daily* in October 1994:

The success of our education does not lie in the number of diplomas issued ... It lies, in the final analysis, in whether our graduating students

are opposed to or turn their hearts to the Dalai clique and in whether they are loyal to or do not care about our great motherland and the great socialist cause. (Quoted in Bass 1998: 56)

Thus, schools are not apolitical, but rather forums for combining education and politics, and promoting new campaigns. The aim of the educational system is to secure stability for the motherland (Bass 1998). This perspective on education is not openly communicated to Tibetans, however, and my informants look upon the schools as educational, and not political, institutions, although with a strong ideological element present. This ideology is apparent in both the explicit and the implicit curricula.

There is some scepticism to be found among Tibetans regarding the school system and the knowledge provided by the State. This scepticism concerns two points mainly: lack of Tibetan subjects and the amount of political propaganda. Although the medium of instruction is Tibetan at the primary school level, the explicit curriculum and classes feature Chinese culture and history. Thus, both primary and middle schools (vocational education) are met with certain scepticism. As pointed out above, knowledge of Tibetan traditions, and the values connected to these traditions, are seen to be significant in order to behave in the right way. Sonam Dorje, a student at the Teacher Training College, elaborates on this:

What I learn at the Teacher Training school is of good use. It provides knowledge of how to be a teacher and what to teach Tibetan children. You know, technical things, mathematics and other sciences, which are important to know. But it does not provide real knowledge, because what is most important to teach the children, we cannot teach in the schools. So, at the school you don't get the truth, you only get maybe half of it. The children don't learn about Tibetan traditions, about what is important in Tibet, such as how to behave well and how to treat others with respect and politeness. Everything is about how good the Chinese culture is and how grateful we Tibetans should be because the Chinese came to help us in modernizing Tibet. So then everything is about politics, and almost nothing about Tibetan culture.

The scepticism expressed is both due to the lack of teaching of the most important issues, Tibetan traditions and how to behave well, and the large amount of political propaganda. Sonam Dorje claims that

patriotic education dominates the schools at the expense of Tibetan subjects, leaving the education to be only 'half the truth'. In any school the explicit programme represents only part of what is being taught and learned, and in Lhasa the implicit part is dominated by politics. This 'incompleteness' is of major significance in an analysis of knowledge, as the 'full truth' is to be found in the family – and, as I shall argue, within noble families in particular.

Whereas vocational education is characterized by less focus on Tibetan issues, some institutions for higher learning offer studies of Tibetan subjects. These institutes for nationalities are found in Chinese provinces outside the Tibetan areas, and many young Tibetans are now being educated there. Middle school pupils with good marks or from well-connected families are offered the chance to study at an institute in the 'mainland'.¹² These positions are much coveted by Tibetans, by both the pupils and their parents, as the institutes for nationalities provide subjects not available in Tibet. The subjects include classical Tibetan language and grammar, Tibetan history (ancient and modern) and religion (Buddhism and Bon). Moreover, a degree from one of these institutes guarantees a future job.

The presence of ideology in the teaching, I believe, reduces people's faith in what is transmitted through the educational system.¹³ A combination of less focus on what is regarded by Tibetans as being important Tibetan issues and this strong presence of ideology can to some extent explain the notions of education as 'incomplete' and only half true. Also, the implicit curriculum of the schools is not aimed at teaching the pupils codes of conduct from within a Tibetan perspective, but rather at teaching pupils to be loyal to the motherland and to the 'great socialist cause', as Chen Kuiyuan puts it. Thus, the implicit knowledge that is learned within the educational system does not correlate with what Tibetans parents want their children to learn – i.e. codes of conduct. That does not imply that education is not highly valued as such, because it does provide knowledge (and a secure income), but education does not necessarily offer fundamental knowledge for personal development. Tashi (Yangzom's boyfriend) has gained only partial knowledge from a system that has scant emphasis on Tibetan subjects on the hand, and is dominated by ideology and politics on the other hand. By contrast, Yangzom's husband, being from a noble family, has gained a complete knowledge from the family, and his knowledge is seen by Yangzom's father to be more valuable than what Tashi holds from school. What is learned from the family, and in particular a noble family, is seen to be more complete.

TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE

Whereas education is gained in the public sphere, knowledge is gained within the family (private) sphere. The latter could be observed in two major ways: transmission through ‘bones’ and genealogies, and internal learning within the family. The concepts of transmission implied in these two ways are what distinguish education from knowledge. I shall argue that, in Tibetan contexts, whereas knowledge gained in a family is guaranteed by links to the past, education is associated with the present and ‘incomplete’, and is without authenticity with regards to cultural knowledge.

A belief shared by Tibetans from both common and noble background is that a baby is born with the bones of the father and the blood (and other liquids) of the mother. The bones carry the family name (or the patrilineage), loyalty to the lineage and knowledge of the family history. Knowledge specifically related to the father and father’s family is transferred in the same way. As I have shown in the first part of this chapter, knowledge of Tibetan history and culture is closely connected to family history. Also Tibetan culture is defined on the basis of the period prior to the Chinese takeover. Such concept of culture associates cultural knowledge to historical periods that were seen by my informants as being known by the nobles. Cultural knowledge is thus transferred from the father, through the bones, to the children – and this indicates the importance of genealogy.¹⁴

In order to interpret cultural knowledge, it is fruitful to compare with religious knowledge and the transmission of such. Ever since the first dissemination of Buddhism to Tibet, monks have received teaching from lamas and religious experts in monasteries and temples. Until the Chinese reforms were initiated in the 1960s, the monasteries had (almost) a monopoly on education in Tibet.¹⁵ Religious expertise in Tibetan Buddhism is transmitted through lineages of lamas. A lineage or, as Strøm terms, it a “spiritual” genealogy’ (Strøm 1995: 150), could be based on both descent and reincarnation, varying within the different schools.¹⁶ Most genealogies are based on reincarnation, going back to the originator of one particular doctrine, and each doctrine can be traced back through a line of transmission to the historical Buddha Sakyamuni. The genealogies ‘document the transmission of knowledge and power from master to disciple in an unbroken chain, and thus guarantee the authenticity of the doctrines and the power of the ritual observances’ (ibid.: 151). In a similar way, the lineage or genealogy of the noble families that links them to historical persons guarantees the

authenticity and truth of the knowledge they are seen to possess. Further, as the transmission of religious knowledge is 'intimately linked with the succession to the high monastic "offices" or "seats"' and that 'most of the larger monasteries ... where headed by a *tulku* ... an incarnated lama' (ibid.: 151), members of noble families (and especially the oldest male member) are, as the *tulkus*, representing and manifesting the knowledge gained through their family history. Similarly, as the *tulkus* had power to control the demonic forces in the world, the nobles had the material possibilities of gaining sympathy from these forces by offerings.

Family and family background are thus crucial in the transmission of knowledge. The knowledge gained within a family is guaranteed by genealogies to ancestors. This knowledge is implicit in the family membership, through the lineage. The idea of knowledge being implicit in a person is also related to the theory of karma, which is inherent in the Tibetan perspective of 'person' (see Chapter Six). Such an interpretation of the transmission of knowledge through reincarnation and genealogy leads to a restricted process in which knowledge is made unavailable to people outside the lineage. Knowledge that is not generally accessible will often have a special value and, as Weiner (1992) argues, secret knowledge, by being secret, promotes authority. Transmission of this knowledge takes place within ritual activity, which is outside the public sphere. I would say that the knowledge held by the Tibetan nobles about Tibetan culture came to be inaccessible to others, through notions of transmission. Valuable cultural knowledge has the same position as mentioned by Weiner, outside the public sphere. Transfer of this knowledge, even though it is not 'secret' knowledge as such, takes place from parent to child, and is therefore restricted. In that sense, possessing knowledge that is available only outside the public sphere promotes authority on matters of Tibetan culture.

The relevance of *kyesa* for knowledge is evident at another level, as the noble families have long traditions of schooling their children at home. Before the Chinese educational reforms in the 1960s, children of noble families attended private schools, either in their own house or in cooperation with other noble families (Yuthok 1990). The teachers were either women of the family or private teachers hired for the task, and the children of the nobility were skilled in reading and writing (Goldstein-Kyaga 1993). Lay (as opposed to religious) knowledge has thus traditionally been part of noble families. Although partly including children of commoner families, schooling was always arranged by the noble families.

I have pointed out the political nature of education in Tibet, both in periods when education was provided for the masses and in the curriculum and language policy of today. The lack of Tibetan subjects and the dominance of Chinese standards in the schools generate certain scepticism towards the educational system among Tibetans. In addition, education does not provide authentic knowledge of *bökyi rigzhung* (Tibetan culture and traditions), because the transmission does not follow the same pattern as with religious knowledge, and, as I have argued, as it is found within noble families. Knowledge achieved through education is thus not seen as valid and guaranteed.

‘INTERNAL’ AND ‘EXTERNAL’ INFLUENCES ON KNOWLEDGE

This chapter has pointed to the significance of focusing on transmission and communication when dealing with knowledge and the value of such. ‘Culture’ is locally defined as a self-contained, harmonious system identified with noble families of a certain historical era (the pre-Chinese period), and noble families have come to represent the past.

Knowledge of Tibetan culture and traditions cover what nobles actually know about certain historical periods and religious events and persons of those times, as well as their use of the complete honorific language. The learning process of the individual points to the implicit aspect of knowledge, to codes of conduct. Learning within the educational system and the family is perceived by Tibetans to be fundamentally different in both content and value. I have argued that knowledge gained within the family (among *kudrak* families) is of higher value and greater credibility, because knowledge of the ancestors and earlier generations is seen to be implicit in the lineage (the patrilineage primarily). As such, knowledge does not have to be expressed or shared in order to be highly valued, as the credibility lies rather in the way of transmission than in the ability to communicate. This affects the accessibility of knowledge, as transmission through genealogies is restricted to those within the lineage or the family and excludes others. Knowledge gained through genealogies is to a certain extent embodied, manifested in what Connerton terms ‘bodily practices’ (right conduct) (Connerton 1989). This ‘right conduct’ is not taught in the educational system, but is rather seen to be ‘incorporating practices’ (*ibid.*), learned and corrected in daily situations within the family or by family members. Thus, the valuable

knowledge of Tibetan issues, including codes of conduct, is taught within the family, and noble family histories guarantee validity in the teachings.

Keesing points out that, tracing ‘who knows what’ (1987: 161) in a society is a serious question that needs to be addressed. As I have shown in Chapter Four, *kudrak* have the ability to control social memory by being able to document the past, and as such are perceived to be cultural experts. However, their power to define and control the meaning of Tibetan culture is not solely based on local notions of transference of knowledge and the value and credibility of such: it must also be understood in terms of Chinese practices of using members of *kudrak* families as legitimizers of their policies in Tibet. The Chinese policies in general and practices toward noble families in particular influence the position of the former nobility, both directly, as the Chinese employ nobles as cultural experts, and indirectly by politicizing Tibetan culture and traditions, making the knowledge limited and unavailable to Tibetans in general. As a result of the combination of this inaccessible nature of cultural knowledge and the restrictive character of knowledge transference, members of noble families remain in a situation where they are seen to hold special knowledge of importance to Tibetan issues. Thus it is not sufficient to describe how ‘internal’ practices, i.e. local beliefs, notions of knowledge and processes of learning and transmission, effect the perception of valuable knowledge. One should also focus on what can be termed ‘external’ influences, including structural features. These external influences include both the state organization of education and governmental policies. These two coexisting processes help to bring about the esoteric or secretive characteristic of *kudrak* knowledge – knowledge that has been made inaccessible to commoners – which again leads to a higher authority of the particular knowledge at stake.

Education and knowledge gained within the family do not necessarily overlap to any great extent. The two concepts have different connotations. ‘Education’ is perceived to be Chinese and more ideological, and thus partial and incomplete, yet it is necessary know-how for work and for being part of Chinese society. However, education fails on one crucial point: it does not accommodate the knowledge of how to be a ‘good Tibetan person’. What is gained within the family is perceived to be cultural knowledge necessary for good behaviour and for being a good person. This knowledge is described in terms of being Tibetan. Due to the notions of transmission, it is complete, true and guaranteed. As such, cultural knowledge is kept and maintained by an

individual as part of a family and is used to instruct and guide actions. Members of noble families are in general seen to be polite and respectful in their behaviour (*yarab chözang*), and thus they are ‘better Tibetan people’.

In the following, the focus will shift to notions of respectful behaviour to be understood as an ideal, but also as a social practice that reconfirms the distinctions between commoners and nobles.

NOTES

1 This was a practice found throughout China. Children of parents classified as, for instance, reactionaries or even leftists encounter limited job possibilities (Kraus 1977).

2 *Rinpoche* is a title of a recognized reincarnated lama (*tulku*). Recognizing lineages of reincarnated lamas is a characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism.

3 In addition to Lhalu, the wife of the late Phunkang minister is a member, as are Shatra and Thonpa (both former officials) and the sons of the Samdrup Potrang and Tsarong officials.

4 The biography was published as part of ‘Sources of the Culture and History of Tibet’.

5 To a certain extent the members (male at least) of *khyimtshang chenpo* are regarded as a political elite; it is only natural that they are in political positions today as well.

6 In Chapter Six I shall return to the case of Lhalu, interpreting his unofficial rank in terms of criteria for being a good Tibetan person.

7 For more information on the institutional aspects of the schools in Lhasa, see the Introduction; for more information on the system of teaching in monasteries, see Strøm 2001.

8 In 1952, the first state-run primary school was set up, admitting 300 pupils in the first year. By 1958, there were a total of 13 state primary schools in Central Tibet (Bass 1998).

9 In 1951, 600 selected Tibetans were sent to the Central Institute for Nationalities in Beijing and the Southwest Institute of Nationalities in Chengdu, Sichuan (Bass 1998).

10 Hu Yaobang was the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. Hu led a working group that visited Tibet in order to report back to the central government on the conditions in the province (cf. Chapter One).

11 Patriotic education implies a focus on the stability and unity of the motherland, i.e. expressing support for the Chinese presence in Tibet, as well as the superiority of Chinese culture and society in general.

12 The system of *guanxi* is well established in China and in Tibet. The Chinese word *guanxi* literally means 'relationship between objects, forces or persons' and includes social connections (Yang 1994:1). The system of *guanxi* is a dyadic relation based implicitly on mutual interest and benefit, and in Lhasa, good *guanxi* contacts are imperative in order to gain special social benefits, such as access to particular schools.

13 The institutes for nationalities in China are probably less popular in Lhasa than in, for instance, Kham and Amdo, where some of the schools are located, and the perspective taken here on the institutes as ideological in orientation might represent a Lhasa biased view.

14 Without elaborating on this, adoption has been widespread in Tibetan society, and biology has only limited significance. See Taring (1994) [1970], Yuthok (1990) and Petech (1973) for cases of adoption into high-ranking *kudrak* families in the twentieth century. See also Aziz (1974) on descent and the importance of residence in Tibetan societies.

15 In addition to the monasteries, for the male *kudrak* population there were two institutes of higher learning in Lhasa: the Mentsikhang (medicine school) and the Tse Laptra, which educated government officials. There were also some private schools for *kudrak* and their servants' children.

16 Within the Gelug and the Kagyud schools, only reincarnation is found, but Sakya and Nyingma recognize both descent and reincarnation as legitimate claims to a lineage.

Chapter Six

Morality and Rank

SELF-PRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY LHASA

Debates about right or wrong inevitably involve morality.
– Howell 1997: 18.

Throughout this book, the main focus has been on how noble families are perceived by commoners as being distinctively different from other Tibetans. This last chapter shifts the focus away from what characterizes *kudrak* as a social category, to what motivates commoners to perpetuate social divisions today. Why do commoners show respect and humbleness towards nobles, and thereby (re-)produce the social divisions between themselves and the nobles? The purpose is to see inter-*kyesa* relations in a wider perspective, relating *kyesa* to the value of respectful behaviour (*yarab chözang* [ya rabs spyod bzang]) and to morality. *Yarab* is both a moral value founded in religion and an essential means of self-presentation in a daily context of contradicting value systems. The main point to be made here is that the respectful behaviour (*yarab chözang*) – which reproduces social difference – should not be understood merely as an expression of rank; it must also be interpreted as a moral value employed in commoners' strategies (conscious or not) for presenting themselves as 'good Tibetan persons'. The latter must be understood as crucial in the context of Chinese cultural, economic and political hegemony.

In the introduction to this book, it was pointed out that Chinese rule in Lhasa has resulted in a suppression of what is defined locally as 'Tibetan'. Under Chinese rule, the authorities have altered the Tibetan social system, and its organizing principles (among them *kyesa*) have been invalidated. The Chinese dominate the public sphere, and Tibetans must underplay their Tibetanness in communication (Havnevik 1994). In contexts of public activities, two contradicting value systems can broadly be discerned. Schematically, these will be named

‘Tibetan’ and ‘Chinese’, and their meanings will be clear throughout the chapter.

In daily life, Tibetans in Lhasa must relate directly to a Chinese value system, being employed at work units (*danwei*) and taking part in a society in which Chinese values and means of communication dominate. The premises for socialization within the public sphere are Chinese and, for instance, in a *danwei*, Tibetans must compromise on their values, as religious activities are prohibited and the working language is Chinese rather than Tibetan. Operating within the Chinese system is seen as being pragmatic, as opposed to Tibetan values being perceived as ideals. Being pragmatic is inherently immoral, but because they are necessary, pragmatic actions are morally acceptable under certain conditions: being ‘Tibetan at heart’ (*sem bōpa*) – being conscious of Tibetan values as opposed to being ‘Red at heart’ (*sem marpo*) – being a renegade.¹ There exists a fine balance between managing the Chinese system and being associated with it fully, and whereas being ‘Tibetan at heart’ indicates a ‘good person’ (managing Chinese values well), being ‘Red at heart’ classifies a renegade, or a ‘bad person’. I argue that respectful behaviour (*yarab chōzang*), whether used in inter-*kyesa* relations or in other contexts, is about being a good Tibetan person, as well as persuading others about it. *Yarab* is about managing a complex situation where coexisting and contradicting values influence everyday life. *Yarab chōzang* is crucial in managing this complex context involving ideals and pragmatics, and come to be a means of presenting oneself as a ‘Tibetan at heart’. It is in this context that I shall interpret commoners’ motivation for perpetuating hereditary social divisions today.

In Chapter Two I quoted Dawa Tsering, who expressed a strong dislike of nobles because of what he claimed was their unjust treatment of the Tibetan population. Dawa Tsering can be seen as a ‘representative’ of a group of younger educated Tibetans who have studied for several years in large Chinese cities (Beijing, Chengdu, Xian and others), and left their families at an early age. They represent a potential for change regarding the rank of noble families and the relations between non-nobles and nobles. However, my material indicates that these changes are limited and are found mainly in expressed attitudes rather than in actual behaviour. This chapter attempts to analyse why these young educated Tibetans, although orally expressing a strong antipathy for nobles, do not violate the value of *yarab*.

Loosely inspired by Mauss’ ideas of the gift as a total social phenomenon, i.e. as something that creates an expectation of some-

thing to be returned (Mauss 1995 [1950]), I shall focus on commoners as giving respect and showing humbleness towards *kudrak*. When *kudrak* are met with humble behaviour, they as receivers are expected in return to recognize the giver as a 'good person', and a social relation of exchange is established. However, such recognition is not returned by *kudrak* alone, but also potentially from others who observe the commoners' humble demeanour. The purpose is to analyse what the commoners get (or expect to get) in return for acting according to the principle of *yarab*. *Yarab* is not only a way of expressing rank: it is also a valued way of behaviour in general, made relevant not only with regard to *kudrak*, but explained in terms of religion and self-presentation as well.

AN ARTICULATED VALUE AND A 'BODILY AUTOMATISM'

What then is *yarab*, and how should perceptions of *yarab* be understood? I shall suggest that *yarab* and the active aspect of the concept, *yarab chözang*, must be understood as an articulated value that has an aspect of being an embodied practice, and being part of a 'socially informed body' (Bourdieu 1977). *Yarab* translates as being 'principled [person], genuinely good, decent in character' (Goldstein 1975), *chözang* translates as 'good behaviour/manners, well-behaved, upright, moral'. When explaining *yarab*, informants include particular ways of behaviour. For instance, says Jigme (a commoner), '[*yarab*] is being respectful and humble when meeting people, never putting oneself higher than others. It is about being good and respectful.' Humbleness (*semchung*) and politeness (*guzhab*), together with showing respect, constitute *yarab chözang*. Included in *yarab chözang* is also how to position the body. i.e. gestures and postures, and how to speak and act in relations with others. In general, there are three types of relations where *yarab* is expected; child to parent, student to (lay or religious) teacher, and commoner to noble.

Yarab chözang is learned mainly through primary socialization during childhood and reconfirmed outside family relations. The ideal for humbleness (*semchung*) is the mother-to-child relation, and particularly the greatfulness a child should feel for the mother is crucial in learning both humbleness and respect, i.e. *yarab chözang*.²

Yarab is not a contested value, it is generally accepted among my informants. Margaret Nowak, in her study of Tibetan youth in refugee settlements in India, focuses on formal schooling, in order to see how

people 'are indeed deeply concerned about maintaining as much as they can of their cultural continuity' (Nowak 1984: 53). Regarding the school system in the settlements, she writes:

[T]raditional cultural patterns are likewise emphasised here: knowledge of the Tibetan language and religion as well as cultivation of three primary values and attitudes: *snying-rje* ('compassion'); *ya-rabs spyod-bzang* ('respectful behaviour'); and *rgyal-zhen* ('patriotism', a recent version of the older virtue of ethnic or local-group pride). (Nowak 1984:53)

Politeness and respectful behaviour are part of what defines a Tibetan person, of Tibetan identity. Respectful behaviour is interpreted as being part of Tibetan culture, tradition and history, as well as being motivated by Buddhism. This is the content of the local definition of Tibetan culture (*bökyi rigzhung*), as I have shown earlier. Nowak points out that *yarab* is one of the core values emphasized by the teachers in exile settlements to be included in the teaching experience. *Yarab* is, I believe, essential as an ideal in Tibet proper as well. By values I mean articulated concepts that valorize emotion, orient choice and propel action (Barth 1993: 44). On a more subtle level, *yarab* also includes an aspect of being a 'bodily automatism' (Bourdieu 1977, Connerton 1989).

Yarab is internalized during childhood. As such, *yarab* is rooted in habitus. Both Bourdieu and Connerton claim that the most important values and categories of a society will be entrusted to bodily automatisms (Bourdieu 1977, Connerton 1989). Habitus is shared only to a certain extent, being 'a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures' (Bourdieu 1977: 86), and differs with regard to members of different groups or categories. Although the behavioural ideal of *yarab* is shared among Tibetans in Lhasa, *yarab* is taught and transferred differently, according to *kyesa*. Commoners are taught to be humble and to show respect towards nobles, while nobles are taught to treat others well, and be humble to people older than themselves (see Chapter Two on *kudrak* and commoner behaviour). However, *yarab chözang* as known to be practised by *kudrak* is perceived by commoners as an ideal of Tibetan behaviour (cf. Chapter Three).

Connerton (1989) describes and categorizes two basic kinds of bodily practices – inscribing and incorporating practices. In the former, technical devices retain information, while in the latter, the human body is the instrument of remembering. *Yarab chözang* should be understood in terms of being an incorporating practice, something

that is learned in encounters between the giver of knowledge and the receiver, and not talked about outside such direct situations. *Yarab chözang* is learned and maintained under strict social control, initially within the parent to child relation, and later transferred to other hierarchical relations, such as the relation of commoners to nobles and corrected in these situations. *Yarab chözang* corresponds to an embodied practice that Connerton explains as being ‘a set of rules defining “proper” behaviour’ (Connerton 1989: 83). With such ‘proper’ behaviour the commoners recognize and recreate the hierarchical relation between themselves and nobles. When a commoner bends his neck and head down and sticks his tongue out³ when meeting a *kudrak*, this is an example of what Connerton calls a ‘choreography of authority’. It is an act where the commoner involved both remembers the hierarchical distinctions of the persons, and recognizes and recreates the fact (Connerton 1989, Strathern 1996).

As mentioned earlier, there are young educated Tibetans in Lhasa today who dislike *kudrak*. Despite their strong negative attitudes towards nobles, they still act humbly and show respect. In order to focus on conceivable motivations for the continued use of *yarab* despite contradictory attitudes, I suggest an analysis of how Tibetans verbalize and explain *yarab chözang*. This perspective will bring forward notions associated with *yarab*, notions that are crucial for understanding what a violation of *yarab* involves.

EXPRESSED MOTIVATION FOR YARAB CHÖZANG

During formal and informal interviews with various Tibetans, I discussed the concept of *yarab chözang* and its implications. Responses varied, but only to a certain extent. Below I shall present some of the answers to the question: Why do you act in a polite manner? The responses were all given by younger commoner Tibetans (between 21 and 42 years old), whose respectful behaviour towards *kudrak* I had already observed on various occasions. The answers given do not only refer to *yarab* as an expression of rank, but reflect *yarab* as a value. These responses indicate how respectful behaviour is perceived by Tibetans, and why this social praxis is defined as important:

It is important to be polite to others because it is part of our long tradition, and part of Tibetan culture. Our language reflects this tradition, and I like to use the honorific language. But also it shows a big difference between Tibetan and Chinese people, and our values.

Chinese are very rude, they never say 'thank you' and they always try to get in front of you at the market for example. They don't care about other people. Typical of the Tibetan people, on the other hand, is to be polite and humble, to treat other sentient beings with respect. (Tsetsam, 32, engineering assistant)

It is a natural part of me and my religious life. I am a Buddhist, and in Buddhism it is important to be humble and polite in order to get a good reincarnation for the next life. So we need to establish compassion and that is part of being polite and showing respect to others. (Rinchen Drolma, 42, teacher)

Being polite and respectful towards other people is a long tradition of the Tibetan people. Songtsen Gampo declared 16 rules of moral conduct, and there he states the importance of being polite and respecting other people. He mentions especially teachers, parents and higher castes [*kyesa*]. Songsten Gampo was very important for the development of Tibetan culture and the history of the Tibetan people, and I want to live according to his teachings. Sonam Dorje, 23, student)

I don't know if there are any reasons. I am that way. My parents are that way also, especially my father. He always uses the honorific forms of Tibetan, always sits in a proper manner and speaks quietly. Maybe I learned from him, except we never talked about this. But it is a better way of behaving, because only bad people are rude and impolite. When you are polite and behave well, people will like you better and you don't get trouble. (Nyima, 21, tourist guide)

Tibetans are polite people, it is part of our long history. It is important to maintain our traditions and culture ... Now [the government] want to change everything, so that everybody becomes Chinese, like they did with the Mongolians [Inner Mongolia]. They were also Buddhists, but now they are just like Chinese: speak Chinese and act Chinese. They are not polite and they do not live as Buddhists. I don't want to become like that. My father and mother taught me to behave and speak politely, and only then could I be a good Tibetan. (Chime, 22, merchant at the Potala market)

In Buddhism one very important doctrine is that, in earlier incarnations, all sentient beings have been your mother at some point. You don't know now who has given you life, because you don't know about all your previous lives. I often think about this, it is very useful, when I meet people. So I try to be nice and not to be rude, because rudeness pollutes your mind. Then you will only be angry and not peaceful, and you will not be able to gain merit, only obstacles for your next life. (Tsering Drolma, 33, secretary)

I don't approve of the need of using *zhesa* [honorific language] all the time. It is not so practical. But I try to behave politely, because that is important when you meet people. To my friends I don't do this so much, because we know each other, but to some friends I do. Many people think about you as not being from a good family if you are not polite. They think you are a bad person. (Yeshe, 29, administrative assistant in a carpet factory)

Several points in these responses deserve further comment. One notes that respectful behaviour is closely related to both humbleness (*semchung*) and politeness (*guzhab*). Furthermore, respectful behaviour is seen as an important part of Tibetan tradition, culture and identity. It demonstrates a distinction between Tibetans and Chinese, and it is important as a means of self-presentation. *Yarab* is also seen as closely associated with religion in terms of providing a favourable next life, and to Songtsen Gampo's 16 laws of moral conduct, as well as being a component of behaviour that is taught within the family. Several of these points overlap in the responses. The answers can be divided into two main categories, religion and self-presentation, and analysed in terms of being ideals and practices.

Many respondents point to respectful behaviour as being part of Tibetan tradition and history, as well as marking a distinction between what is Tibetan and what is Chinese. These reflections must be interpreted as interdependent, because Tibetan tradition, culture and history per se are seen as distinct from Chinese tradition, history and culture. Thus, the responses indicate that respectful behaviour is important for defining and maintaining ethnic boundaries. Not only is *yarab* seen by Tibetans to be characteristic of the Tibetan people; rudeness is commonly regarded as a characteristic of Chinese people – both by Tibetans and by Chinese themselves.⁴ Nowak's study supports

this view, describing *yarab chözung* as a set of values and attitudes that ‘Tibetans perceive as distinctly Tibetan’ (Nowak 1984: 97). Just as *yarab chözung* marks the difference between Tibetans and Indians in India, it marks a difference between Tibetans and Chinese in Tibet (China). I shall return to this point in the concluding section of the book, in discussing coexisting value systems in Lhasa today.

Not only is *yarab* closely identified with ‘Tibetanness’; it is also directly related to Buddhism. Young Tibetans point out the value of respectful behaviour, relating *yarab* to the concept of compassion (*nyingje*). *Nyingje* is a central concept in Tibetan Buddhism, and is also mentioned by Nowak as another ‘core value’ among Tibetans in exile (Nowak 1984: 53).

BUDDHIST MOTIVATION

Most of the respondents quoted above say that religion is a central motivation for their polite way of behaviour. The level of reflection in terms of Buddhist philosophy varies, with some simply saying that they worry about ‘my next life’ (Rinchen Drolma), while others refer to Buddhist teachings such as ‘all sentient beings might have been your mother’ (Tsering Drolma). Also, one of the other quotes (Sonam Dorje) mentions the influence of King Songtsen Gampo. He was the first of the three major Buddhist kings, seen to be the main promoter and an important protector of Tibetan Buddhism. His 16 principles of moral conduct formulate preferable and virtuous acts, including ‘honouring one’s parents, honouring learned scholars and honouring and respecting the elders and those belonging to higher castes [*rig*]’ (Tsepak Rigzin 1993 [1986]: 92). Songsten Gampo’s principles, thus, are part of the Buddhist ethos, and are included in ‘Buddhist motivation’.

Within Buddhism, such fundamental concepts as *samsara*, *karma*, reincarnation, compassion and merit define the processes of life and death, of action and consequences, of individual and collective, micro- and macro-levels. These concepts form the ideal source of ideal behaviour. Some of the underlying principles (particularly *karma* and merit, and compassion) embody a close connection between the sacred and the profane, leaving little distinction with regard to religious and secular practice. Local notions of religious belief and practice as being contiguous lead to a particularly strong focus on daily life as a religious practice. In opposition to what is found in, for instance, Christianity in many places,⁵ being a believer without practising is absurd and unheard

of. For Buddhists in Tibet, daily-life situations propose a relevant context for religious practice. For Tibetans working in units, where all forms of religious practice or religious artefacts are forbidden, daily relations with other people become a context for religion-related practice.



Figure 8. Prayer flags on the mountain

Prayer flags, inscribed with auspicious symbols, invocations, prayers and mantras, are put outside for the wind to carry its blessings. This practice is an important part of Tibetan pilgrimage, and Lhasa people of all backgrounds carry prayer flags when visiting a holy place.

In order to discuss religion as a motivation for *yarab chözang*, let us look briefly at some basic concepts in Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism has been termed the ‘complete Buddhism’, as it is a hybrid of all the three schools (Kværne 1984). In Tibet, ‘the monks followed the same disciplinary code as the Hinayana School, their philosophy was unquestionably Mahayana School (the Madhyamaka in particular), and their meditative and ritual practices were mainly those of the tantric Vajrayana School’ (ibid.: 255). For lay people it is mostly the Mahayana philosophy and the Vajrayana ritual practices that are important; however, knowledge concerning the various schools of Buddhism is limited.

Among the most basic and pervasive of Buddha’s teachings are the ideas of reincarnation and intrinsically intertwined with that, karma,

the law of cause and effect. These are both underlying principles in a Buddhist world-view, and the foundation of Buddhist practices.⁶ In addition, and closely connected with reincarnation and karma, are (virtue and) 'good merit' and the concept of 'compassion'.⁷ Religious actions are not necessarily separated from worldly actions, Buddhism being commonly understood as an all-encompassing system of beliefs implemented in daily life. Due to the definition of action, in Buddhist philosophy all actions have the same potential. Karma is literally translated as 'action', while the derived meaning is 'action and the appropriate result of action' (Humphreys 1984: 105), or 'productive of consequences' (Govinda 1960: 34). Every action produces a concordant reaction, and this happens automatically. The state we live in is *samsara*,⁸ the cycle of birth and death, and the cyclic existence involves rebirth into other realms of existence. The final aim is to be released from this mechanism of birth and death and to enter the state of nirvana (the opposite of *samsara*; the state where birth and death do not occur). There are six levels of existence into which one may be reincarnated: the hell realm; hungry ghost realm; animal realm; human realm; semi-god realm; and god realm.⁹ Although the god realm is seen to be the most pleasant realm of existence, it is considered favourable to be reborn into the human realm, as it is here that one experiences both pleasure and suffering. The core idea of Buddhist philosophy is to realize the absolute solution to the problem of suffering, and in a human form one is able to experience enough suffering to motivate religious activities, as well as to liberate time to engage in this practice.

In order to realize the reality of suffering and *samsara*, Buddhism teaches that one has to take refuge in the 'Noble Eightfold Path'.¹⁰ Two Tibetan terms encompass the teachings of the Buddha: wisdom (*sherab*) and compassion (*nyingje*). Wisdom is the realization of the Sanskrit concept of *shunyata*: all phenomena's emptiness of inherent existence, which can be realized by meditation and philosophical studies. None of my informants in this study actually engaged in realizing *shunyata*. Compassion (the empathy for all sentient beings) on the other hand, is together with the securing of a good rebirth, the main focus of lay Tibetan practice. Also, lay Tibetans, in both rural and urban areas, are actively involved with offering practices to protector deities of various kinds (from both the Buddhist and pre-Buddhist pantheon). Although the fundamental philosophy of Buddhism is not directly made relevant for most lay Tibetans today, the basic concepts such as karma, merit and

reincarnation motivate action, both in terms of religious practices, but also in terms of social interaction with other people.

IDEAL AND PRACTICE

Buddhism must be interpreted as an ideal of behaviour, a representational model of society, rather than a model of what people actually do. It is an explicit set of values and ideals that are easily referred to in questions of reason. However, there are three different connections between *yarab chözang* as shown towards nobles and religious practice: by the practice of being humble towards deities and lamas, as well as with nobles, by the underlying issue of compassion in the act of respect, and by the principle of karma with regard to ascribed status.

Although the law of cause and effect is at an abstract philosophical level removed from the idea of direct punishment and reward, karma does have a certain legitimizing effect on social distinctions. The religious and secular spheres are not strictly separable in Tibetan societies, and the concept of *chö* (*chos*)¹¹ includes secular and social, as well as cosmological order. As Clarke writes, on the basis of his study of Tibetans in Helambu in Highland Nepal:

[*chö*] is *the* proper order which stands behind all aspects of culture and nature, behind all possible worlds ... This local conception of *chö* embodies both a cosmology and an idea of correct or proper action that for the large part explains the position of the individual in this order. (Clarke 1990: 172)

One's present life is a result of previous deeds, so there is a certain 'justice' to the social differences. With karmic law, the belief in ascribed status is also maintained. Noble background is ascribed by birth (or in cases of adoption and ennoblement), and is acknowledged by most Tibetans as indicating a favourable rebirth. Such rebirth, according to the underlying law of cause and effect, signals a previous life of good deeds. As such, social differences (and to a certain degree inequalities) are explained and legitimized, and a social practice of being humble and showing respect towards *kudrak* might be interpreted in terms of karma. However, karma is a deep and underlying principle, one that is not necessarily made explicitly relevant when Tibetans make their choices of how to act in daily life.

The process of gaining merit is life-long and includes all situations, both daily and secular actions (such as relations with one's neighbours) and more typical religious actions (such as offerings and prostrations in



Figure 9. People prostrating outside the Jokhang temple

*Humbleness is a much appreciated quality among Tibetans of all social backgrounds, and prostrating is one way to practice humbleness. At most times one will see Tibetans prostrating outside the Jokhang temple in the heart of Lhasa. Also, being humble is crucial in social interactions in daily life, and one important practice is the use of *zhesa*, the honorific level of Tibetan language.*

the temples). Among my informants, religious practice was limited to circumambulation, offerings, praying, performing prostrations and paying homage to the deities, as well as praying and offering to one's personal lama and protector. Respectful behaviour is an ideal when encountering both the lay and the religious elite. It is the same *type* of respect, although the respect shown to a lama is stronger. Humbleness (*semchung*) is crucial in these practices, and very similar ways of behaving appear in the temples and in the noble houses. Rinchen Drolma, one of the respondents quoted above, elaborates her views:

To respect a person and be humble when you meet them is also important. If you only are humble in front of your deity or a lama, it will be wrong. Then you are not a good Buddhist. Anybody can look small [appear humble]¹² when in a temple, but with people they are often different. But it is the same thing, the same attitude.

Humbleness, respect and politeness are intertwined with compassion. Acting in a respectful way, either towards a deity or a noble, accumu-

lates good merit. This could be interpreted as a religious practice, and performed both in a religious and a secular setting. This is also observable when my informants encounter a lama or lay people of high hereditary rank (*rig thobo*); the difference of their behaviour is of degree rather than of kind. When meeting a lama, one will bow down (or prostrate if the lama is of very high rank), put one's tongue out and turn the palm of the hand upwards. The neck will be bent down, and one will not look the lama directly in the eyes. When meeting a person of high rank, for instance someone from a *yabshi* family, one will behave in a conspicuously similar manner. With the exception of prostrating, the same behaviour with regard to bowing forward, the use of the tongue and the position of the hands will be the same. Whereas the respect shown to the lamas is explicit, the respect shown to a *yabshi* is more subtle, in terms of actual body movements.

A connection between *yarab* and religious practice also indicates that opposing *yarab* implies a violation of religious principles, especially the principles of compassion and merit. It is not clear to me whether Tibetans actually believe that opposing *yarab* means rejecting Buddhism, but there is a general idea that if one opposes *yarab*, others will interpret this as going against religion. Barth (1993) points out that in order to study values one needs to consider to what degree values are sanctioned and in that sense generate social praxis. Below I explore commoners' alternatives to being respectful and polite towards noble family members (and thereby maintaining and recreating the social differences between themselves and *kudrak*) in terms of sanctions against violating the value of *yarab*. In Lhasa, most Tibetans operate and act in relation to both ideals and pragmatic considerations. Tibetan society is dominated by the Chinese presence and the Chinese define the premises for inter-ethnic interaction. Furthermore, Tibetans work within the Chinese work system and relate directly to the Chinese authorities. In this situation, many Tibetans engage in activities considered immoral according to religion and moral values. However, these activities are accepted on certain preconditions – one of them being *yarab chözang*.

THE DOUBLE PERSON AND COEXISTING MORAL ORDERS

In this section I will focus on *yarab* as a means of self-presentation, indicating a 'good Tibetan person'. What constitutes a 'good person' and why is it important to be seen as one? These are indeed tricky

questions – especially the second one. As I have already mentioned, when defining a ‘good person’ Tibetans distinguish between an ‘ideal person’ and a ‘pragmatic person’. The former is related to the perception of a ‘Tibetan person’, while the latter is connected to a being a ‘Chinese person’ or a renegade.

Schematically, we can distinguish between two value systems present in Lhasa today; for the sake of the argument, I shall term these ‘Chinese’ and ‘Tibetan’. These appear as clearly contradictory, but nevertheless most Tibetans in Lhasa must relate to both on a daily basis. It is not the intention to label all activities as being either ‘Tibetan’ or ‘Chinese’, and I am fully aware that such polarizing terminology might appear reductionistic. At the same time, it is my opinion that when dealing with moral orders or value systems, abstracted terminology is indispensable. On the level of managing daily life, Tibetans do not necessarily identify what I term a ‘Chinese’ moral order as such, but rather relate actions within this moral universe to be something one has to do, i.e. being pragmatic. Many activities are perceived in everyday life to be ‘Tibetan’ (e.g. offering in temples), but Tibetan moral values are also perceived to be an ideal that is difficult to realize in actual life. It is frequently necessary to act in a way that contradicts ideal Tibetan values. In order for Tibetans to manage the necessary participation in the Chinese-dominated society, I suggest that *yarab chözang* serves as a ‘bridge’ between the pragmatic choices and ideal moral values.

What constitutes a ‘good person’ corresponds to notions of a ‘good Tibetan person’, which is related to Buddhism and compassionate deeds. A phrase often mentioned by my informants, and also included in the definition of a ‘good Tibetan person’, is to be ‘Tibetan at heart’ (*sem böpa*).¹³ Being Tibetan at heart is a vague term. However, it is explained in political terms, although in varying degrees,¹⁴ and could be explained as a person who would benefit Tibet if the possibility were there. Specifically, what is implied in the term is probably not clearly defined by Tibetans, nor is it the main point that I want to make. The crucial point here is that people’s intentions are evaluated in terms of being a ‘good person’ or not. Whether a person is ‘Tibetan at heart’ is negotiated contextually.

Tibetans understand a person as being made up of two parts: an inside and an outside. The inside is related to the mind/heart (*sem*) and the outside is related to the physical body (*lū*), and these could be opposed. Being ‘Tibetan at heart’ could thus be explained as ‘outside (he or she) is Chinese, but on the inside (she or he) is Tibetan’. Or the physical appearance could be Chinese, but the heart is Tibetan.

Balancing between being Chinese on the outside but Tibetan on the inside is something experienced by most Tibetans in Lhasa. The opposite of being Tibetan at heart is being 'Red at heart' (*sem marpo*), indicating that the person acts not in favour of the Tibetan people, but of the Chinese (government).

Being 'Chinese on the outside' implies making pragmatic choices – acting in order to be socially successful (and thus getting what is needed) in everyday life. The strict control of the individual limits the possible range of activities, including the individual improvement of one's financial situation. This makes Tibetans dependent on the official organization of work. However, with well-established individual contacts – networking – there are ways of gaining access to extra social benefits. Tibetans have to rely on good contacts, and in order to get these contacts Tibetans must be able to compromise on their moral values and appear as good pragmatists. Much of social relations are part of a *guanxi* system, based on mutual exchange of favours, material goods, etc. In China, a general rule is that 'the larger one's *guanxi* network, and the more the diverse one's *guanxi* connections with people of different occupations and positions, the better one's general manoeuvrability in society and with officialdom to obtain resources and opportunities' (Yang 1994: 123). This, I believe, holds true for Lhasa as well.¹⁵ In order to expand a social network today, one must promote oneself as an attractive contact, which invariably includes saying bad things about others. Moreover, it is crucial to be able to compromise on Tibetan identity, especially on the use of Tibetan language and religious practice, in order to operate well within the Chinese arenas where social benefits are available. This is particularly relevant in the context of work units, where religious practice is prohibited and where the working language is Chinese. It is the general opinion among my informants that, in order to make use of the potential benefits of a work unit, an employee needs to be selfish (*rangshe tshabo*) and competitive. One department leader says:

Work units can provide many extras [social benefits], for example access to cars and good salary, and maybe money to travel to your hometown even when it is outside Central Tibet. But to get these things every worker must have good relations to their leader, and they have to make sure that the leader knows that.

The pragmatic sphere largely contradicts such moral values as humbleness, compassion and being conscious of Tibetan traditions like

language. Being part of this pragmatic sphere is considered by most of our informants to be necessary and unavoidable, although it does involve great compromises. Pragmatic actions contradicting Tibetan values are inherently immoral. However, because such behaviour is necessary, pragmatic acts are morally accepted on certain conditions – namely, that the person is ‘Tibetan at heart’.

Ideal and pragmatic considerations are mutual reinforcements that enable a Tibetan to be a ‘good person’ while also participating in a society dominated by ‘Chinese’ values. Acting according to underlying moral values related to Buddhism, i.e. compassionate and respectful deeds, is evaluated as conduct in relation to esteemed human qualities, which is the definition of morality given by Humphrey (1997: 25). However, daily life in Lhasa has an aspect to it that contradicts this moral order, as Tibetans must make priorities in order to ‘survive’ or be successful within the (Chinese) system. The possibility of coexisting moral orders has been pointed out by Melhuus:

Moral values represent a set of cultural presuppositions which inform and create social relations, and not just sanction or maintain them. However, the meaning of moral values is not unambiguous, and therefore open to various interpretations. Thus, moral orders, being culturally constructed, opens for the possibility that conflicting meanings co-exist within one society. Moreover, there is also the possibility that different moral orders may operate simultaneously, informing events and actors' interpretations of these events variously. (Melhuus 1992: 11)

In Lhasa, the meaning of moral values can indeed be ambiguous. Pragmatic acts, i.e. the ability to work your way up the system and attain social benefits, although in apparent opposition to esteemed moral values, are accepted on certain preconditions. There seem to be no alternatives. Jigme, a commoner, explains in this way: ‘If you are not willing to use Chinese and just want to read [religious] texts, you will maybe be happy for a short time, but you will not live long. Everybody needs food and money.’ Making pragmatic choices and acting in contradiction to what are seen to be Tibetan values is everyday routine. Some immoral actions are more easy to get away with than others. As Melhuus points out above, moral orders are constructed and acts are evaluated as related to one value system or the other. In Lhasa, actions are evaluated as being morally acceptable only if the person in question is perceived as being ‘Tibetan at heart’.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN TIBETAN AND CHINESE VALUE SYSTEMS

The preceding chapter presented the former Tibetan Minister of Defence, Lhalu, one of the most high-profiled *kudrak* who is now part of the political administration in Lhasa. I suggested that due to his *yabshi* background (both the 8th and the 12th Dalai Lamas were born into the Lhalu family), Tibetans do not classify him as a renegade. Rather, his intentions in serving as vice-president in the CPPCC are interpreted as being moral, and Lhalu is thus believed to be a 'Tibetan at heart'. As such, *kyesa* can be understood as balancing pragmatic and ideal actions; in Lhalu's case, *kyesa* provides a counterweight to co-operation with Chinese. However, seen in a perspective of *yarab*, Lhalu's 'balance' might also be interpreted as based upon his correct *yarab* behaviour. Because Lhalu has an appearance of humbleness and politeness, he is acting properly according to Tibetans' expectations of *kudrak* behaviour, and he is admired for his correct behaviour. *Kyesa* and *yarab* are intertwined concepts, as *kyesa* indicates behaviour and *kudrak* are characterized by their right conduct.

It is my contention that *yarab* is essential for self-presentation, in order to maintain the balancing act between, on the one hand, managing the pragmatic Chinese sphere and being termed 'Tibetan at heart', and, on the other, being seen as a renegade and thus 'Red at heart'. *Yarab chözang* is the main strategy for self-presentation for Tibetans who make careers out of apparently immoral businesses (such as becoming leaders within the Chinese system, running brothels, selling antiques).

Yarab chözang is important for establishing trust (*lökkel* [blos 'khe]) in social relations. Although, as I have pointed out in the Introduction, fear is inherent in social relations in Lhasa today, a need for trust, at one level, is said to be important in networks and among Tibetan *guanxi* contacts. A usual way of expressing dislike for a person is to say that 'I don't trust her [or him]'. In this connection, to trust does not imply that one shares personal and political opinions, but is rather a description of attitude. When a person is not trusted, I believe that the person is perceived too Chinese, and too little Tibetan, and the intentions of the person's acts are doubted. Conversely, if a person is trusted, then he or she is perceived to be someone who would act to the benefit of the Tibetan people when possible. More precisely, in order to signal an association to moral values, people employ *yarab* in order to present themselves as 'Tibetan at heart'.

One example of the importance of *yarab* in order to be perceived as 'Tibetan at heart' when one is engaged in apparently immoral activities concerns the former mayor of Lhasa municipality, Logala. Logala is a highly respected man in Lhasa.¹⁶ In 1998, he was removed from his position, and retired, but the circumstances around his departure were unclear. Tibetans assumed that Logala had been politically controversial, and that he had been replaced by a more pro-Chinese person. Some time after, Logala appeared as the new leader of a large luxury hotel, one widely known as a centre for prostitution. With this new position, Logala's activities were perceived by my informants as 'degenerate' in Lhasan society. Despite his two positions, as a political leader and as the leader of a brothel/hotel, where he is clearly outside the sphere of ideal values, Logala is still highly respected and seen as a 'good Tibetan person'. The reasons for that, I believe, can be found in his demeanour, in his behaviour. Logala is known for being very polite, always using polite language and acting humble when meeting other Tibetans. He is a manifestation of *yarab chözang*, although he is not from a noble background. His *yarab* behaviour signals that he, despite his official positions, can be trusted to work in favour of Tibet, if he can. Thus, whether deliberately or not, he successfully uses *yarab* as a means to balance his operations between two moral orders.

Where Humphrey (1997) focuses on an evaluation of conduct as morality, I shall suggest that it is people's intentions and motivations, as well as conduct, that is evaluated with regard to esteemed or despised human qualities in Lhasa.¹⁷ As all Tibetans might have to act in contradiction to what they define to be their moral values as Tibetan persons, it is rather what they *would have done* if they were in a position to choose that is evaluated. Thus, *yarab* is a way of signalling that the intentions of a particular action are well-founded in the moral paradigm of being a good Tibetan person. When a person acts in accordance with *yarab*, the chances of getting away with committing contradictory actions are higher. It is impossible to define the limits of what a person would be able to do and still be perceived by others as being 'Tibetan at heart'; this must be understood as being contextually negotiated.

Much in the same way, Melhuus has described from her study of gender and morality in Mexico that if a woman acts within the set limitations of morality defined as being a good mother, she would be accepted as a 'good woman' even if she was a prostitute. As such, a good mother is per se a good woman regardless of other activities (Melhuus 1992). Presumably immoral actions and conduct might be made irrelevant in contexts when other criteria for moral conduct override

these. With Melhuus' words then, one can say that *yarab* 'overrides any other categorization' of person (ibid.: 182). As such, *yarab*, used deliberately or not, defines a good person so that operating pragmatically within the Chinese moral order is made easier. *Yarab* must be interpreted as being a connecting bridge between the coexisting moral paradigms and value systems present in Lhasa today, and thereby as a means of managing everyday life in an omnipresent political conflict.

NOTES

1 This division has obviously a strong political aspect and could be interpreted in terms of daily resistance.

2 The mother also represents an ideal for religious practice (Powers and Curtin 1994).

3 This is a traditionally respectful way of greeting someone in Tibet.

4 In January 1998, *The People's Daily* of Beijing carried an editorial concerning impoliteness, complaining that too many Chinese show rude behaviour (reported in *Aftenposten*, 3 February 1998).

5 From my experience, many people in the West define themselves as Christians, but do not attend services, do not pray nor engage in other religious practices.

6 The ideas of reincarnation and karma were present in the time of the historical Buddha (around 500 BC), and he accepted these ideas in much the same way as his contemporaries did (Powers 1995).

7 Obviously, other concepts and doctrines of Buddhism are also significant, but it is beyond the scope of this book to go into greater details. For a more thorough discussion of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, see Rahula 1974, Snellgrove 1987, Hopkins 1980, 1984, 1987, Thurman 1995.

8 All non-English terms used in this part dealing with Buddhist doctrines are Sanskrit, unless otherwise noted.

9 From his study of a Tibetan village in northern Nepal, Clarke notes that lay beliefs in the realms of existence are limited to reincarnation up or down (1990).

10 The Eightfold Path is: 1. correct view, 2. correct intention, 3. correct speech, 4. correct action, 5. correct livelihood, 6. correct effort, 7. correct mindfulness, 8. correct meditative absorption.

11 *chos* corresponds to the Sanskrit term *dharma*, meaning Buddhist doctrines.

12 *semchung* (humble) can be literally translated as (*sems*: mind, *chung*: small) thinking of yourself as being small(er than others).

13 *sems* translates as mind in Buddhist philosophy, but is related to the heart in colloquial use. *sems* is said to be located in the heart, and is closely associated with emotions. Thus, *sem böpa* translates better to English as ‘Tibetan at heart’ than ‘Tibetan in mind’.

14 It might indicate that a person supports a higher degree of autonomy, or simply that the person is conscious of Tibetan history, traditions and language.

15 Traditional Tibetan societies seem to have been characterized by social networking in order to gain social and economic position. It is important to remember that also in the past, religion was not the only motivation for action, but pragmatic considerations were highly relevant (Goldstein 1989). Tibetans are generally known to be good traders and business people, and selling goods at high prices is not considered to be unethical. See Levine (1981) and Clarke (1990) for a study of religion and material prosperity among Tibetans in Highland Nepal.

16 Some years ago, his son married Ngari’s vice-president’s daughter. This union is much talked about among Tibetans in Lhasa, and is seen as a manifestation of the establishment of a new social group of the elite.

17 This corresponds to the karmic evaluation of action as well, where motivation is crucial for the karmic results of an act.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Lhasa Tibetans are at the present experiencing a period of economic and social-cultural changes. Ever since the end of the 1950s the Chinese government has aimed at transforming Tibet into what they define to be a modern Chinese society. With the large-scale Western Development campaign (Chinese: *xibu da kaifa*) launched by Jang Zemin in 1999, the modernization process has been intensified, and one can expect great changes in certain sectors of the Tibetan economy.¹ The past decade's developments in terms of transnational flows of information, goods and people have brought Lhasa closer to the rest of the world, and the world closer to Lhasa. The current process of change is rapid but unpredictable, and we need to pursue the possible implications and consequences. In the present book, it is not so much the overall changes of Tibetan society that has been the main centre of attention; rather, the continued existence and reproduction of certain social categories in these times of rapid change have been studied. All change has some aspect of continuity, and I suggest that the high rank of the noble families as a way for Tibetans to engender a feeling of continuity within the process of cultural (and economic) changes is a crucial point. Economic and cultural changes operate with different speed and the relevance of hereditary background (*kyesa*) today is an indication of the sluggishness of cultural change. The meaning of a social category is of course not identical over time, and although there is a slowness to cultural change, it does not necessarily indicate sameness. Rather, social categories are continuously renegotiated and reproduced, and their relevance increases and decreases over time. The nobility has not remained equally, and in an identical manner, relevant throughout the years of Chinese presence in Tibet; rather they are continuously redefined as a meaningful category, with varying connotations and significance.

But how and why have the social categories of pre-Communist Lhasa persisted despite four decades of Chinese propaganda of equality and comprehensive socio-economic restructuring? That has been the main

question posed in this book. Ethnographic data and, more particularly, everyday social practices were used to show how and in which contexts hereditary social categories are made relevant. The starting point of the analysis was how the categories of commoner and noble are perceived and talked about among Tibetans in Lhasa today, a closer focus being on knowledge, person and morality. The traditional categories of *menrig* and *kudrak* are still operative in terms of being meaningful and in use as a principle for social classification. Most of the Tibetan population today are simply termed *kyuma*, ‘ordinary people’, indicating a change in the demographic distribution of the social categories, with the number of commoners growing at the expense of both *menrig* and *kudrak*. This process corresponds to how Ugen Gombo describes (in Bailey’s words) the Tibetan social hierarchy as having ‘a “peculiar rigidity” at the top and the bottom’ (Gombo 1983: 45), in the sense that it is the extreme top and the extreme bottom that seem to have remained unchanged after the Chinese implementation of social restructuring. I have argued for a new classification of *kudrak* families, distinguishing those (fewer) families with known family histories who are the descendants of politically important Tibetans, from the rather numerous families whose history is basically linked to the administration of estates, rather than the holding of political posts. These high-ranking families are found mainly among the *yabshi*, *depön* and *midrag* categories of the traditional nobility. We have seen that *kudrak* do not consist of a homogeneous group of people, but must be seen as individuals who perceive themselves in different ways, also in terms of *kyesa*. Different, but with a similar effect, are the changing notions about who is *menrig* in Lhasa today, as fewer lineages of skillworkers are recognized as being polluted (*tsogpa*) today than what is known from the literature of traditional Tibet.

Through a point of convergence on marriage and marriage partners, we have seen both endogamous processes of marriage among *kudrak*, and how commoners prefer members of *kudrak* families as marriage partners. These processes highlight two salient features of *kudrak* background today, namely that members of *kudrak* families are perceived to possess a highly valued knowledge of Tibetan culture and tradition, and that an interdependency of *kyesa* and behaviour leads to expectations of *kudrak* as good persons who practice right conduct. The knowledge identified with *kudrak* background concerns Tibetan issues, i.e. knowledge of what is perceived by my informants as Tibetan culture. The book has pointed to the special relations between *kudrak* and history and religion on the one hand, and between language and the

celebration of Tibetan festivals on the other, arguing that it is the dominant role of *kudrak* in Tibetan history that defines this social category as the custodians of cultural knowledge. Cultural knowledge is transmitted through the family history, the patrilineage, and even though the knowledge that they possess is highly valued, it is not necessarily shared. The validity and authenticity of cultural knowledge lie rather in the way of transmission than in the ability to communicate. The United Front policy of employing *kudrak* as opinion-makers also reinforces their position as cultural experts. By their known family histories, *kudrak* come to represent the past – the pre-Communist period of Tibetan history. This period in Lhasa was seen by my informants to be a period when the ‘original’ and ‘true’ Tibetan culture flourished, and the local notions of an original Tibetan culture reflect *kudrak* practices of pre-1959. This, I argued, is rooted in the *kudrak*’s ability to influence, and to a certain extent control, social memory through documentation of the past. Most of the written material on traditional Tibetan society has been written by, or about, lamas or members of *kudrak* families. The literature thus reflects the social life of the lay elite and the clergy, and only to a very limited degree does it document and recall the lives of commoners. The role of *kudrak* in Tibetan society has shifted from being the politico-economic elite of traditional Tibet to being the cultural elite of today.

Further, the persistence of hereditary social categories in Lhasa must be seen not only in relation to the distribution of cultural knowledge but also in terms of being a ‘good’ person in the context of a political conflict. Respectful behaviour, *yarab chözung*, as an act from a commoner to a noble is both an expression of rank, founded in, among other things, religious doctrines, and a means of self-presentation. Thus, I suggest that inter-*kyesa* relations must be analysed both in terms of how *kudrak* are perceived by commoners – that is, what characterizes the social category of *kudrak* today – and in terms of what the interests of commoners are in maintaining these traditional social divisions. *Yarab chözung* is part of what maintains and reproduces social distinctions, and an important value rooted in Buddhism and embodied practice. Because *yarab* as a value is generally seen to be both inherent (embodied) in, and essential to, Tibetanness, the consequences of violating *yarab* are significant. Young educated commoners who express a dislike for *kudrak* must choose between expressing their dislike in action or maintaining a respectful behaviour and hence participating in the perpetuation of social differences, but also balancing their own position within the Tibetan community.

There are several coexisting social hierarchies in Lhasa today, operated on criteria such as economy, education, religious expertise and political influence. These various aspects bear influence on each other, but it seems that *kyesa*, and the hierarchy based on *kyesa*, is fundamental and as such dominant to other social hierarchies. Although we can no longer claim that ‘the nobility are a class apart’ as Charles Bell wrote in 1928 (1998 [1928]: 53), they are certainly seen by Lhasa Tibetans to be significantly different from commoners – not so much with reference to economy, but rather in terms of personality and morality, and as a symbolic representation of an idealized past.

NOTE

1 Tibet Information Network claims that the campaign mostly develops the tertiary sector (government agencies, party agencies and social organizations) as well as construction and investment, which are all areas dominated by Chinese rather than Tibetan employees. As such, they claim, the campaign seems to increase the economic position of only very few Tibetans (Tibet Information Network 2000).

Bibliography

- Adams, Vincanne (1996) 'Karaoke as modern Lhasa, Tibet: Western encounters with cultural politics'. *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11, pp. 510–546.
- Allen, Nicholas J. (1978) 'Fourfold classifications of society in the Himalayas'. In James F. Fisher (ed.), *Himalayan Anthropology. The Indo-Tibetan Interface*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Anderson, Benedict (1991 [1983]) *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Aziz, Barbara N. (1974) 'Some notions about descent and residence in Tibetan society'. In Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf (ed.), *Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
- (1978) *Tibetan Frontier Families*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- Barth, Fredrik (1975) *Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman of New Guinea*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- (1993) 'Are values real? The enigma of naturalism in the anthropological imputation of values'. In M. Hechter, L. Nadel and R. Michod (eds), *The Origin of Values*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- (1994) 'Opplysning eller mysterier? Transaksjoner om kunnskap og konsekvenser for kulturformene i Sydøst-Asia og Melanesia' [The guru and the conjurer: Transactions in knowledge and the shaping of culture in Southeast Asia and Melanesia]. In Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Manifestasjon og prosess*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Bass, Catriona (1998) *Education in Tibet. Policy and Practice since 1950*. London: Tibet Information Network / Zed Books.
- Bell, Sir Charles (1928) *The People of Tibet*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (1992 [1940]) 'Introduction'. In F. Spencer Chapman, *Lhasa: The Holy City*. Delhi: Bodhi Leaves Corporation
- Ben Jiao (2001) 'Socio-Economic and cultural factors underlying the contemporary revival of fraternal polyandry in Tibet'. Unpublished PhD thesis, Case Western Reserve University, USA.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1996) 'Ritueler som innstiftende handlinger' [Les rites comme actes d'institution]. In Pierre Bourdieu, *Symbolisk makt* [Le pouvoir symbolique]. Oslo: Pax Forlag.

- Carrasco, Pedro (1959) *Land and Polity in Tibet*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Cassinelli, C. W. and Robert B. Ekvall (1969) *A Tibetan Principality: the Political System of Sa skya*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Chan, Victor (1994) *Tibet Handbook. A Pilgrimage Guide*. California: Moon Publications.
- Chapman, F. Spencer (1990 [1940]) *Lhasa: The Holy City*. Delhi: Bodhi Leaves Corporation.
- China Intercontinental Press (1994) *Berecht über die Menschenrechte in Tibet (II)*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press.
- (n.d.) *The Historical Status of China's Tibet*.
- China Reconstructs Press (1988) *Tibetans on Tibet*. Beijing: China Reconstructs Press.
- Christophersen, Mona (1994) 'Løvetannen spirer gjennom asfalten. Om *guanxi* og byråkrati i Beijing' [The dandelion grows through asphalt. On *guanxi* and bureaucracy in Beijing]. Unpublished M.phil. thesis, the Institute of Anthropology, University of Oslo, Norway.
- Clarke, Graham E. (1990) 'Ideas of merit (*bsod-nams*), virtue (*dge-ba*), blessing (*byin-rlabs*) and material prosperity (*rten-'brel*) in Highland Nepal'. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*: XXI, 2, pp. 165–184.
- Connerton, Paul (1989) *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corlin, Claes (1975) 'The nation in your mind: Continuity and change among Tibetan refugees in Nepal'. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Institute of Anthropology, Göteborg University, Sweden.
- Craig, Mary (1999) *Waiting for the Sun. The Harrowing Story of a Peasant Boy in Occupied Tibet*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Dalai Lama, The 14 th (1994 [1990]) *Freedom in Exile. The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama of Tibet*. New Delhi: Rupa Publishers.
- David-Neel, Alexandra (1927) *My Journey to Lhasa*. New Delhi: Time Books International.
- Dawa Norbu (1987) *Red Star over Tibet*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.
- De Voe, Dorsh Marie (1984) 'Psycho-social dimensions of cultural conversion among Tibetan refugees in India'. In Li (ed.), *Proceedings of International Conference on China Border Area Studies*. Taipei: Taipei National University Press.
- Department of Information and International Relations (1992) *Tibet: Environment and Development Issues*. Dharamsala: Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama.

- Dhondup Choeden (1978) *Life in the Red Flag People's Commune*. Dharamsala: The Information Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.
- Dowman, Keith (1988) *The Power-places of Central Tibet. The Pilgrim's Guide*. New Delhi: Timeless Books.
- Dumont, Louis (1980 [1966]) *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ekvall, Robert B. (1964) *Religious Observances in Tibet: Patterns and Function*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland (1992) *Us and Them in Modern Societies: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Mauritius, Trinidad and Beyond*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Fang, Jianchang (1989) 'Research on the Huis and their mosques in Tibet – and on the spread and influence of Islam in Tibet'. *Tibet Studies*, pp. 202–222.
- Fentress, James and Chris Wickham (1992) *Social Memory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Fjeld, Heidi Elisabeth (1998) *Representing the Past: Some Perspectives on Change and Continuity in the Former Tibetan Nobility in Lhasa*. Working Paper no. 5, Department for Ethnography and Social Anthropology, Aarhus University.
- (forthcoming) 'Changing perceptions of hereditary rank: *Rigs btsog pa* in rural Tsang.' In Robert Barnett and Ronald Schwartz (eds), *Proceedings from the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Oxford University.
- Franke, H. (1929) 'Islam among Tibetans'. *Moslem World*, pp. 134–140. New York: Routledge and Kegan.
- Gaboreau, Marc (1995) 'Introduction'. *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 20, pp. 3–7.
- Goldstein, Melvyn C. (1968) 'An anthropological study of the Tibetan political system'. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Washington, USA.
- (1971a) 'Serfdom and mobility: An examination of the institution of "human lease" in traditional Tibetan society'. *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 30, pp. 521–534.
- (1971b) 'Stratification, polyandry and family structure in Tibet'. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 27, pp. 64–74.
- (1973) 'The Circulation of estates in Tibet: Reincarnation, land and politics'. *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 32, pp. 445–455.
- (1986) 'Re-examining choice, dependency and command in the Tibetan social system: "Tax appendages" and other landless serfs'. *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 11, pp. 79–112.
- (1989) *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951. The Demise of the Lamaist State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- (1994) 'Change, conflict and continuity among a community of nomadic pastoralists: A case study from Western Tibet, 1950–1999.' In Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (eds), *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*. London: Hurst & Company.
- (1998) 'Introduction'. In Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein (eds), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet*. Religious Revival and Cultural Identity.
- (2001) *The New Tibetan–English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goldstein, Melvyn and Ngawangthondrup Narkyid (1984) *English–Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives.
- Goldstein, Melvyn, William Siebensschuh, Tashi Tsering (1998) *The Struggle for Modern Tibet. The Autobiography of Tashi Tsering*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Goldstein-Kyaga, Katrin (1993) *The Tibetans – School for Survival or Submission. An Investigation of Ethnicity and Education*. Stockholm: HSL Forlag.
- Gombo, Ugen (1983) 'Cultural expressions of social stratification in traditional Tibet: "Caste" and casteism in a non-Hindu context'. *Anthropology*, vol. 7, pp. 43–77.
- Govinda, Lama Anagarika (1960) *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*. Delhi: B. I. Publications
- Guo Qing (1991) 'Tremendous changes of the Tibetan society over the past forty years'. *Tibet Studies*, pp. 38–50. Lhasa: The Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences.
- Harrer, Heinrich (1953) *Syv år i Tibet* [Seven years in Tibet]. Oslo: Den Norske Bokklubben.
- Haviland, John Beard (1977) *Gossip, Reputation, and Knowledge in Zinacantan*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Havnevik, Hanna (1990) *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns. History, Cultural Norms and Social Reality*. Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture.
- (1994) 'The role of nuns in contemporary Tibet'. In Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (eds), *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Hedin, Sven (1907) *Scientific Results of a Journey in Central Asia 1899–1902*. Vol. 4: Central and West Tibet. Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet, P.A. Nordseth & Sønner.
- Howell, Signe (1997) 'Introduction'. In Signe Howell (ed.), *The Ethnography of Moralities*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Huber, Toni (1999) *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain. Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Humphrey, Caroline (1997) 'Exemplars and rules: aspects of the discourse of moralities in Mongolia'. In Signe Howell (ed.), *The Ethnography of Moralities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Humphreys, Christmas (1984) *Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*. London: Curzon Press.
- Jacobsen-Widding, Anita (1997) "'I lied, I farted, I stole...': dignity and morality in African discourses on personhood' In Signe Howell (ed.), *The Ethnography of Moralities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jäschke, H. (1992 [1881]) *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Karsten, Joachim (1979) 'Some notes on the house of Lha rGya-Ri'. In Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (eds), *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson. Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tibetan Studies, Oxford 1979*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
- Kawaguchi, Ekai (1995 [1909]) *Three Years in Tibet*. Delhi: Book Faith India.
- Keessing, Roger M. (1976) *Cultural Anthropology. A Contemporary Perspective*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- (1987) 'Anthropology as interpretive quest'. *Current Anthropology*, vol. 48, pp. 161–176.
- Kolås, Åshild (1998) 'Chinese media discourses on Tibet: The language of inequality. *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 23, pp. 70–77.
- (2003) "'Class" in Tibet: Creating social order before and during the Mao era'. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 10, pp. 181–20.
- Kraus, Richard C. (1977) 'Class conflict and the vocabulary of social analysis in China'. *The China Quarterly*, vol. 69, pp. 54–75.
- Kunsang Paljor (1977) *Tibet: The Undying Flame*. Dharamsala: Information and Publicity Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.
- Kværne, Per (1984) 'Tibet: the rise and fall of a monastic tradition'. In Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (eds), *The World of Buddhism*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Leckie, Scott (1994) *Destruction by Design. Housing Rights Violation in Tibet*. The Netherlands: Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions.
- Levine, Nancy (1981) 'Perspectives on love: Morality and affect in Nyinba interpersonal relationships. In Adrian C. Mayer (ed.), *Culture and Morality: Essays in Honour of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- (1988) *The Dynamics of Polyandry: Kinship, Domesticity, and Population on the Tibetan border*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Levine, Nancy and Joan Silk (1997) 'Why polyandry fails. Sources of instability in polyandrous marriages'. *Current Anthropology*, vol. 38, pp. 375–397.
- Lewis, Gilbert (1980) *Day of the Shining Red: An Essay on Understanding Ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lu, Feng (1989) 'Dan Wei – a special form of social organisation'. *Social Sciences in China*, vol. 10, pp. 100–122.
- (1993) 'The origins and formations of the unit (*danwei*) system'. *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 25, pp. 1–92.
- Luo, Ga (1989) 'Lhasa: Growing pains'. *Beijing Review*, 28 August, pp. 21–23.
- Machong Mingyu Dorje (1990) 'On Tibetan surnames and names'. *Tibet Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 168–181.
- MacDonald, David (1996) *Twenty Years in Tibet*. Delhi: Cosmo Publications.
- Mauss, Marcel (1995 [1950]) *Gaven [The gift]*. Oslo: Cappelen akademiske forlag.
- (1992) 'Morality, meaning, and change in a Mexican context'. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo, Norway.
- Melhuus, M. and Borchrevink, T. (1984) 'Husarbeid: tidsbinding av kvinner'. In Ingrid Rudie (ed.), *Myk start – hard landing. Om Forvaltning av Kjønnssidentitet i en Endringsprosess*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Michael, Franz (1982) *Rule by Incarnation: Tibetan Buddhism and Its Role on Society and State*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Miller, Beatrice D. (1985) 'Lhasa: An international politico-economic centre through the centuries: A very preliminary examination'. In Helga Uebach and Jampa L. Panglung (eds), *Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the 4th Seminar of the IATS*. Munich: Kommission für zentralasiatische Studien.
- (1987) 'A response to Goldstein's "Re-examining choice, dependency and command"'. *Tibet Journal*, vol. 2, pp. 65–76.
- (1988) 'Last rejoinder to Goldstein on Tibetan social system'. *Tibet Journal* vol. 13, pp. 64–65.
- Notes and Queries on anthropology* (1951). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Nowak, Margaret (1984) *Tibetan Refugees. Youth and the New Generation of Meaning*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Panchen Lama, The 10th (1997) *A Poisoned Arrow. The Secret Report of the 10th Panchen Lama*. London: Tibet Information Network.
- Passin, H. (1955) 'Untouchability in the Far East'. *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 11, pp. 247–267.
- Peissel, Michael (1972) *Cavaliers of Kham. The Secret War in Tibet*. London: Heinemann.
- Petech, Luciano (1973) *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet. 1728–1959*. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente.

- Peter, Prince of Denmark and Greece (1954) *The Aristocracy of Central Tibet*. Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press.
- (1963) *A Study of Polyandry*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Phuntsog Wangyal (1975) 'The influence of religion on Tibetan politics'. *Tibet Journal*, vol. 1, pp. 78–86.
- Poole, Fitz John Porter (1982) 'The ritual of forging of identity: Aspects of person and self in Bimin-Kuskusmin male initiation'. In Gilbert H. Herdt (ed.), *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Powers, John (1995) *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.
- Powers, John and Deane Curtin (1994) 'Mothering: moral cultivation in Buddhist and feminist ethics'. *Philosophy of East and West*, vol. 44, pp.1–18.
- Price, John (1966) 'A history of the outcaste: untouchability in Japan'. In George De Voe and Hiroshi Wagatsuma (eds), *Japan's Invisible Race. Caste in Culture and Personality*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rahula, Walpola Sri (1974) *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove Press.
- Richardson, Hugh and Michael Aris (1998) *High Peaks, Pure Earth: Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture*. London: Serindia.
- Rinchen Thargyal (1985) 'A traditional estate in Eastern Tibet'. Unpublished 'magister' thesis, University of Oslo.
- (1988) 'The applicability of the concept of feudalism to traditional Tibetan society'. In Helga Uebach and Jampa Panglud (eds), *Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the 4th Seminar of the IATS*. Munich: Kommission für zentralasiatische Studien.
- Rockhill, William Woodville (1975 [1891]) *The Land of the Lamas: Notes of a Journey Through China, Mongolia and Tibet*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Rong, Ma (1991) 'Han and Tibetan residential patterns in Lhasa'. *The China Quarterly*, vol. 128: pp. 814–835.
- Save The Children (1997) *China* [Information sheet]. Beijing: Save the Children.
- Schwartz, Ronald D. (1994) *Circle of Protest. Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Shakya, Tsering W. (1994) 'Politicisation and the Tibetan language'. In Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (eds), *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*. London: Hurst & Company.
- (1999) *The Dragon in the Land of Snows. A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947*. London: Pimlico.

- Shang, Jun'e (1998) *Education in Tibet. Yesterday and Today*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press.
- Shuguba, Tsipon (1995) *In the Presence of My Enemies*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publications.
- Smith, Warren W. (1996) *Tibetan Nation. A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Snellgrove, David (1987) *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetans Successors*. Boston: Shambala.
- (1995 [1957]) *Buddhist Himalaya. Travels and Studies in the Quest of the Origins and Nature of Tibetan Religion*. Kathmandu: Himalayan Book Sellers.
- Ståhl, David (1992) *Tibet. Våldtaget land på världens tak* [Tibet. A raped country on the roof of the world]. Täby: Larsons förlag.
- Stein, Rolf A. (1972) *Tibetan Civilization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Strathern, Andrew (1996) 'Habit or habitus? Theories of memory, the body, and change'. In Andrew Strathern (ed.), *Body Thoughts*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Strøm, Axel Kristian (1995) *The Quest for Grace. Identification and Cultural Continuity in the Tibetan Diaspora*. Oslo: Occasional papers in Social Anthropology No. 24, Institute and Museum of Anthropology, University of Oslo.
- (2001) 'Continuity, adaptation and innovation: Tibetan monastic colleges in India'. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oslo.
- Taring, Rinchen Dolma (1994 [1970]) *Daughter of Tibet. The Autobiography of Rinchen Dolma Taring*. Delhi: Rupa & Co.
- Thubten Jigme Norbu (1960) *Tibet is My Country*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis.
- Thurman, Robert A. F. (1995) *Essential Buddhism*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Tibet Information Network (2000) *China's Great Leap West*. London: TIN.
- Tibet Information Network and Human Rights Watch / Asia (1996) *Cutting off the Serpent's Head. Tightening Control in Tibet, 1994–1995*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Tsepa Rigzin (1993 [1986]) *Tibetan-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Work and Archives.
- Turner, Victor (1967) *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Waddell, L. Austine (1895) *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism with Its Mystic Cults, Symbolism and Mythology, and Its Relation to Indian Buddhism*. London: W.H. Allen.

Bibliography

- van Walt van Praag, Michael (1986) *Population Transfer and the Survival of the Tibetan Identity*. New York: U.S. Tibet Committee.
- Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain (1997) *The Historical Status of China's Tibet*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press.
- Williamson, F. (1938) *Who's Who in Tibet*. Calcutta: Government of India Press
- Weiner, Annette B. (1992) *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wylie, Turrell (1959) 'A standard system of Tibetan transcription'. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 22, pp. 261–67.
- Xizang Renmin Chubanshe (eds) (1987) *Zangzu Shihui Lishi Diaochang*, vol. 2 [Investigation on Tibetan Social History]. Lhasa: Tibetan People's Publishing House.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui (1994) *Gifts, Favour, and Banquets. The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Yuthok, Dorje Yudon (1990) *House of the Turquoise Roof*. Ithaca: Snow Lion.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

- Aftenposten* (1998) 3 February.
- Tibet Daily* (1991) 27 February 1991.

Index

- adoption 131 n. 14, 142
- aristocracy. *See* nobility
- authenticity 126–127
 - See also* knowledge, education
- Barth, F.
 - and the study of knowledge 97
- ‘big families/small families’ 62, 64, 95, 130 n. 5
 - See also* *gerpa*, *yabshi*, *midrag*, *depön*
- biographies 112
 - about noble families 100
 - written by nobles 22–23
- blacksmiths 5, 49–51
 - See also* inferior kind
- butchers (*shemba*) 2, 5, 28, 51
 - See also* inferior kind
- Carrasco, P. 22, 28–30, 51, 64
- caste
 - and the Tibetans’ social system 5
 - in India 5
- Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC) 118
 - Tibetan members of the ~ 119
- change, social
 - and continuity 6, 53, 77, 95, 135, 152
 - and education 123
 - initiated by Chinese policies 6, 7, 34, 42, 137, 152
 - and social divisions 42, 52, 62
- chō* [religion]
 - and morality 142
 - as secular, social and cosmological order 142
- class
 - defined by Songtsen Gampo 101
 - in Marxism 34–36, 118
 - in Tibet 2–5, 34–37, 42, 45 n. 27, 75, 118
- compassion, 139, 141
- Connerton, P. 68, 110, 128, 136
- CPPCC. *See* Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee
- Cultural Revolution
 - and education policy 123
 - and honorific language 105–106, 115, n. 15
 - and marriage 75
 - and restriction on communal participation 35–36, 75
 - See also* honorific language
- danwei*. *See* work unit
- ‘Democratic Reforms’ 35, 20 n. 6, 117
- depön*
 - definition of ~ 29–30
 - names of ~ 44, n. 15
 - See also* ‘big families’/‘small families’
- divorce 75, 90–91, 94 n. 4
- drip*. *See* pollution
- düchung* [small families] 26–27

- education
 - availability of ~ 123
 - and ideology 123–125
 - as incomplete 129
 - primary ~ in Lhasa 39–40
 - system in Tibet 123
 - of Tibetans issues 88, 93, 125
 - See also* authenticity
- egalitarianism 42
- endogamy
 - among *menrig* [inferior kind] 79–83
 - among nobles 78, 79, 88–89
- ennoblement 32, 44 n. 22, 142

- feudalism 33. *See also miser*

- gara*. *See* inferior kind
- gerpa*
 - definition of ~ 29–30
 - See also* ‘big families’/‘small families’
- Goldstein, M.C. 22–27, 29–30, 33
- gossip 54–56
- guanxi* 131 n. 12, 146, 148

- hierarchies, social
 - and birth 4, 6, 33, 65, 69
 - coexisting ~ 155
 - in pre-1959 Tibet 2, 43 n.10, 118, 153,
 - Tibetan terms for ~ 3–4
- honorific language
 - and nobles 106
 - as part of Tibetan culture 104
 - See also* Cultural Revolution and honorific language
- humbleness. *See* respectful behaviour

- inequality, social
 - lack of ~ 42
 - the rhetoric of ~ 12–14, 42
- inferior kind
 - internal differentiation of ~ 28–30
- and marriage 80. *See also* endogamy: among *menrig*
- and pollution 50
- perceptions of ~ 49–50
- terms for ~ 64 n. 4
- and work 51, 69, n. 1
- See also* blacksmiths, butchers, social groups and categories, ‘big families’/‘small families’, *tomden*

- Institutes for Nationalities 118

- karma 139–141
- Keesing, R.
 - the distribution of knowledge 96, 129
- khyimtshang chenpo/khyimtshang chungchung* 121
- See also* ‘big families’/‘small families’
- knowledge
 - and morality 90–95
 - transmission through bones 126
 - See also* authenticity
- kudrak*. *See* nobility

- Ladakh
 - elites in ~ 96
- Lhalu, Tsewang Dorje 119
- Lhasa
 - ethnic composition of ~ 18
 - as a holy city 14–15
 - population of ~ 16–18
- losar*. *See* New Year

- Mauss, M. 133–134
- marriage
 - the definition of ~ 71–72
 - and ideal partners 92
 - kha thug*, self-initiated ~ 73
 - and pollution 78–79, 82
 - polyandry 72
- Melhuus, M. 147, 149
- menrig*. *See* inferior kind

- midrag*
 definition of ~ 29–30
 names of ~ 44, n. 16
See also 'big families'/'small families'
- miser*
 internal differentiation of ~ 26–28
 translation of ~ 25
See also feudalism
- morality
 and personhood 144–146
 and respectful behaviour 135–136
- namthar. See* biographies
- New Year
 and nobles 108–109
 as a social festival 107
- nobility
 and the Buddhist kings 100
 'bureaucratic' ~ ' 64
 as custodians of cultural knowledge 107, 154
 as historical symbols 112–114
 and independence 100
 internal differentiation of ~ 29, 63–64
 livelihood of the former ~ 30
 numbers of the ~ 44, n. 13
 as protectors of dharma 100–101
 'territorial chiefs' 64
See also Carrasco, endogamy: among nobles
- nyingje. See* compassion
- political administration in PRC 118–119
- pollution (*drip*) 29, 48, 50, 52, 70
 n. 7, 79
 and taboos 28
- private schools in Lhasa 127
- propaganda
 depicting the nobility 13, 23, 117
 depicting Tibetan society before 1959 12–14, 101, 110, 113
- rank
 of the nobility 29
 within the Tibetan administration 30
- respectful behaviour
 and childhood 135
 the definition of ~ 134
 and humbleness 138
 as part of Tibetan tradition and history 138
 and religion 138, 143–144
 and self-presentation 148
- rig*
 the definition of ~ 3
- ritual purity 25, 42
- shemba. See* butchers
- social differentiation and age 32
- social groups and categories
kudrak, menrig and commoners as ~ 69
See also inferior kind, nobility
- social memory 53, 110, 112, 113, 129
- Songtsen Gampo
 16 principles of moral conduct 139
- Strøm, A.K.
 spiritual genealogy 126–127
- Taring, R. D. 22, 32, 43 n. 3
- taxpayer
 internal differentiation of ~ 26–27, 32–33
- Tibetan national identity 96, 114, n. 1
- tomden* [corpse cutters] 25, 28, 51
See also inferior kind
- trelpa. See* taxpayer
- Ugen Gombo 4, 25, 153,
- United Front policy 34, 118, 121, 154
- value systems
 as coexisting moral orders 147
 Tibetan and Chinese ~ 145, 148

- Western Development Campaign
152
work unit (*danwei*) 37–39, 133
- names of ~ 44, n. 14
See also ‘big families’/‘small families’
Yuthok, D. Y. 22, 29, 32, 43 n. 3, 99–100
- yabshi*
definition of ~ 29–30

The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) is funded by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden via the Nordic Council of Ministers, and works to encourage and support Asian studies in the Nordic countries. In so doing, NIAS has been publishing books since 1969, with more than one hundred titles produced in the last ten years.

