

VAJRAYANA FORMS IN UPSTATE NEW YORK

A Thesis

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by

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## ABSTRACT

From the mid twentieth century forward there has been a dramatic rise in the establishment of Tibetan Buddhist centers for practice and study outside the Himalayan region. The movement of the relevant form of Buddhism, the *Vajrayana*, the 'Diamond vehicle,' outside its origin of cultivation brings with it the continued cultural practices of Lamaism, Tibetan Buddhism.

The founding of these centers in the U.S.A. has been a part of this widespread dynamic. The growth of these centers over recent decades often necessitates expansion. Expansion plans and construction realities are often interwoven with the intent to model new buildings after traditional Tibetan Buddhist designs. These architectural outposts serve as memories to their prototypes and counterparts in the Himalayan region. They also serve as repositories for a vast spectrum of history, by way of storing religious texts and housing continued practices and teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism. A result is significant contribution to the preservation and vitality of Tibetan religious, cultural and architectural traditions and the transmission of a building typology to a profound global scale.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Annika A. Lundkvist completed an International Masters of Spatial Planning Degree at Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan (Royal Institute of Technology) in Stockholm, Sweden in 2003 with a thesis on Underground Space and its use by humans. Photographing buildings, spaces and atmospheres are among her favorite activities.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: WHERE HISTORY AND LEGEND MERGE	10
CHAPTER TWO: THE VEHICLE	17
CHAPTER THREE: THE VEHICLE'S MOVEMENT INTO THE U.S.A.	28
CHAPTER FOUR: A LOOK AT TWO CENTERS- KARMA TRIYANA DHARMACHAKRA & PADMA SAMYE LING	33
CHAPTER FIVE: KALACHAKRA RISING- ITHACA'S NAMGYAL	69
CONCLUSION	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY	88

## LIST OF FIGURES<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1: Peacock at Wood Valley Temple, Big Island, Hawai'i	2
Figure 2: Prayer flags on palm tree at Wood Valley Temple	3
Figure 3: The emblem for Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies, the Kalachakra mantra symbol	5
Figure 4: The pre-Buddhist demoness, Painting by Tsewang Tashi	15
Figure 5: A vajra, ritual symbol of Vajrayana Buddhism, at Namgyal Monastery, Ithaca	18
Figure 6: Entry sign, KTD <sup>2</sup>	35
Figure 7: Main temple and Meads Mountain House, KTD	36
Figure 8: Meads Mountain House, KTD	38
Figure 9: Construction underway, KTD	39
Figure 10: Main temple, KTD	40
Figure 11: Wheel of Law ornament, KTD	42
Figure 12: Façade, KTD	43
Figure 13: Kalachakra symbol atop window, KTD	44
Figure 14: Ornamental lentils with Buddhist symbols, KTD	45
Figure 15: Front porch of main temple, KTD	46
Figure 16: Pillar in Shrine Room, KTD	47
Figure 17: Tara Shrine room at KTD	48
Figure 18: Ceiling of main shrine room, KTD	49

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<sup>1</sup> All photographs by author

<sup>2</sup> Karma Triyana Dharmachakra

Figure 19: Signage, Padma Samye Ling	50
Figure 20: Signage, Padma Samye Ling	51
Figure 21: Resident practitioner Elizabeth Guyton holding up a prayer flag for a visitor, Padma Samye Ling	52
Figure 22: Bodhicitta Inn, Padma Samye Ling	53
Figure 23: Sangha House, Padma Samye Ling	54
Figure 24: Landscape, Padma Samye Ling	55
Figure 25: Lantern with symbol of the endless knot, Padma Samye Ling	55
Figure 26: Stairway as seen from the west, Padma Samye Ling	56
Figure 27: Stairway looking south, Padma Samye Ling	57
Figure 28: Lotus inscription, Padma Samye Ling	58
Figure 29: Main temple, Padma Samye Ling	59
Figure 30: Main (south facing) entry, Padma Samye Ling	61
Figure 31: East façade of main temple, Padma Samye Ling	62
Figure 32: West Façade of main temple, Padma Samye Ling	63
Figure 33: Dragon handle at Padma Samye Ling,	64
Figure 34: Wheel of Law ornament on 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor balcony, Padma Samye Ling	65
Figure 35: View from 3 <sup>rd</sup> level balcony, Padma Samye Ling	66
Figure 36: A <i>gyaltshen</i> , symbol of Buddhist victory, on 3 <sup>rd</sup> level balcony, Padma Samye Ling	67
Figure 37: Tenzin Gephel in shrine room of Aurora Street Monastery, Namgyal	70
Figure 38: Temple Complex layout, Namgyal	78
Figure 39: Temple Complex, Namgyal	79
Figure 41: Tenzin Gephel on site for new temple complex, Namgyal	83
Figure 42: Tenzin Gephel on site for new temple complex, Namgyal	83



## INTRODUCTION

The first Tibetan Buddhist temple I went to and regularly visited was *Nechung Dorje Drayang Ling*<sup>1</sup>, Wood Valley Temple, established in 1973 in the Ka'u district of the Big Island, Hawai'i. I visited the temple every so often during the late 1990's, enjoying the largely rural and lush route. At the temple, peacocks roamed the yard and the shrine room was open to the visiting public. The vivid aesthetics and quietude of the shrine compelled my visits, though I was not a practicing Buddhist. My first encounter with Tibetan Buddhist ritual was by happenstance. A friend and I made the southward drive to visit the temple. While sitting in the shrine room we realized, with the entrance of a group of monks, that an event was about to occur. We stayed and witnessed a Losar (Tibetan New Year) ceremony. A feast of the offerings left by visitors on the altar followed: a range of cookies, candies and fruit that added a quirky charm to the event. This introduction to Tibetan Buddhist space and ceremony was inevitably a root event that influenced the decision to pursue the theme of Tibetan Buddhist temples for this research.

In pursuing this theme, I was particularly eager to learn more about the compelling intersections of Tibetan Buddhist mythology and history. The production of Tibetan history is embedded throughout with legend. Early on in my readings it was evident that the victories of Buddhism were very critical points in Tibetan Buddhist mythology and that the history of Vajrayana Buddhism and its growth in the Tibetan region was not without strife.

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<sup>1</sup> "Immutable Island of Melodious Sound"



Figure 1: Peacock at Wood Valley Temple, Big Island, Hawai'i



Figure 2: Prayer flags on palm tree at Wood Valley Temple

While few religions are unlikely to actively promote violence and warfare, such processes have been an intrinsic part to the spread of religions, Buddhism notwithstanding. When the Tibetan state was converted to Buddhism in the 8<sup>th</sup> century it did not renounce armed conflict.<sup>2</sup>Tibet was a military force of considerable power for a time, and elements of this can be seen in the fortress-like quality of some Tibetan Buddhist architecture on its home ground as well as on other continents.

The Kalachakra-tantra is a Buddhist empowerment ceremony that speaks volumes for the acknowledgement of conflict in the Buddhist scheme of things. The Kalachakra-tantra foretells of a future apocalypse in which "...the forces of the hidden Buddhist kingdom of Shambhala<sup>3</sup> will be attacked by enemies of the dharma; both sides will fight a momentous battle, which will culminate in Shambhala's victory and the establishment of Buddhism throughout the world."<sup>4</sup> Kalachakra initiations have a long history of being given to large public audiences. They are given with the express intention of being a vehicle for world peace<sup>5</sup> as well as with the intent of bringing peace to the area in which the ceremony is held. The ritual involves participants committing to rebirth in the land of Shambhala, a mythical kingdom, where the war will occur. Interpretations of this facet of the Tantra vary greatly among Buddhists, but the idea of participants generating a karmic link with the Kalachakra, and thus the

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<sup>2</sup> Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Shambhala is the mythical kingdom hidden in the Himalayas where Tantric Buddhism is preserved in preparation for apocalyptic war.

<sup>4</sup> John Powers. *History as Propaganda: Tibetan Exiles versus the People's Republic of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 136.

<sup>5</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama

land of Shambhala, through participation in the ceremony, if not in sustained practice, is a key point of the initiations purpose.

When I learned of Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies (Ithaca, New York) newly bestowed name for their future temple complex, *Du Khur Choe Ling*, 'Land of Kalachakra Study and Practice', I could appreciate the opportunity to incorporate some basic exploration of the history of the Kalachakra.



Figure 3: The emblem for Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies, the Kalachakra mantra symbol. This symbol is found in abundance in the world of Tibetan Buddhism.

The perception of the Kalachakra Tantra and its ritual performances occurring at key moments in the spiritual evolution of the world is also in line with the notion of the Dharma, the body of religious teachings, being transmitted across territories in a timely fashion, or some might say revived, when they are in need.

Whenever there are conditions of intense changes in our other world, these outer changes usually trigger inner changes as well. The outer changes that will take place in this world, according to

the Kalachakra, will be so extreme that they will force inner changes to occur. At such times as these, the Kalachakra is particularly relevant.<sup>6</sup>

In line with the transmission of religious teachings and practices is the infrastructure that serves other dimensions of the Vajrayana. Temples and monasteries are the traditional historic spaces for the cultivation of the spirit and serve as vital nodes for community life and education.

Tibetan Buddhism's growth in the U.S.A. has been characterized by a growth of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and dharma centers from the 1960's forward. Many are now sufficiently rooted, with a number of regular practitioners, to enter a phase of expansion. The trend for many Tibetan Buddhist dharma centers established in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was to convert a residential house into a religious center. With the growing interest in Tibetan Buddhism and increase in activity, centers take the necessary steps for expansion.

One rainy April 2006 evening at Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies in Ithaca illustrated the point well. I arrived at the tail end of a Friday meditation session, in order to attend the lecture that would follow. Chants were deep underway and I found sitting room only on the floor in the foyer. Attendees were gathered on the stairwell and almost pouring out of the house. It is clear that increased spatial accommodations will greatly benefit Namgyal.

In pursuing the theme of Tibetan Buddhist centers and monasteries in the U.S.A. for research, I honed the focus to New York State. I further limited my

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<sup>6</sup> Jon Landaw, "Kalachakra," *Mandala: Buddhism in Our Time*, Issue 18, Dec/Jan 2005.

concentration on centers with traditional Tibetan Buddhist buildings erected or in the works. A literature review of Tibetan history catalyzed this project, parallel to visits to each of the three sites in New York State. I conducted interviews with individuals affiliated with each site and pursued photo documentation.

The first chapter will discuss the 'arrival' of Buddhism in Tibet and give an overview of the nature of its development from the 7<sup>th</sup> century forward. The exchange of religious and cultural elements from Tibet's neighbors, and the impact these influences had on the formation of Tibetan Buddhism, will be discussed. The relationship between landscape, energetic forces and the construction of religious buildings, will be given attention as well.

The second chapter will cover the nature of Tibetan Buddhism and its main orders. The influence of Central Asian geopolitical powers over the centuries, specifically the wax and wane of the Mongolian Khan Dynasties, on the rise to political power of certain Tibetan Buddhist sects, will be outlined.

The third chapter will look at key figures and events in the early growth of Tibetan Buddhism in the U.S.A. The growing popularity of Tibetan Buddhism and the catalysts to its growth in the U.S.A.- the political movement to free Tibet, the continued safeguarding of religious texts and the establishment of scores of Tibetan Buddhist centers outside of the Himalayan region over the past 50 years-will be outlined in this chapter.



The fourth chapter will hone in on New York State and compare the profile and setting of two monasteries, Padma Samye Ling and Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, in upstate New York. Both monasteries have traditionally styled Tibetan Buddhist buildings. The two views present a visual sketch highlighting features that lend to the traditional Tibetan Buddhist vocabulary in the buildings.

The fifth chapter will focus on Namgyal Monastery, in Ithaca, New York, the North American branch of the Dalai Lama's personal monastery in Dharamsala, India. Living in the same town as Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies led to a decision to provide a more intimate profile of certain aspects of its history in Ithaca. In this work it serves as a more detailed case study of a North American Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the transition point of constructing a new center.

The key factor for use of and visits to these centers was the presence of Tibetan Buddhist architecture, though providing comprehensive and detailed description of the buildings was not the aim. This work serves as a focus on one piece of the young and diverse continental network of Tibetan Buddhist centers. The nature of the three centers chosen here being monasteries and retreat centers also speaks to the benefit of their location in largely rural environs of Upstate New York.

Readers of this text will all have varying levels of knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism's history as well as varying levels of interaction with Tibetan



Buddhist practice and centers. My aim in writing was to offer a document of simplicity and interest for all readers.

The relevance of historic preservation as a central theme in this subject is potent and direct. As centers for practice continue to proliferate in this country, aspects of Tibetan Buddhist history and culture become lodged into the diverse landscape of American religious practices. Architectural preservation is a subset of cultural preservation and in the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism the evidence for the link is stark. While efforts at American dharma centers to construct traditionally influenced temples are often conceived and spearheaded by “locals,” Tibetan resident monks and affiliates in the Himalayan region are often a key link for the development of the design. Bringing the Tibetan aesthetic to fore at these centers by way of new construction is a direct means of preserving Tibetan Buddhist cultural legacy.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHERE HISTORY AND LEGEND MERGE

Tibet is the highest inhabited region in the world, with an average elevation of 13,120 feet above sea level as well as possessing some of the wildest and most rugged zones on Earth. Most Tibetans have historically resided in the southern and eastern portion of the country, where the terrain allows for cultivation of the traditional crops of barley and wheat, and allowance for growth of some vegetables and fruits. It is in the southern regions where Tibetan culture and civilization began to develop. The northern desert regions of Tibet have a climate and altitude so severe as to be largely inhabitable, although nomads and yak move in these areas. The history of Tibet is formed in large part by its geography. Tibet's location has made travel particularly challenging over the centuries, and inclement weather- landslides, thick snows, and flooding- further complicate passage to the 'Land of Snows,' as Tibet is often called. The history of Tibet's interaction with her neighbors as well as the level of accessibility into the country, were largely determined, and limited, by the rugged, not uncommonly hazardous, geographical profile.

However, the idea of a closed society is noted as a major misconception fixed in the Western imagination, with the Himalayas, the tallest mountain range in the world, helping to reinforce the grand myth of Tibetan isolation.<sup>7</sup> One author disputes the myth, writing on the extensive relations Tibet maintained with its neighbors, particularly the Mongols and Chinese, as well as Great Britain,

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<sup>7</sup> Lee Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1996), 19.

India and the U.S.A., and the centuries long “cross-Himalaya traffic of teachers, texts and translators” stimulated by the growing interest of Buddhism in Tibet.<sup>8</sup>

When one looks for Tibet on the map today, one finds *Xizang*, Chinese for “Western Treasury House.” The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) is an administrative unit, established in 1965, covering a region of approximately 1.2 million square kilometers. ‘Cultural Tibet,’ the historic area of Tibet’s cultural exchange and influence, covers far more territory than the TAR or even Tibet’s traditional territory. Bhutan, northern Nepal, northern India, Ladakh, and Sikkim in particular have close ethnic, historic and cultural ties with Tibet. Today, cultural Tibet is nearly as extensive as its historic territory had been, with Tibetan populations in Western China, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim.

The varying narratives on the historical precedents and turn of events leading to the occupation of Tibet are important to note, as drastically different perspectives on the Tibetan nation and its capacity and will to exist sovereign are clearly shown.

During the past several centuries, Buddhism came to pervade so much of Tibetan life that much of the history of Tibet is written with Buddhism’s development in mind. The history of Buddhism in Tibet is frequently such an infusion of religious narrative, legend and historical ‘fact’ that ‘truth’ itself can be a puzzle of perspective, accuracy and to some extent, belief.

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<sup>8</sup> Abraham Mark Zablocki, *The Global Mandala: The Transnational Transformation of Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005), 92.

The establishments of monasteries are key moments in the histories of Buddhist nations.<sup>9</sup> Tibet falls within this trend with the establishment of Samye Monastery in the 8<sup>th</sup> century heralding the Buddhist era in the nation. The construction date of Samye Monastery, the 'cradle of Tibetan Buddhism,' is often used as the beginning of Buddhist history in Tibet, architecture thus being used to refer to the beginning of an entire era in the life of the country. Samye Monastery is also one of the few examples of a building which from its beginning was laid out according to traditional concepts of Buddhist cosmogony, manifest as complete as possible in physical form, mirroring the layout of a mandala or universe.

Buddhism arose in Tibet during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, introduced by way of China and then India.<sup>10</sup> At the time, Buddhism in India was heavily Tantric, influencing the manner in which it was transmitted to Tibet. Songtsen Gampo, 'warrior' king of the Yarlung dynasty as well as considered the first Buddhist king of Tibet, was in power at this time. He is credited with having named Lhasa as capital of Tibet and is said to have built a palace on the site of the current Potala Palace. The 7<sup>th</sup> century is a critical turning point in the history of Tibet where Buddhism is concerned. Gampo was the first ruler to have accepted and introduced Buddhism into the society and is regarded as an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, the archetypal personification of compassion. In historical narratives and legend, it is Gampo's initiation of the construction of a

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<sup>9</sup> Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 173.

<sup>10</sup> Knud Larsen and Amund Sinding-Larsen, *The Lhasa Atlas: Traditional Tibetan Architecture and Townscape* (London: Serindia Publications, 2001), 12.

group of temples, that root a religious architecture for a very specific purpose in Tibet and the neighboring land of Bhutan: to tame what was perceived as the 'wild demoness,' the Tibetan territory. The living being, the land and her attributes, had to be tamed as she did not welcome the spread of Buddhism. The notion of subduing the landscape through architectural construction is fundamental in projects, such as Gampo's, that seek to influence the societal dynamic<sup>11</sup> through construction that responds to and works with the natural forces of the landscape.

The legend incorporated divination and geomancy into the symmetry of the Buddhist mandala and may be interpreted as symbolizing a civilizing force superimposed on the unruly landscape and population of Tibet.<sup>12</sup>

The important role of landscapes in Buddhist narratives and architectural tradition raises the concept of inherent power and energetic forces in place. Construction and development with these forces in mind can be described as allowing the landscape to suggest where things should go, in perceiving buildings as an extension of the landscape, in live relationship with their environment. Tibetan structures such as pagodas and stupas<sup>13</sup> are examples of architectural forms that draw their energy from the force of the land.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the art and science of drawing energy from the land to facilitate spiritual practice were applied extensively to the construction of monasteries and retreats in eastern Tibet.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In Gampo's case, the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet.

<sup>12</sup> Ingun Bruskeland Amundsen, *On Sacred Architecture and the Dzongs of Bhutan: Tradition and Transition in the Architectural History* (Oslo, Arkitektthøgskolen I Oslo, 2003), 152.

<sup>13</sup> The stupa symbolizes the Buddha's teachings and often contains the remains of a religious figure, in addition to sacred texts and ritual objects.

<sup>14</sup> Eva Wong, "Energies in Balance," *Shambhala Sun*, November 2005.

The parallel of the macrocosm, the external world of natural phenomenon, and the microcosm, the internal world of the mind and body, is found in many systems including Tibet's Vajrayana Buddhism, in which the land is seen as an entity pervaded with thousands of energy centers and power places, often the dwelling place for deities<sup>15</sup>. Energy is perceived as being particularly concentrated in mountain ranges, waterways and valleys, which the land of Tibet is dense with.

The twelve temples built under King Songtsen Gampo's direction during his reign in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, were sited at strategic locations, key geomantic locales, and are referred to as 'limb binding temples.' They are the buildings that subdued the demoness of the country and eased the spread of the Dharma.<sup>16</sup> This demoness in actuality belonged to the underworld, and as with other anti-Buddhist deities, her restraint through the temple constructions would prevent her from rising to the level of Earth's surface where the dissemination of the Dharma was at work.<sup>17</sup> The Jokhang Temple, located in the old city of Lhasa, was built over the heart of the demoness.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1995), 203.

<sup>17</sup> Amundsen, *On Sacred Architecture and the Dzongs of Bhutan*, 152.



Figure 4: The pre-Buddhist demoness, Painting by Tsewang Tashi, in Larsen et al. *The Lhasa Atlas*, 18.

In addition to King Songsten Gampo, Padmasambhava, is credited with taming the local 'demons' of Tibet and bringing them under the service of Buddhism. Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche,<sup>18</sup> is considered a major contributor to the heralding of the first Buddhist era in Tibet and is described as having been "On the border-line between history and myth...a key figure in Himalayan mythology."<sup>19</sup> Padmasambhava was invited by King Trisong Detsen, of the Yarlung Dynasty, to Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century to assist in pacifying the local Bön demons, as they were obstructing a successful implantation of Buddhism. These deities were seen as needing to be persuaded to overcome their anti-Buddhist nature and accept, and in many cases serve to protect, Buddhist interests. The *terma* tradition also finds its

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<sup>18</sup> Rinpoche is translated as 'precious jewel and is a title frequently given to Tibetan Buddhist teachers.

<sup>19</sup> Hildegard Diemberger, "Beyul Khenbalung, the Hidden Valley of the Artemisia: On Himalayan Communities and their Sacred Landscape," in *Mandala and Landscape*, ed. A.W. MacDonald (New Delhi, D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1997), 321.

roots with this historical figure. According to historic legend, Padmasambhava, considered the 2<sup>nd</sup> Buddha by the Nyingma order of Tibetan Buddhism, concealed many treasures throughout the Himalayan region. These spiritual and material treasures were hidden in the landscape with the intent for later revelation, sometimes centuries after concealment, when ‘the time is right.’ *Tertön*, ‘treasure finder,’ is the term for individuals who reveal such treasures, and the tradition is highly expressive of a Buddhist perception of the close relation between geography, landscape and spiritual tradition.

The Mandala is a central concept in Buddhist architecture that “is applied to all forms of planning and building.”<sup>20</sup> Mandala is Sanskrit for circle and, applied to Tibetan religious buildings, reveals the influence of Indian symbolism in form, with the central sacred area indicating “...the point where celestial, terrestrial and netherworlds meet.”<sup>21</sup> In ritual practice, the mandala signifies the abode of the deity, yet it also signifies an external representation of the mind's layout.

Mandalas are conceived of as key in relation to Buddhist architecture and are often reflected quite explicitly in the layout. The Mandala has heavily influenced Tibetan architectural style, with its implications for organizing space as well as allowing this organization to respond to natural features of the landscape. The Mandala was introduced into the Tibetan cultural area along with the Tantric form of Buddhism from India. In Buddhist tradition, Mandalas are also often constructed with sand or paint, and subsequently destroyed, paying homage to the impermanence of things.

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<sup>20</sup> Amundsen, *On Sacred Architecture and the Dzongs of Bhutan*, 138.

<sup>21</sup> Larsen, et. al., *The Lhasa Atlas*, 40.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE VEHICLE

Buddhism is composed of three major strands. Hinayana, the 'Great Vehicle,' Mahayana, the 'Universal Vehicle,' and Vajrayana, the 'Diamond Vehicle'. The term vehicle is indicative of the spiritual path of practice unique to each major strand.

Vajrayana Buddhism is a division of the greater Mahayana school of Buddhism, the only form of Buddhism to be completely Tantric. It is the esoteric and secret form of Mahayana. *Tantra* means 'continuum' and involves methods to assist the practitioner in progressively awakening out of the states of Samsara.<sup>22</sup>

...the essence of 'Tantra' implies the interdependence of ritual and reality.<sup>23</sup>

*Vajrayana* is Sanskrit for the 'Adamantine vehicle'<sup>24</sup> and has incorporated into it the belief that the path to enlightenment is greatly accelerated by the use of rituals and ritual objects. Vajrayana follows the Buddhist Tantras, esoteric instructions typically given to a select number of disciples while sutras are teachings that were given by the historical Buddha to general, public audiences. The perception that taking the Tantric path involves realizing the

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<sup>22</sup> Samsara refers to the Buddhist conception of the cycle of rebirth and endless suffering.

<sup>23</sup> Amundsen, *On Sacred Architecture and the Dzongs of Bhutan*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> *Vajra* translates to Adamantine or Diamond, thus this school is also known as the Diamond Vehicle. *Yana* translates to 'Vehicle' and refers to the medium and system through which the spiritual path of the state of the Buddha is sought and attained.

'Buddha nature' that exists within us, not needing to be freshly created, is also fundamental to this school of thought and practice.



Figure 5: A vajra, ritual symbol of Vajrayana Buddhism, at Namgyal Monastery, Ithaca

Tibetan Buddhism, also known as Lamaism, is a school within Vajrayana Buddhism. It is the form of Buddhist practice specific to the Himalayan area as well as practiced in Mongolia, China, and parts of Russia. Tibetan Buddhism has evolved to encompass four major orders over the centuries: Nyingma, Kagyü, Sakya and Geluk. The lineages each have unique associations to certain historical teachings and texts as well as figures, human and otherwise. The four orders have regional associations that developed over time as political powers on the continent waxed and waned. The range of interest and investment by the ruling Mongolian Khans in the political affairs of Tibet, and their patronage of Buddhism had decisive influence over the rise of certain Tibetan Buddhist orders.

The indigenization of Tibetan Buddhism can be seen early on, in the history of King Songtsen Gampo and the twelve temples. Warding off evil spirits in preparation for construction has roots in the pre-Buddhist tradition of Bön, an animistic religious system indigenous to Tibet. Its elements permeate the nature of Tibetan Buddhism and its pantheon of deities. The fact that the term 'Tantric' is often used when discussing both Buddhist and Bön practices of the Himalayan region reveals the level of mutual influence.

The new eye to the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon and range of symbols may be surprised by the plethora of violent imagery and the vast presence of demonic figures. In every culture where Buddhism spread in Asia, local, indigenous gods were typically converted to the Buddhist mission, as opposed to being eradicated. The ensuing merging of local deities with Buddhist ones heavily characterizes the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, as it did in other Buddhist

cultures of the world. Bodhisattvas and wrathful deities play a major role in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon and each order also has their own protective deity as well as deities unique to their specific teachings.

The concept of *bodhisattvas* literally translates (from Sanskrit) to 'beings who have awakened' and work tirelessly for the benefit of all beings. The Lama's of Tibetan Buddhism are the leaders and teachers of the faith, but are also ultimately recognized as *bodhisattvas*. The centuries long cycle of recognizing these reincarnate beings is fundamental to Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama perhaps figuring as the most widely recognized being, due to his role as spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan Buddhist community.

In the traditional narratives, King Trisong Detsen's interest in establishing Buddhism in Tibet with the founding of a monastery enraged the gods and demons of the land to such an extent that Padmasambhava was called in to subdue them. Only when the local deities were sufficiently 'tamed' could the establishment of a monastery truly succeed.<sup>25</sup>

Two major historic phases of the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet occurred, the first between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century, and the second in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The rule of the Yarlung kings, who are largely remembered in history as being active in introducing Buddhism to the country, ended with the assassination of Tri Ralpachen, the third king of the Yarlung Dynasty, in 838.<sup>26</sup> Ralpachen's

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<sup>25</sup> Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 173.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Batchelor, *The Tibet Guide: Central and Western Tibet* (Massachusetts: Wisdom Publications, 1998), 14.

older brother, Langdarma, assumed the throne. Unlike his familial predecessor, Langdarma was not interested in Buddhism's progress and development in the country. In the ensuing years of his rule, violent attacks on Buddhist developments, including desecration of religious buildings and persecution of monks led to a suppression of the Buddhist practice that had already begun in Central Tibet.<sup>27</sup> The Yarlung Empire dissolved following the assassination of Langdarma and Buddhist practice in Tibet entered into decline.<sup>28</sup>

The "Second Dissemination of the Doctrine,"<sup>29</sup> occurring during the 11<sup>th</sup> century, is seen as the second Buddhist revival, fueled by renewed contacts with India.<sup>30</sup> Many monasteries were built during this time and it was a critical period for the development of much of the infrastructure of Tibetan Buddhism.

During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of Mongol power, a dynamic felt throughout China and Central Asia, had major impact on the development and factionalizing of Tibetan Buddhist sects. During the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, Mongol forces unified under Genghis Khan.<sup>31</sup> Köden Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, sent an invading army into Tibet in 1239. He later invited Sakya Pandita, head abbot of the Sakya order to the Mongolian court. The Sakya order was the political power of the time in Tibet, hence the Khan's interest in alliance. In exchange for a cessation of Mongolian invasions into Tibet, Pandita was

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<sup>27</sup> Batchelor, *The Tibet Guide*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Zablocki, *The Global Mandala*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> Referring to the Second Buddhist Revival in Tibet

<sup>30</sup> Zablocki, *The Global Mandala*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

requested to place the territory in the hands of the Khan. Pandita was then given a post in the Mongolian court as regent of Tibet.<sup>32</sup>

Köden Khan's heir, Khubilai Khan, and Sakya Pandita's nephew, Pakpa, carried on the relationship of their predecessors. On the Tibetan behalf, ensured military protection of their land was an incentive, and on the Mongolian behalf extensive geo-political domination was the game of the day. What ensued was a complex relationship in which cultural exchange was inevitable.

Divisions among the major religious orders in Tibet intensified during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the mingling of political control and spiritual authority creating an atmosphere of competition among the orders. The decline of Mongolian power during the 14<sup>th</sup> century was paralleled by the birth of a Tibetan nationalist movement. During the 1350's the Sakya hierarchy was overthrown by Jangchub Gyeltsen of the Pamotrupa Dynasty.<sup>33</sup> Mongol power acknowledged him as ruler of Tibet, and with their own geo-political reach significantly weakened, the patron priest relationship that had been formerly established between Mongolia and Tibet fell out of favor, and perhaps practicality, as Tibet entered a period of approximately 300 years of independence. Jangchub Gyeltsen had high regard for the 'golden days' of the Yarlung Empire and during his reign there was a renewed interest in the

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<sup>32</sup> Batchelor, *The Tibet Guide*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet*, 63

efforts of Yarlung kings Songtsen Gampo and Trisong Detsen to introduce Buddhism into the society.<sup>34</sup>

The ruling dynasties of the 15<sup>th</sup> through the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>35</sup> were aligned with the Karmapa, a figure who had by these eras become a powerful lama. The Karmapa is, historically, the head of the Kagyü order and thus it was the Kagyü who dominated politically during this time.

Sonam Gyatso, born in 1543, was called forth by Altan Khan, a descendant of Chinggis Khan, to meet him in Khan, in Northeastern Tibet. Altan Khan bestowed upon Sonam Gyatso the title “Ta-le,” now written as *Dalai*. *Dalai* is Mongolian for Ocean and is translated as *gyatso* in Tibetan. Sonam Gyatso’s two predecessors were retroactively also bestowed with this title, making Sonam the third Dalai Lama. It appears that during this time, Altan Khan’s appreciation of Buddhist teachings led to the establishment of Buddhism as popular practice in Mongolia. The reincarnation of the Dalai Lama being found in Altan Khan’s grandson, however, revealed the potential obstacles that political and religious alliances could manifest.

During the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, Mongol power on the continent waxed back into influence. The fifth Dalai Lama had assumed temporal power over the country in aligning with Gushri Khan. Gushri’s troops had defeated the King of Tsang, a patron of the Karma Kagyu order,<sup>36</sup> in effect strengthening the rise of the

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<sup>34</sup> Batchelor, *The Tibet Guide*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> These include the Pamotrumpa dynasty, the rule of princes from the Ripung area and the rule by four kings from the Tsang region.

<sup>36</sup> Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 9.

Geluk. The Karmapa was stripped of his authority and the fourth King of the Tsang region was murdered and replaced with the fifth Dalai Lama, Losang Gyatso, enthroned in the 1620's. 'The Fifth' named Lhasa the capital of Tibet in the 1640's and was given authority of the Tibetan region as Regent of Tibet, a title bestowed upon him by Quosot Mongols. He was also instrumental in laying the foundation for the Potala Palace and bringing much of the country under Geluk rule, largely through the backing of the Mongols.

This was the first time in the history of Tibet that a single indigenous regime, uniting spiritual with secular authority truly dominated the land.<sup>37</sup>

The "Rule of the Dalai Lamas" began in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century and was characterized by the rise in dominance of the Geluk order.<sup>38</sup> Geluk means "virtuous order" and was first known as the Ganden order. In prior centuries, the Kagyü and Sakya orders had become inextricably wound up with political affiliations, which the Geluk had not.<sup>39</sup> Strife continued to ensue among the orders. The Kagyü, experiencing the wane of political influence, were justifiably threatened by the prospects of the strengthening Mongol-Geluk alliance. Attacks on monasteries were not uncommon.

The Geluk order dominated political affairs in Tibet from the 17<sup>th</sup> century forward. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dalai Lama had come to serve both as head of state as well as the Geluk order, this tradition continuing today, despite changes in the reality and existence of a Tibetan 'state'. The current Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was recognized at the age of two as the reincarnated

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<sup>37</sup> Batchelor, *The Tibet Guide*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Zablocki, *The Global Mandala*, 77.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.



leader of Tibet. The turn of events that were to radically transform the fate of Tibet as an independent nation, as well as catalyze the practice of Tibetan Buddhism to a global scale, manifested during his leadership.

In the beginning of the 1950's, the Chinese People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet. The Dalai Lama was 15 at the time and was officially appointed the political leader of Tibet during the same year. On March 17, 1959, the Dalai Lama went into exile in India, with a following of approximately 100,000 refugees. By September 1965, Tibet was officially a part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China.

For approximately the next decade, the Cultural Revolution occurred, which one author cites as "one of the greatest disasters any country has ever inflicted upon itself."<sup>40</sup> Inherent in the aims of the Cultural Revolution was destruction of any semblance of a separate identity, on the part of Tibetan people, which was seen as an obstruction to assimilating the nation into the 'Chinese motherland.' Monasteries and nunneries, critical institutions in Tibetan society, were hard hit. Traditions once acceptable have come under varied forms of restraint.<sup>41</sup> In addition to outright assault on the integrity of many Tibetan religious structures, the 'medieval townscape'<sup>42</sup> of Lhasa also experienced extensive demolition to make way for the aims of 'modernization' and development that included the resettlement of thousands of Chinese into Lhasa.

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<sup>40</sup> Batchelor, *The Tibet Guide*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>42</sup> Larsen et al., *The Lhasa Atlas*, 15.

Remarkable efforts towards salvaging, renovation and restoration work began to occur in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Chinese Government, no doubt aware of a certain values in preserving heritage sites, has invested heavily in projects such as renovation of the Potala Palace, the winter residence of the Dalai Lama since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and Jokhang Monastery and Temple. Both are key sites, for Tibetans and visitors to the region alike, due to their nature as holy sites and their architectural fame. The nomination of the Jokhang Monastery to UNESCO's World Heritage List came from the Chinese in 1999. The Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace was added to the list in 1994.

Scores of foundations, too numerous to detail, dedicated to preserving various aspects of Tibetan cultural heritage have been vigorously present on the scene since the 1990's, increasing collaborative restoration and documentation projects and research centered on the architectural traditions. Organizations such as the Tibet Heritage Fund, the Tibetan Architecture Documentation Centre and the Tibetan Himalayan Digital Library Project (to name a few) have conservation and study of the traditional Tibetan Architecture as a central principle of their work. Various state run cultural relic management commitments, such as the Tibetan Autonomous Region Cultural Relics Administration, are also in place, overseeing the range of cultural relics as well as enforcing regulation in the name of protection.

A Tibetan monastery was the traditional center of religious teaching and general education for the Buddhist laity, *sangha*<sup>43</sup> and general community. Monasteries were also central nodes for government. One author points out that the close ties between the lay and monastic communities is ‘traditionally definitive of Tibetan Buddhism.’<sup>44</sup> Stupas, temples and all manner of converted spaces serve as testimony to the spread of a physical infrastructure in consort with the rise of the religious and cultural practices and the movement of its teachers and practitioners. As noted by two contemporary surveyor’s of Lhasa’s architecture and historic fabric, “...Tibetan architecture as a whole truly deserves a place among the great building cultures of the world.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Buddhist monastic community

<sup>44</sup> Eve Mullen, *The American Occupation of Tibetan Buddhism: Tibetans and their American Hosts in New York City* (New York: Waxmann Münster, 2001), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Larsen et al., *The Lhasa Atlas*, 11.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE VEHICLE'S MOVEMENT INTO THE U.S.A.

*If Tibetans were in the wrong place after 1959, they were at the right time.*<sup>46</sup>

The 1960's forward is when a sustained development of interest and practice of Tibetan Buddhism is seen in American society, due both to the movement of monks and lamas to the U.S.A. and travelers from Europe and North America to India and Nepal. Proponents of Tibetan Buddhism have, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, succeeded in developing a vast and steadfast network of centers for practice and learning.

Due to the growing interest among Americans to engage in Buddhism and also in part due to their wealth, growing Buddhist groups in the States have been able to collaborate extensively with monks and lamas in the newly formed refuge communities, which settled in the States, in the founding of dharma centers nationwide, many of which serve a community which is largely non-Asian in descent.<sup>47</sup>

"Three interrelated forces" have led to the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism to North America over the past decades, all linked to the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950: a) the campaign for a free Tibet, b) the preservation of religious texts, and c) the establishment of networks and centers, begun in the 1960's, by Tibetan lamas and their increasingly international set of students.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jeffery Paine, *Re-enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 174.

<sup>48</sup> Seager. *Buddhism in America*, 113.

The campaign for a free Tibet involves several organizations worldwide, often driven by non-Tibetan activists and largely devoted to ending China's occupation of Tibet and maintaining a high level of awareness on human rights issues in Tibet. The reality of Tibetan Buddhism constituting a strong part of the Tibetan national identity has inevitably drawn religious issues into the political campaign for Tibet to regain an independent status.

The arrival of Tibetan lamas and monks in the U.S.A. was essential to the dispersal of Tibetan Buddhism, as was the publication and dispersal of many Tibetan texts to America. The efforts of E. Gene Smith, a Tibetologist and head of the Library of Congress in New Delhi from 1968-1985, are noted as having been critical in the publication of thousands of Tibetan texts that had been brought out of Tibet and in the 1960's and 1970's became increasingly "...as if magically, manifest in the stacks of American university libraries."<sup>49</sup>

The Tibetan Diaspora took on significant form in 1959, with approximately 100,000 Tibetans moving into exile. The entire population of Tibetans in the U.S.A. until the 1980's was under five hundred. As exiles, many could not get special refugee status. They were not citizens of any country as Tibet was not recognized as a country. Many of the first Tibetans who immigrated to the U.S.A. did so under the U.S.-Tibet Resettlement Program, which sought to determine sites where Tibetans could be placed.

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<sup>49</sup> Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 165.

Only about five percent of the Tibetan population was able to leave in the beginning of the 1960's, but among these early exiles and immigrants were thousands of monks who represented all of the major sects of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> The main concentration of refugees during the next few decades was in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States.

Buddhist history and Buddhist texts agree that without monks there can be no Buddhism, a view supported by Buddhist myths of the end-time.<sup>51</sup>

The movement of teachers is particularly important to note in tracing the establishment of Tibetan Buddhist religious centers worldwide. The migration of Mongolian lamas to the U.S.A. in the early 1950's and their presence and practice was key in the early phases of Tibetan Buddhist communities in the States. It is perhaps because of the understated profile of a center in Howell, New Jersey that it does not receive accurate reference in many accounts of Tibetan Buddhism's encounter with 'the West,' as the earliest center of Tibetan Buddhist practice in the U.S.A.

Mongolian Tibetan Buddhist lama, Geshe Wangyal, from the Kalmykia region<sup>52</sup>, arrived in New Jersey in 1955. A Kalmyk community had already formed there and they sought a lama to perform religious functions. This group of Kalmyks had traversed much territory prior to arriving in the States. Persecuted by the Soviets during World War II, the Kalmyks had sided with Germany and

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<sup>50</sup> Patricia Ann Darling. *Turning East in the Twin Cities: Converts and Movements in the 1970's*, Volumes I and II. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: UMI Dissertation Services, 1988), 269.

<sup>51</sup> Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 173.

<sup>52</sup> Approximately half of whose 300,000 residents are Buddhist, making it the only Buddhist region in Russia.

followed them in their retreat from the Soviet Union, ending up in Austria. The Kalmyk immigrants were given permission to emigrate to New Jersey where they settled in Freewood Acres.<sup>53</sup> Wangyal, whose relocation was instrumental in the development of what became one of the largest Kalmyk communities in the States, founded the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the country there and taught for a while at Columbia University. It is noted that Wangyal's "...influence on the current state of Tibetan Buddhist Studies in the United States is difficult to overstate."<sup>54</sup> Wangyal thought that in order for Tibetan Buddhism to survive it needed to be integrated with American culture, an idea that other monks and lamas followed in the 1960's and 1970's. What differed amongst the various monks and lamas was their technique. A number of students of Geshe Wangyal are now preeminent Buddhist Studies scholars as well as practitioners. Original students of Wangyal are figures on the forefront of Tibetan Buddhist studies in the United States today and have in turn produced their own students.

Two Tibetan Buddhist centers are commonly referred to as the earliest in existence in the West,<sup>55</sup> Kagyü Samye Ling in Scotland and Tail of the Tiger in Vermont, U.S.A. Both centers are related to Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche,<sup>56</sup> a Kagyü lama whose high profile and dynamic role in the story of Tibetan Buddhism's early days in the United States is often framed with eccentricity and controversy. Tail of the Tiger,<sup>57</sup> founded in 1970 by a group of Chögyam

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<sup>53</sup> Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, 164.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>55</sup> The 'west' in this context refers to Europe and North America.

<sup>56</sup> Paine, *Re-enchantment*, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Tail of the Tiger is today known as the Karmê Chöling Shambhala Buddhist Meditation Center.

Trungpa's students prior to his first visit to the States, is frequently referred to as the first Tibetan Buddhist center in the West, despite the prior existence of Wangyal's community in New Jersey.

Hundreds of Tibetan Buddhist associations, study groups and dharma centers have been established during the past half a century throughout the continent. What follows here is a visit to three centers in upstate New York.



CHAPTER 4  
A LOOK AT TWO CENTERS  
KARMA TRIYANA DHARMACHAKRA & PADMA SAMYE LING

From the early recorded history of Buddhism's dissemination in Tibet, the direct link between architecture and religious tradition was present, with the founding by Songtsen Gampo of 108 temples throughout the Himalayan region to subdue the forces perceived as opposing the spread of Buddhism. Buddhist mythology is not relegated to events and teachings of the past. The establishment of the sacred architecture in 'new land' reveals the mythological current of the vehicles of Buddhism arriving at timely moments and the events associated with their occurrence.

The Tibetan aesthetic, as seen developing in monasteries and temples across the globe, typically carries a traditional vocabulary of color, form, layout and symbols. Architecture of the Tibetan Diaspora is mainly religious in nature and evidenced in the spread of stupas, temples and monastic complexes in countries far flung from the point of cultivation in the Himalayas.

In its architectural and artistic forms, transnational Tibetan Buddhism also remains strictly loyal to historical symbols. In general, Tibetan overseas centers attempt to look as much like traditional Tibetan *gompa* as possible.<sup>58</sup>

Creation of a Tibetan aesthetic has reached fruition at two centers in upstate New York. One runs from the Kagyü lineage and maintains a decidedly, and well developed, public profile. The other runs from the Nyingma lineage and

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<sup>58</sup> Zablocki, *The Global Mandala*, 370.

this fact, coupled with the nature of the place as a retreat center has led to a much more subdued presence. They are the first Tibetan Buddhist centers in New York State to seek after a traditionally influenced or styled design in their construction, both with impressive results.

Brightly colored exterior walls characterize Tibetan religious buildings, rarely so for secular ones. Tibetan Buddhist interiors are often plush and ornate, exploding with color, detail and fabric. The interior represents the heavenly abode of the deities and is intended to portray the natural wealth of their realm. Vibrant, information dense ritual and ceremonial spaces have been cultivated at both Karma Triyana Dharmachakra and Padma Samye Ling.

Symbols are often found at the key thresholds of the buildings, the windows and doorways. With the concept of sacred geometry often laid into their blueprint, and the number of levels and location having sacred implications, these buildings serve as architectural manifestations of the religion and are testaments to Buddhist practice and culture.

The founding of Kagyu Thubten Choling Monastery and Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery in Woodstock, and Zen Mountain Monastery in Mount Tremper, Ulster County during the 1970's heralded the beginning of the growth of Buddhist practice on a community scale in the mid-Hudson Valley.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Michelle J. Lee, "Buddhism evolves as followers multiply," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, April 23, 2004. [http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/projects/cultures/fr042304s2\\_p.shtml](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/projects/cultures/fr042304s2_p.shtml)



Figure 6: Entry sign, KTD

Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery, located visibly off the road at 352 Meads Mountain Road in Woodstock, New York, was built in the 1980's. Located two thousand feet above sea level, the monastery was founded in 1978 by the 16<sup>th</sup> Gyalwa Karmapa,<sup>60</sup> the traditional head of the Karma Kagyü<sup>61</sup> and is a replica of the Gyalwa Karmapa's monastery in Sikkim, India, Rumtek Monastery, his official home in exile. While serving a substantial community of practitioners, it is also the Karmapa's seat in the West. Karma Triyana

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<sup>60</sup> The Gyalwa Karmapa, like the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, is an office occupied by a succession of reincarnated lamas.

<sup>61</sup> Karma Kagyü's is a lineage within the Kagyü order of Tibetan Buddhism.

Dharmachakra plays an important role in the early physical and symbolic mapping of Tibetan Buddhist architecture in North America. The monastery was, at the time of this writing, in the midst of expanding their monastic complex.



Figure 7: Main temple and Meads Mountain House, KTD

Between 1976 and 1977, the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa went on his second world tour, this time establishing KTD in 1976 in an apartment in New York City. In 1978 KTD was moved to its current location in Woodstock, on land donated by Chia-Tsin Shen. Shen immigrated from China to the States in the 1950's and also donated 125 acres for Chuang Yen Monastery in Kent, New York.<sup>62</sup> The KTD

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<sup>62</sup> Lee, "Buddhism evolves as followers multiply"

monastic community first occupied the Meads Mountain House building which was constructed in 1865 as the residence of George Mead and his family. It later became a summer hotel, the Meads Mountain House and in 1948 Captain Salva Milo, a Yugoslavian and former U.S. Army Air Corps pilot, purchased the property to run as a hotel with his wife, and he in turn sold the property to Shen. There has been considerable refurbishment to the 19<sup>th</sup> century structure since its occupation by the Tibetan Buddhist institution, including installation of a heating system and other modernizing elements<sup>63</sup> The cozy, yet rambling, rustic interior of the Meads Mountains House emanates decades of human inhabitation and use. The building is currently seen as not cost effective to further renovate or inhabit and will be demolished.

In November of 1981, the founding force of the center, the 16<sup>th</sup> Karmapa died, yet the project of expansion had been put in motion. The following year, construction of the main monastery building began. In 1992, at the age of seven, the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, His Holiness the Karmapa Ogyen, was discovered in Tibet. In January of 2000, when the Karmapa escaped Tibet for India, local and national media coverage focused on Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery, as it was evident that this may be one place the Karmapa would flee to. Schmidt notes that the Karmapa is one of the highest lamas in Tibet, so it brought Tibet back into the forefront of media attention,<sup>64</sup> along with eyes turned toward the Monastery nestled on the hill.

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<sup>63</sup>Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, "Staff and Guest House at Karma Triyana Dharamchakra," <http://www.kagyu.org/monastery/staff.html#/text>, 1998.

<sup>64</sup> Tom Schmidt, Interview with author, Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Monastery, September 24, 2005



Figure 8: Meads Mountain House, KTD

Unlike some other centers, KTD does not seem particularly media shy and it is perhaps because of exposure that the monastery developed a critical sense of media savvy as well as protocols for handling high levels of public attention.

Websites are public repositories of information for each center as well as part of its communicative expression and identity. Through the writing of this paper, I watched the sites of each center develop, particularly that of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra. Information about visions related to new constructions are important for public curiosity and awareness, as well as fundraising needs. KTD's savvy for presenting information has resulted in a comprehensive web portal representing their grounds, monastery and history.



The Woodstock monastery has a residence for the Gyalwa Karmapa and two community shrine rooms and is currently under the in-house direction of Bardor Tulku Rinpoche and Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. The current expansion at KTD is intended to fulfill the needs of the institution, which has grown substantially since its existence.



Figure 9: Construction underway, KTD

The new complex, inspired heavily by traditional Tibetan Buddhist design concepts, will expand on the existing monastic structure, providing more space for residential and administrative facilities as well as a central temple, a school

of higher philosophy, dining facilities, office space and shrines. With a future visit by the 17<sup>th</sup> Gyalwang Karmapa's in mind, KTD's intent on being able to spatially accommodate those who will visit to receive his teachings and blessings is also a motivation behind expansion.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 10: Main temple, KTD

In traditional style, symbols abound throughout the interior and exterior of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra. They are found in characteristic abundance around the windows and entryways. The Dharmachakra (Wheel of Law) symbol (Figure 11), is found in traditional placement above the main entry of

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<sup>65</sup> Karma Triyana Dharmachakra ,“Fulfilling the Vision: Monastery Completion” (brochure).



the temple and is flanked by two deer. This representation is symbolic of the first sermon of the Buddha, held in the deer park of Benares, India. The placement of the Wheel of Law is typically prominent at temples and monasteries as it is a fundamental aspect of Tibetan Buddhist belief. At Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, the Kalachakra symbol is found placed above a window (Figure 13), with ornamental lentils jutting above the window entry (Figure 14). The lentils are of a reddish hue and feature gold hued carvings picturing the Dharmachakra (Wheel of Law) and crossed vajra in repetition. The Wheel of Law is a fundamental symbol in the Buddhist realm and symbolizes the ‘Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism.’ This path is a means of ending suffering which indicates maintaining right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The double crossed vajra is a specific representation of the Vajrayana strand of Buddhism. *Do-rje* is the Tibetan word for vajra and means “noble stone.” The vajra in sole or double crossed form is a common symbol featured on Tibetan Buddhist buildings. The vajra symbolizes the diamond like and indestructible principle of Vajrayana Buddhism. This symbol is pervasive in Tibetan symbolism and is frequently seen in multiple forms of artwork as well as used in three-dimensional form as a ritual piece.



Figure 11: Dharmachakra (Wheel of Law) ornament, KTD



Figure 12: Façade, KTD



Figure 13: Kalachakra symbol gleaming in sunlight atop window, KTD



Figure 14: Ornamental lentils with Buddhist symbols, KTD. The symbols carved on the lentils are the Wheel of Law, representing the Buddhist Eightfold Path and the crossed vajra, or double Dorje.



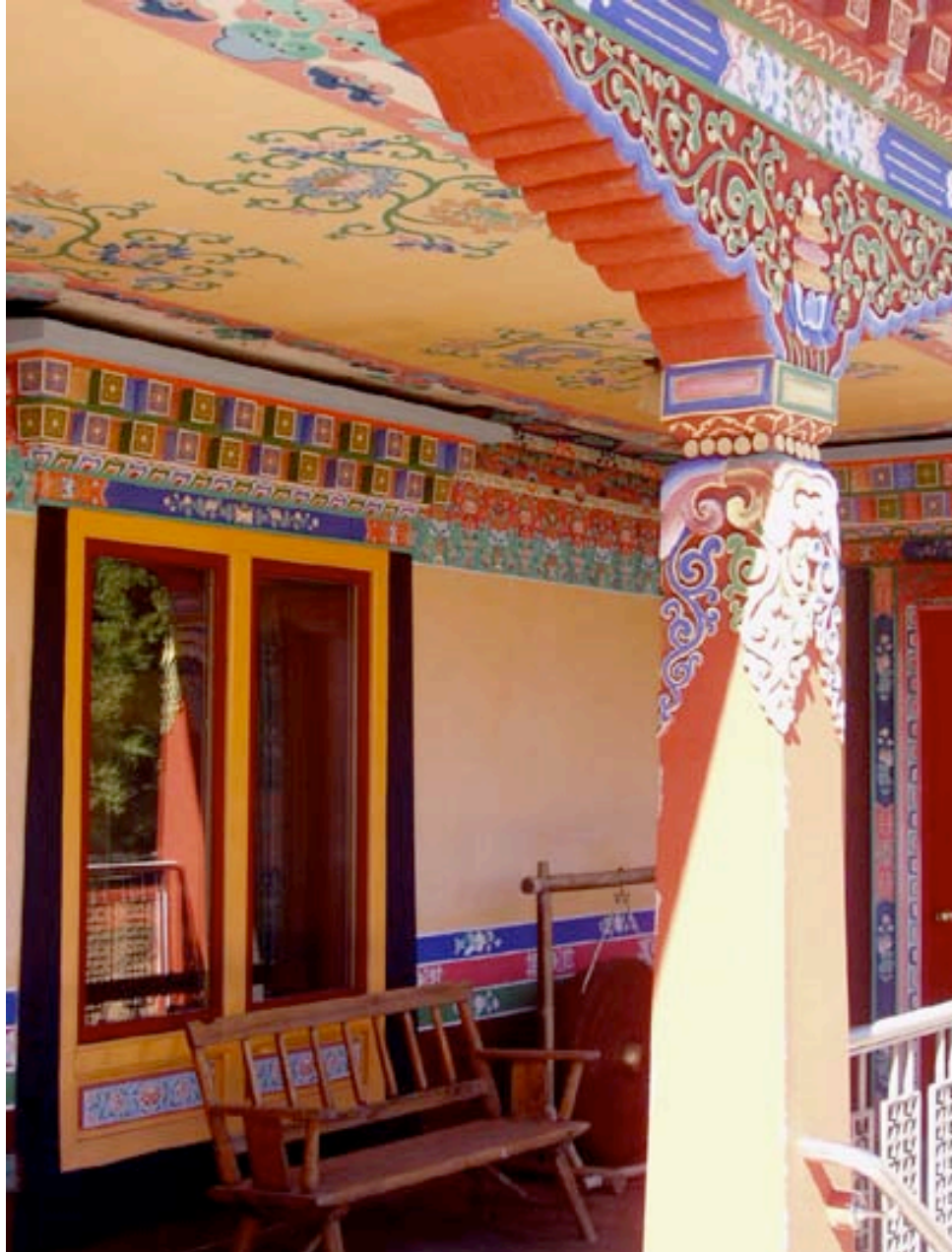


Figure 15: Front porch of main temple, KTD. Colorful eave, beam and ceiling decorative painting by Thinley Chojor, resident artist, KTD.



Figure 16: Pillar in Shrine Room, KTD. Pillars are a common feature throughout Tibetan architecture.



Figure 17: Tara Shrine room, KTD





Figure 18: Ceiling of main shrine room, KTD. Multitudes of decorative silk hangings with extensive imagery line the ceiling and a bright Wheel of Law symbols is featured with the four representative colors of Tibetan Buddhism: blue, red, green and yellow.

Lamas of KTD also lead over two dozen meditation centers in different states as well as overseas. Associated centers include more than two dozen meditation centers nationally and internationally. The KTD network also includes a stupa and a pilgrimage site at Karma Thegsum Tahi Gomang in Crestone, Colorado.



Figure 19 & 20: Signage, Padma Samye Ling

KTD is a hive of activity and the extraverted public persona of the monastery and its operations is testament to the deep international ties and vigorous synergy of teachers, practice and schedule of events it maintains.





Figure 20

Padma Samye Ling, located at 618 Buddha Hwy in Sidney Center, New York, in the western region of the Catskill mountains, is Sanskrit for 'Inconceivable Lotus Land' and sits tucked away in the residential countryside, barely noticeable to a passer by. Padma Samye Ling is of the Nyingma order of Tibetan Buddhist tradition and affiliated with the national network of Padmasambhava Buddhist Centers,<sup>66</sup> founded by two Tibetan lamas and brothers, Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche and Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche who came to New York City in the early 1980's.



Figure 21: Resident practitioner Elizabeth Guyton holding up a prayer flag for a visitor. Prayer flags are printed with mantras that are carried through the world by wind, Padma Samye Ling

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<sup>66</sup> Padmasambhava Buddhist Center spreads the teachings of Buddhism according to the Nyingma order lineage of Tibet



Figure 22: Bodhicitta Inn, Padma Samye Ling

The mountainside, forested retreat center has a sense of the quiet mythic. Entering into the retreat lands from the west, one ascends a dirt path, passing by the Bodhicitta Inn (Figure 22), where resident practitioners live and guests



stay. The tri-level inn has a sense of the vernacular Tibetan aesthetic with its symmetrical fenestration, stone foundation, and slightly elevated placement. One soon arrives at the Sangha House (Figure 23), a goldenrod hued building with a wraparound balcony that serves as the space for the residential community's mundane activities. Looking east onto the property, grass fields sprawl with a handful of prayer flags and a Tibetan flag posted (Figure 24). The lama's dwelling is set furthest east (Figure 25) in the whole network of the retreat center's buildings and between that and the Sangha House, set upon a hill, is the main temple, a building that manages to strike as grandiose and utterly subtle, at once. The location, a quality key in Tibetan religious plans, allows for the building to merge comfortably into the landscape, with the woods sheltering and rising from behind it and a distant view of rolling hills stretching before it.



Figure 23: Sangha House, Padma Samye Ling



Figure 24: Landscape, Padma Samye Ling



Figure 25: Lantern with symbol of the endless knot, one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, and lama's dwelling in distance.



Figure 26: Stairway as seen from the west, Padma Samye Ling





Figure 27: Stairway looking south , Padma Samye Ling



Figure 28: Lotus inscription, Padma Samye Ling



Figure 29: Main temple, Padma Samye Ling. Dharmachakra (Wheel of law) symbol flanked by two deer above main entry.

All the buildings at Padma Samye Ling were designed and conceived in close connection between Khenpo Tsewang, Khenpo Sherab and Nashville, Tennessee based architect Patrick Avicé du Buisson. The main temple (Figure 29) is modeled after Samye Monastery, which housed the first monastic community in Tibet and is often viewed as the ‘cradle of Tibetan Buddhism.’ The original monastery, built during the reign of King Trisong Detsen in 775,<sup>67</sup> was constructed in the design of a Mandala, with the temple at the center, the four sides oriented with cardinal directions and the outer circle constructed as

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<sup>67</sup> Samye Monastery was founded by King Trisong Detsen, Padmasambhava and Sataraksita to celebrate the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet.

a fortified wall, protecting the inner monastic buildings. The main temple at Padma Samye Ling is south facing, which is typical of Tibetan temples, with the vantage point of being set on the hill. The geomantic reading of this site has a mountain on the north side and more open land on the east. The land is also open to the south with a rolling valley, which one resident describes as being “in the lap of the Buddha.”<sup>68</sup>

The tri-level nature of the building has direct reference to the *Trikaya*, or three realms the Buddha. The first, *Nirmanakaya*, refers to earthly Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; the second, *Sambhogakaya*, refers to the Buddhas in the heavens; the third, *Dharmakaya*, refers to the true nature of the Buddha and his teachings. The third storey, relating to Dharmakaya, is for occasional and extremely special events and ceremonies and also houses relics from Tibet. The third storey is surrounded by a balcony, from which a spacious view of the surrounding Central New York rural conditions can be viewed.

The facades of the main temple show a characteristic dynamic of empty surfaces contrasted with rich symbolic detail at the windows and doors. The shrine room has a maximum capacity of approximately 210 people and is devoted to daily prayers, everyday practices, teachings and ceremonial events.<sup>69</sup> This room is in many ways ‘the heart of the monastery’ as one resident and practitioner explained.<sup>70</sup> The interior reflects the exterior in the sense of simultaneous expansiveness and intimacy. The room is spacious,

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Guyton, Interview with author, Padma Samye Ling, September 17, 2005

<sup>69</sup> Artists worked on the murals in the shrine room, and impressive mural work was still in progress when I visited in September 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Guyton, Interview, September 24, 2005



cavernous almost. Sacred art and murals contribute heavily to the typically vibrant temple interior within.



Figure 30: Main (south facing) entry, Padma Samye Ling. This entry is reserved for special occasions.



Figure 31: East façade of main temple, Padma Samye Ling



Figure 32: West Façade of main temple, Padma Samye Ling



Figure 33: Dragon handle, Padma Samye Ling. Door handles on Tibetan religious buildings often possess elaborate craftsmanship, serving as the transit from outdoor space to the sacred interior of the temple.





Figure 34: Dharmachakra (Wheel of Law) ornament on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor balcony, Padma Samye Ling.



Figure 35: View from 3<sup>rd</sup> level balcony with a row of gilded vajras, Padma Samye Ling.



Figure 36: A *gyaltshen*, symbol of Buddhist victory, on 3<sup>rd</sup> level balcony, Padma Samye Ling.

Religious architectural traditions carry specific narratives, intentions and symbolism. The replication and modeling of Tibetan Buddhist building styles in North America extends the network of sacred typology to new terrain. That local practitioners look to carry over an cultural heritage in the form of its building tradition and religious practices has profound meaning for the longevity of this indigenous tradition and its flourishing in North America.

CHAPTER 5:  
KALACHAKRA RISING ITHACA'S NAMGYAL

Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies 412 North Aurora Street, Ithaca, NY 14850 in Ithaca, New York was established in 1992 as the North American seat of the Dalai Lama. Originally, Namgyal Dratsang (Victorious Monastery) was founded in 1575 in Tibet and for several centuries was located in the Potala Palace. As the personal monastery of the Dalai Lama it was reestablished in Dharamsala, India after the Dalai Lama was granted asylum there.<sup>71</sup> Dharamsala became the administrative center to the exile community, the main residence of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and home to the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies in New York State combines Tibetan faculty with adjunct faculty of Western scholars of Tibetan Buddhism, serving as one hub in the academic world of Buddhist studies, as well as a place for practice. The Monastery and Institute uphold traditions of the Geluk order of Tibetan Buddhism, the traditional order of the Dalai Lama, and is also non-sectarian, maintaining ritual practices and teachings of the four main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Being non-sectarian, Namgyal frequently hosts lectures and events that are not related to Tibetan Buddhist teachings, thus increasing interfaith dialogue at the center.

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<sup>71</sup> Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies, "Namgyal Tibet and India," [http://www.namgyal.org/about/namgyal\\_india.cfm](http://www.namgyal.org/about/namgyal_india.cfm)



In the early 1970's the Dalai Lama had not been to Europe or North America and he wasn't teaching much beyond the monastic community. In 1974, when Sidney Piburn,<sup>72</sup> one of the founders of Namgyal Monastery in Ithaca, traveled to Southeast Asia to trek around Nepal and visit India, he also made contact with the Dalai Lama's secretary, who finally invited him to a small meeting at which the Dalai Lama was present. While in India, Piburn spent a lot of time at Namgyal Monastery and became friends with several monks there.



Figure 37: Tenzin Gephel in shrine room of Aurora Street Monastery, Namgyal.

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<sup>72</sup> Sidney Piburn, Interview with author, Ithaca, November 9, 2005.

A component of the Geluk tradition is a strong monastic curriculum. In order to become a *Geshe*, approximately twenty-seven years of study are required. As the monastery became more established, Namgyal monks began to travel more. The Dalai Lama refined the Geshe curriculum to 13-15 years, seeking to modernize it in order to accommodate this trend of increasingly transient movement, perhaps to a degree that he did not even foresee occurring by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1978, Piburn went back to both Nepal and India to see the Dalai Lama. In toto were photos of Ithaca and Piburn invited the Dalai Lama back to New York State. To his shock, the Dalai Lama accepted the invitation. When he arrived back home to Ithaca, there was a letter waiting from the Dalai Lama, confirming the visit.<sup>73</sup>

The Dalai Lama visited Ithaca in 1978 for four days<sup>74</sup>. This occasion further stirred ripples among Piburn and his friends to sustain Tibetan Buddhist activities in Ithaca and contribute to the preservation and promotion of Tibetan culture. One outgrowth has been Snow Lion Publications, founded by Gabriel Aiello, Pat Aiello and Sidney Piburn in 1979. Snow Lion Publications is a premiere publishing company for books on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. The publishing company is closely linked with the Dalai Lama and the Gelugpa tradition, with ties to the North American headquarters of Namgyal.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Piburn, Interview, November 9, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> The Dalai Lama's first visit to the United States was in 1978 with a subsequent visit in 1980 and then in 1981 for the Kalachakra initiation in Madison, Wisconsin that had about 1200 attendees.

<sup>75</sup> Snow Lion Publications, "About Snow Lion Publications," <http://www.snowlionpub.com/pages/about.php>

In addition to Sidney Piburn, the founders of Namgyal in Ithaca were Pema Losang Chögyen, Gerri Jones and Tom Miller. The plan was to have a center that would have a rotating system of resident monks from Namgyal, India, who would also function as teachers at Namgyal, Ithaca. Pema Losang Chögyen, who was a PhD student at Columbia University, was envisioned as being the lynchpin of the Monastery as it was being established, although his death prevented this. Pema Losang Chogyen played a key role in the early vision for Namgyal and collaborated with the Program of Computer Graphics at Cornell University to produce 'Exploring the Mandala,' a computer simulation of a three-dimensional mandala.<sup>76</sup>

Namgyal, India was dedicated to the development of Namgyal, Ithaca, but was hesitant to send their best monks and teachers to the West. The first group was chosen by the Dalai Lama yet over recent years his direct involvement in choosing the monks who come to reside in Ithaca as well as his control of programming at Namgyal, Ithaca has decreased considerably. This is due, in part, to the North American branch becoming more self-sustaining in terms of direction, planning and programming.<sup>77</sup>

Namgyal was chosen as a site for this thesis as, like other Tibetan Buddhist centers across the nation, the center is in the planning phase for their new temple construction. The interest for the expansion stems largely from spatial demands and programming. Like other Tibetan Buddhist centers with a

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<sup>76</sup> The Cornell University Program of Computer Graphics, "Exploring the Mandala," <http://www.graphics.cornell.edu/online/mandala/>

<sup>77</sup> Current teachers at Namgyal include Ven.Tenzin Gephel, Ven.Tenzin Thutop, Ven.Tenzin Choedon, Ven. Lobsang Gyelsten, Mr.Tenzin Lodo, and Mr.Palden Oshoe



sizeable community of practitioners, new temple and monastic complex construction has been sought to accommodate these needs and their complex is also noteworthy for having a design scheme based on a Tantric theme. As Tenzin Thutop, resident monk at Namgyal in Ithaca explained,<sup>78</sup> people associated with the center depend on a place to stay, to convene, to bring scholars and to have large functions, which the converted single-family residence, in all its intimacy, does not provide.

Namgyal provides an excellent opportunity to study how a Tibetan Buddhist monastery is established and first grew. It also offers the opportunity to study expansion. This story begins in 1997 when the board began discussing interest in a retreat center. Three of the board members at the time were chosen to be a development committee and spearhead the research needed for beginning the project. One of these board members was Cornelia Tobey, who took refuge vows in 1997 at Namgyal Monastery and joined the board of directors in 1997, and who has been highly instrumental in the planning and design process. The ensuing years saw changes in the board and the project and development plans were not steadily pursued. When Tobey returned to the board in 2001, after having left to attend to motherhood, the project was still on her mind. A Program Committee was established and along with the Development Committee, these became the two forces for the initial planning—the former composing the preliminary case statement and now working largely on programming for the monastery.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Tenzin Thutop, Interview with author, Namgyal, November 23, 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Cornelia Tobey, Interview with author, Ithaca, November 3, 2005.

In April 2004, Scot Tobey (construction manager for Namgyal's expansion), Cornelia Tobey, Tenzin Thutop, Tenzin Gephel, and Lobsang Gyaltzen (resident monks at Namgyal, Ithaca) traveled to Toronto to meet with the Dalai Lama who expressed his support for the expansion as well as encouraged more nonsectarian and Buddhism-Science dialogues. The Dalai Lama also expressed interest in having increased interaction between Namgyal and Cornell University. Some representatives of Namgyal are also part of Cornell faculty and staff and are instrumental in linking the local "town" community with the "gown" community through events and lectures.<sup>80</sup>

The Kalachakra theme is to be prominent in the design of Namgyal's new center.<sup>81</sup> Kalachakra is the latest and most complex Tantric system to have developed and is a specifically precious practice for the Geluk order and Namgyal Monastery,<sup>82</sup> but also a very important practice in general in Tibetan Buddhism. Other Tantras of this class<sup>83</sup> are called '*buried Tantras*', meaning that they are written in the 'twilight language'<sup>84</sup> of the *dakinis*, concealed in a specifically ambiguous way, intended for revelation at some future point in time. The Kalachakra is a '*clear Tantra*,' intended to be plain and apparent. This

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<sup>80</sup> Ted Arnold, who works at Cornell University and is a board member of Namgyal, has been particularly involved in increasing the Buddhism-Science dialogue through organized events at which representatives of the Tibetan Buddhist community and the academic community speak. The Buddhism Science dialogue is largely Namgyal centered as the Dalai Lama initiated it and is an understandable pursuit in a town with a presence of such a large university community. David Holmberg, chair of the Cornell Anthropology department, serves on the Namgyal Board of Directors, as does Tenzin Tsokyi, a staff member of Cornell University and a teacher at Namgyal.

<sup>81</sup> Cornelia Tobey, interview with author, November 3, 2005.

<sup>82</sup> All orders perform the Kalachakra, so it's not specific to Geluk, but the current Dalai Lama has now given it so many times in his lifetime that it has an understandable tight association with his figure and the Geluk tradition.

<sup>83</sup> Highest Yoga Class of Tantras

<sup>84</sup> 'Twilight' language of the dakini is an integral part of some Tantric literature.

aspect of its nature appears also to be reflected in Namgyal's plans to have a literal architectural representation of the Kalachakra as evidenced in the design for the new temple complex.

One of the particularly amazing aspects of the Kalachakra Tantra is that it is the only Tantra of its class to be given publicly as initiation to extremely large groups. The number of attendees to the initiations that have been given worldwide, often in the thousands, is evidence of the significant interest and curiosity across the globe. Kalachakra ceremonies are major events requiring provisions and space for thousands of people. For example, in preparation for the Kalachakra ceremony in Guntur City, India in January 2006, the state government, recognizing the potential for the area to become a pilgrimage site, as well as the general lack of existing infrastructure, assisted heavily with planning for the extension of facilities that would accommodate the thousands who would be visiting the area. The opportunities for the tourism sector to improve were recognized by the officials who compiled a set of guidelines for sectors of the hospitality and travel industry to prepare for the event.<sup>85</sup> From His Holiness the Dalai Lama's perspective, such activity serves to make the holy place more accessible.

The first Kalachakra given in the West in July 1981 by His Holiness the Dalai Lama was held in Madison, Wisconsin.<sup>86</sup> By January 2006, he had given the empowerment 30 times in places around the world. Contemporary public

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<sup>85</sup> Nagi Reddy, "Guntur Hotels to Expand Facilities", June 16, 2005, Businessline (Chennai), 1.

<sup>86</sup> Kalachakra 2006 Amaravati, "Previous Kalachakra Empowerments Given by His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama," [http://www.kalachakra06.com/kalacha/kala\\_frameset.htm](http://www.kalachakra06.com/kalacha/kala_frameset.htm)

Kalachakra ceremonies are increasingly ‘analogous to the public initiation given by King Suchandra to the inhabitants of Shambhala.’<sup>87</sup> Legend holds that the King of Shambhala, Suchandra, journeyed to India where he requested that Shakyamuni Buddha initiate him into Kalachakra teachings. King Suchandra wrote down the Tantra and returned to his Kingdom where he then bestowed the teachings upon the entire community of Shambhala. Thus the trend, highly unusual for a Tantra of this class, was set, in giving the teachings to a very large audience.

Not only did the legendary kingdom of Shambhala play a role in the transmission of the *Kalachakra Tantra*, but according to the Tantra, it also has an important function in the world’s future (...) The victory of the Shambhala army will mark the beginning of the new “Age of Perfection” when practitioners will be able to attain enlightenment easily through the Kalachakra Tantra.<sup>88</sup>

Shambhala has been referred to as both a mythical and a real kingdom where the preservation of Buddhism is ensured. The concept of Shambhala can be viewed as completely esoteric, a plane of living which is beyond that of the mundane, as well as a literal place. The idea of receiving the initiation as a blessing is confirmed by the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama as an action to establish a karmic relationship with the Kalachakra Tantra.

In April 2005, when representatives of Namgyal in Ithaca met with Jhado Rinpoche, previous abbot of Namgyal Monastery in India, he mentioned that the complex should be designed like a Mandala and that the shrine should

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<sup>87</sup> Dina Bangdel and John C. Huntington, *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art*. (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2004), 476.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.

evoke the Kalachakra.<sup>89</sup> The name *Du Khur Choe Ling* became extremely important to Ithaca's Namgyal in spring of 2006 after resident monk Tenzin Thuthop traveled to Dharamsala to, among other things, receive a name for the site. The Dalai Lama gave the name for the site, which literally translates, to *Land of Kalachakra Study and Practice*.<sup>90</sup> Jhado Rinpoche has been highly instrumental in refining what a Kalachakra-minded complex should be. The recently bestowed name of the site is also expected to play a catalytic role in fundraising, speaking directly to individuals globally who are familiar with the Kalachakra and its meaning.

Originally, the new center was going to be set in Trumansburg, New York. When it was determined how much it would cost because of the absence of municipal water, sewage and gas, Namgyal representatives began, in 2003, looking for land that already had water and sewage. The plot of land now owned by Namgyal is a 26-acre site in Ithaca approximately three miles south of Namgyal's current residence. Anonymous Namgyal patrons donated the purchase price for the site.<sup>91</sup> The complex will be built over 1000 feet from the road and woods will surround it while the trees directly adjacent to the planned buildings will be taken out. Two natural streams exist on the site, one of which is protected as it flows into Buttermilk Falls, and both of which will be left undisturbed. While more remote settings are often preferred for retreat centres,

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<sup>89</sup> Jhado Rinpoche was in Ithaca to conduct the Vajrasattva empowerment at Namgyal.

<sup>90</sup> Dhu=Time, Khur=Wheel, Dhu Khor+ Kalachakra, Cho= Dharma/Teaching, Ling=Land

<sup>91</sup> The site was found with the aid of Diana Druker, a buyers agent at Green Street Real Estate who also assisted in acquiring their current residence and is closely connected to the Tibetan Buddhist community in Ithaca.

Namgyal values the logistical benefits of having the new complex so close to town.

As the site was not zoned for religious institutions, Namgyal, a 501 CS, needed to submit a special permit to continue with their plans for building in this MDR (medium density residential) zone. The site plan review, one of the earlier steps of the process, involved Namgyal representatives working with town engineers.

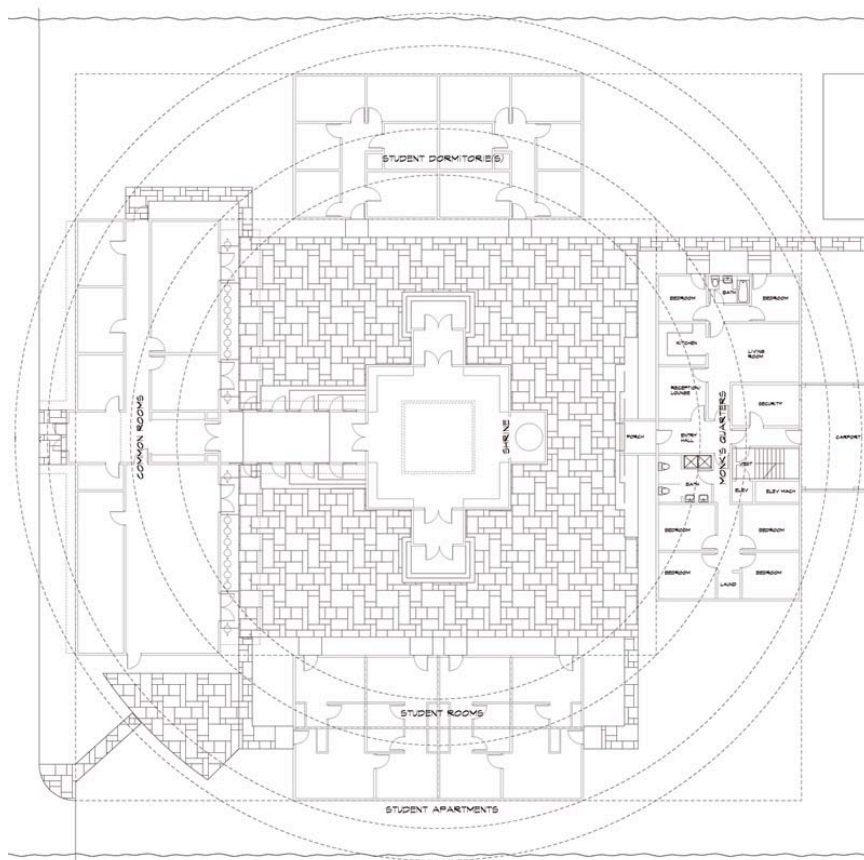


Figure 38: Temple Complex layout, Namgyal.  
Allan McLane Chambliss, Jr.



Figure 39: Temple Complex, Namgyal.  
Allan McLane Chambliss, Jr.

The idea for a Mandala design was always present and what appears in the current plan as five separate buildings in the complex is in actuality one, connected by a roof and all serving to form a courtyard. The integration of a courtyard draws directly from Tibetan Buddhist architectural tradition, as it is the classic space for debate among monks as well as offers a circumambulation route around the shrine.

The building, with indoor square footage of 13,000 square feet, is to be largely constructed of concrete with a metal roof. Decisive elements of Tibetan architecture are integrated into its design, evoking the appearance of a Tibetan Buddhist building. Incorporation of future expansions in mind also

went into the plan and there is the general sense that the construction of the temple complex will allow the community to evolve and grow, as well as the physical complex itself.

The plan includes:

- A Kalachakra themed entry pavilion with passage to the basement
- A Kalachakra themed entry gate
- West facing main building with common rooms, a large part of which will be a dining room and space to be used for talks and classes which are dharma and Buddhist related
- East facing monks residence with 4 first level bedrooms for monks, 2 upstairs bedrooms reserved for special guest,<sup>92</sup> and a suite for the Dalai Lama<sup>93</sup>
- North facing building with separate female and male dormitory space, each with 10 person capacity
- South facing building with four single rooms and two 1 bedroom apartments for student residency
- A 32 square foot Kalachakra themed central shrine room<sup>94</sup> flanked with interior niches for consultation and rest
- 5 Seasonal cabins on the east side of the lot with a 4 person capacity for summer retreats
- Parking lots

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<sup>92</sup> As these quarters are separate from those of the monks they can also be used as nun's residence as well as guest rooms for visiting high lamas and other teachers.

<sup>93</sup> The only part of the complex with a second story is the monk's quarters.

<sup>94</sup> Approximately three times larger than the current Namgyal shrine room.



- A utility and arts building
- A volleyball field

Discussion within the Development Committee concerned, among many other issues, which way the Buddha should face in the shrine. Integral in architectural religious designs of many traditions is directional influence.<sup>95</sup> As the site was not chosen with auspicious directional influence in mind, but was attained more through the ‘power of permits,’ this was not determined.<sup>96</sup> One of the Namgyal monks proceeded to do research and called upon various lamas for advice, with the main conclusion being that ‘the Buddha should have the best view.’ It was decided that the Buddha should face the West, which to some board members made sense, Namgyal itself being the Western branch of the Dalai Lama’s monastery.

Other centers have served as inspiration and models along the way for how such projects can be brought to fruition. Cornelia Tobey mentions Karma Triyana Dharmachakra as one source of inspiration, as well as a center with which Namgyal has maintained exchange with.

Karma Triyana Dharmachakra has tons of volunteer help and that is what we will rely on in the end. Karma Triyana Dharmachakra was like a model for us and an inspiration.<sup>97</sup>

The new site will fulfill the needs for the retreat,<sup>98</sup> as well as housing needs for students of the monastery and institute. There are not many full time students

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<sup>95</sup> Based on compass direction

<sup>96</sup> Cornelia Tobey, Interview with author, Ithaca, November 3, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Cornelia Tobey, Interview with author, Ithaca, November 3, 2005.

<sup>98</sup> Namgyal has been renting the Arnot Forest Field Retreat Center, owned by Cornell University, for their summer retreats.

at Namgyal, but among those that do come there is typically the interest for boarding on site, which Namgyal's current residence cannot always afford. Part time students have also expressed interest in being able to reside at the monastery during their practice and studies. The current monastic residence will remain, to be coined the 'Aurora Street House' to distinguish from the new temple complex. Evening classes and meditation will continue as they are at the Aurora Street House, offering the intimate space that practitioners have become accustomed to for practice, classes and events. The future temple complex will be for weekend retreats, weeklong retreats, Science and Buddhism Conferences and Interfaith conferences.

The new site will also serve as a cultural events and gathering center for Tibetans in Ithaca, who have a strong and intimate community here as evidenced by, among other things, the succession of an annual Tibetan Cultural Day held locally (as well as similar themed events held at Cornell University) and the presence of an active Tibetan Association of Ithaca. The 'degree of separation' between individuals involved in various monasteries across the globe is often quite close and not uncommonly a family affair. Palden Choedak Oshoe, for example, translator at Namgyal (Ithaca) is the brother of Kelsang, one of the official artists of the Dalai Lama's personal monastery, who also has done artistic work in Ithaca. Both brothers have done commissioned paintings for the Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University.

Site plan approval for the temple complex was granted in March 2006. Groundbreaking is anticipated for Spring 2007, to be preceded by two major rounds of fundraising efforts, one in Ithaca and one in New York City. The

fundraising efforts are projected to include a mandala demonstration in NYC to gather attention<sup>99</sup> and catalyze awareness of Namgyal, a two-day fundraiser at the Tibet House to bring in funds and give a Kalachakra teaching and hopefully involvement of the parent monastery in Dharamsala. At a community potluck event at the Monastery, on April 15, 2006, arranged for the architect Lane Chambliss and contractor Scott Tobey to present the graphic renderings of the complex, one attendee observed that the difference between this architectural representation and the sand mandala is that this will not be destroyed when it's built.



Figures 41-42: Tenzin Gephel on site for new temple complex, Namgyal.

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<sup>99</sup> Resident monks of Namgyal spend considerable time and energy traveling the nation giving Sand Mandala presentations.

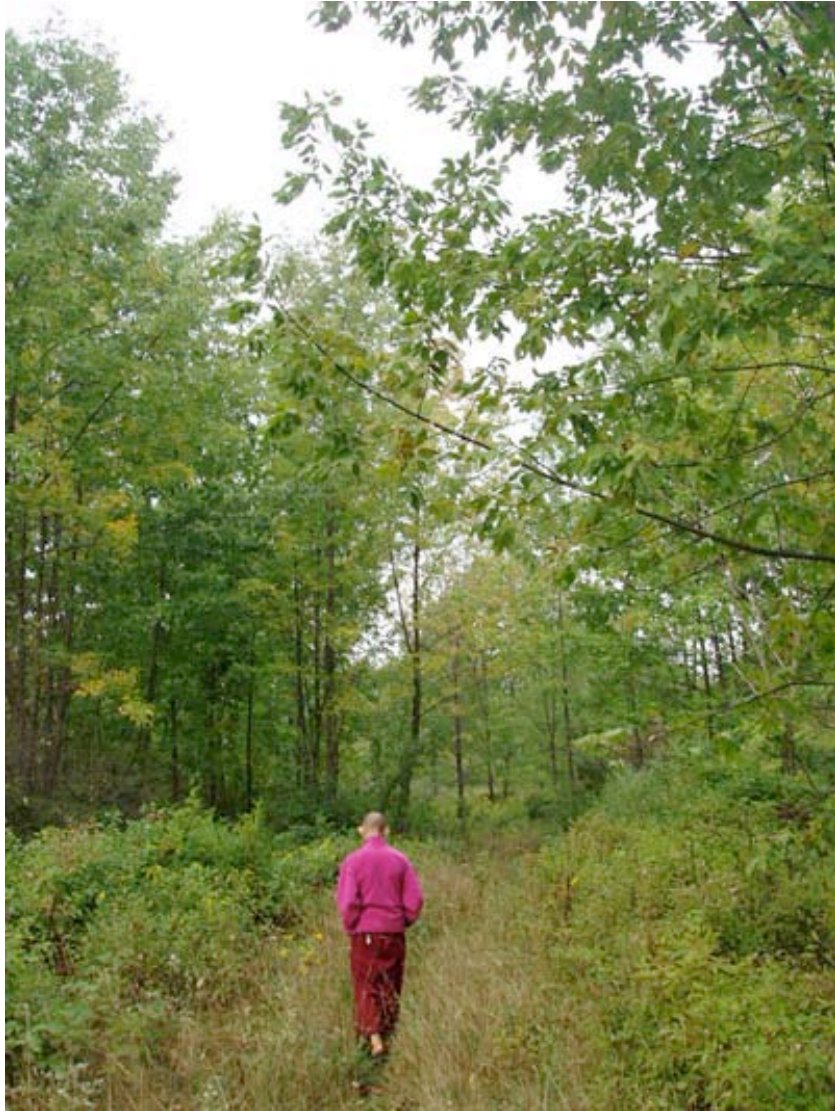


Figure 42

## CONCLUSION

A core part of preservationist's work involves telling a story. Years from now, the buildings central to the case studies in this paper will be seen as historic structures in upstate New York. At this point, the traditional methods for nominating these buildings as 'historic' would be premature, too recent is their construction. But their very existence links immediately to the story of the dramatic and recent changes in global route that Vajrayana Buddhism has taken. The recent birth of a widespread Tibetan Diaspora has been key in propelling much of this route.

It is an ironic twist of history and timing that such a devastating change of events and political power in Tibet catalyzed its national religion to dispersal and practice on a global scale. The movement of high lamas, monks and nuns, in the increasingly international Diaspora of Tibetans, to the USA was a fundamental and critical shift in the geographical transmission of this form of Vajrayana Buddhism. These Tibetan lamas, monks and nuns were pioneers on all fronts- exiled from their home country, traveling to settle in entirely new terrains and cultures.

Tibetan Buddhist religious architecture, even when removed from the context of its Himalayan origin, still often resonates as fitting and harmonious with the landscapes it is constructed in and this is perhaps in large part due to the various factors fueling location preference and design.

Starting points for further research surrounding this theme would involve more in depth exploration of each center, requiring brief stays in varying seasons, to acquire more narrative from interviews with teachers, staff and practitioners as well as further research of the historic material present at centers, including archived newsletters, correspondence and albums.

A deeper investigation into geomantic concepts at these sites, both perceived as well as integrated into construction plans, would add valuable insight into the range of issues contributing to location preference for these religious and cultural centers. That ingrained within Buddhism is a perception of a close relationship between geography, landscape and spiritual tradition raises questions on the vigor of such perceptions at individual sites throughout the country and its influence on design. A study comparing various Tibetan Buddhist centers and complexes in North America with a geomantic focus at the core, would provide for interesting research. A comprehensive nationwide survey and mapping project of Tibetan Buddhist centers, with extensive photographic documentation of each center and histories in brief would allow for a rich and visually informative overview that many audiences could appreciate.



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