

## Article

# Shouldering His Guru's Legacy: Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's Discourse in Relation to *thos-bsam-sgom* after the Death of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok

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**Abstract:** This article contributes to the growing discussion of the ways that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's legacy has been carried forward by his spiritual successors at the Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Academy (or Larung Gar), in contemporary Eastern Tibet, by focusing on the contribution of the Larung vice principal and leading second-generation luminary, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro (1962–). Drawing on a range of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's spoken teachings and writings over a twenty-year period, this article undertakes a contextualised analysis of how he has shouldered his guru's legacy in the areas of Tibetan Buddhist monastic education, monastic governance, and monastic–lay relations. It explores how the threefold framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* (listening, reflecting, meditating), whether in its parts or its entirety, lies at the centre of his reformist discourse in these matters, articulated in relation to a wide range of Buddhist and secular concepts, as well as to concrete institutions and organisational structures. It is argued that, while Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro expounds the entire framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* throughout the years in question, in 'the earlier period' (c.2000–2012), from shortly before his guru's death until approximately a decade afterwards, he subtly privileges the intellectual attributes associated with *thos-bsam*, while in 'the later period' (c.2013–2021) he reweights his exposition to give a balanced emphasis to the practice of *sgom*.

**Keywords:** Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro; Larung Gar; listening; reflecting and meditating; *thos-bsam-sgom*; monastic education; monastic governance; monastic–lay relations; Tibetan Buddhist revival; Buddhist educational reform



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## 1. Introduction

If one visits Larung Gar today, physical reminders of its founding lama, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok Wish-Fulfilling Jewel (*mkan po 'jigs med phun tshogs yid bzhin nor bu*) (1933–2004),<sup>1</sup> can be seen in the form of the large gilded portraits adorning the exteriors and interiors of many halls and buildings. These are but one of the many ways in which the Larung community continues to remember and revere its guru, invoke his power of blessing, and remind residents and visitors alike that his legacy remains alive and active in the institution today. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death in 2004 was a time of rupture, sadness, and uncertainty for Larung Gar. As a guru-centred religious institution, the loss of the figure who had served as its magnetic and inspiring lynchpin, spiritual director, chief educator, and tantric master for two-and-a-half decades raised doubts about its ongoing viability. These doubts must only have been deepened by a series of demolitions at Larung Gar in the years immediately before Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, which greatly reduced the size of the institution, hampered its activities, and demoralised the community. However, in the subsequent years, Larung Gar not only survived but flourished, growing even beyond its former size while continuing to serve as, undeniably, the most dynamic and influential hub of Tibetan Buddhism in Eastern Tibet.

The story of this period of reinvigoration is partly one of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's charismatic inspiration, even in death, and of the extraordinary prescience and resilience of his vision for Larung Gar. However, it is also one of the actions and discourse of his disciples who, once thrust into positions of second-generation leadership, did their utmost to ensure that Larung Gar authentically remained the Dharma seat of their guru. It is the second story that will be under consideration here. With a view to contributing to the growing discussion of the ways that various elements of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's legacy have been inhabited and carried forward by his spiritual successors at Larung Gar, this article focuses on the Larung Gar vice principal and leading second-generation luminary, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro (*mkhan po tshul khrims blo gros*) (1962–).

Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok did not appoint any one disciple as his sole successor to carry forward his legacy. Insofar as his legacy has been maintained, it has relied on his second-generation disciples upholding formal equality with one another while each carrying forward separate aspects of that legacy relating to the roles for which Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok trained and mentored them, albeit with an absence of specificity and prescription that has left them with considerable agency and discretion as they have navigated the contingencies of their times. Collectively, the second-generation disciples might be said to loosely span the staggering breadth of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's activities, which traversed the full range of the paṇḍita and siddha poles of Tibetan Buddhism. Individually, however, each of them has only ever been a partial successor.

From the early 2000s, by which time Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was already in worsening health, and, to a far greater degree, in the aftermath of his death, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro carried forward his guru's legacy in fields relating primarily to the paṇḍita pole of his guru's activities, namely, fields such as monastic ethics, monastic education, monastic governance, lay education, lay ethical activism, monastic–lay relations, and the rational defence of Buddhist doctrines. To carry forward such a significant portion of his guru's legacy might have appeared a heavy burden, but Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro shouldered the responsibility with extraordinary vigour.

Existing scholarship has examined his activities in some of these fields: Gayley (2013, 2016, 2017), notably, has addressed his lay ethical activism, and both Duckworth (2015) and Sheehy (2021) have explored his rational defence of Buddhist doctrines. Building on that work, this article will primarily examine Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's pursuit of his guru's legacy in the three fields of monastic education, monastic governance, and monastic–lay relations, although some reference to his activities in the fields of monastic ethics, lay education, and lay ethical activism will be integrated throughout. Specifically, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's *discourse* will be the main 'activity' under consideration, with his practical actions in the three fields described in a secondary fashion. This discourse will be contextualised through an accompanying analysis of the institutional changes at Larung Gar and the sociopolitical changes in wider Tibetan and Chinese society in this period, not only to illuminate how the context may have influenced Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse, but also to suggest how Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse may have, in turn, influenced the context.<sup>2</sup> As will be highlighted from several perspectives, the threefold framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* (listening, reflecting, meditating) (see Deroche 2021),<sup>3</sup> whether in its parts or its entirety, lies at the centre of his discourse in these matters, articulated in relation to a wide range of Buddhist and secular concepts, and also in relation to concrete institutions and organisational structures.

This article will first provide, as essential background, a short biography of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro in the years before Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death. It will then briefly discuss the context of Larung Gar's emergence as a key centre of the post-Mao Tibetan Buddhist monastic education movement. Drawing on a wide range of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's spoken teachings and writings in both Tibetan and Chinese, it will move on to analyse his discourse relating to monastic education, monastic governance, and monastic–lay relations over approximately twenty years.<sup>4</sup> Throughout this time, he expounds the entire framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* as the core of the Mahāyāna path. However, there is a

subtle but discernible shift in how he emphasises the different aspects of this framework, beginning roughly around 2013. This article will, therefore, first examine the years c.2000–2012—which are here termed ‘the earlier period’, and which encompass the time from shortly before Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s death until approximately a decade afterwards—and will contend that a slightly greater emphasis is given in his discourse during this period to the intellectual attributes associated with *thos-bsam*. It will then examine the years c.2013–2021—which is here termed ‘the later period’—and will draw attention to a reweighting of his discourse that gives balanced emphasis to the practice of *sgom*.

## 2. Biography

Born in 1962, near Kharsa Lake (*mkhar sa mtsho*) in Dranggo County (*brag ‘go rdzong*; Ch. *luhuo xian* 炉霍县) of Kardze Prefecture (*dkar mdzes khul*; Ch. *ganzi zhou* 甘孜州), to an ordinary seminomadic family, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro came of age just as Tibetan communities across the plateau were emerging from the Cultural Revolution. During his youth, he obtained a basic secular middle school education which, although devoid of any Tibetan language component because of the assimilationist cultural policies of the time, nevertheless equipped him with literacy in Chinese. In his private time, through assiduous self-study, he learned to read and write in his native Tibetan. With what was, by local standards, a very respectable level of education, several years after finishing his schooling, he gained employment at the township level of the Luhuo county government. In 1984, at age twenty-two, and after three years in the position, he declined a significant offer of promotion and resigned in order to pursue a monastic career as a disciple of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok at Larung Gar.

In 1984, the Larung community was a predominantly male saṅgha of roughly seventy members. After first venturing into the Larung valley, it would be three years before Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro next set foot outside the encampment. Under Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s close mentorship, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro applied himself with great diligence to the systematic study of the sūtric and tantric scriptures, and, at age twenty-four, he began to receive Dzogchen pith instructions from his guru. He clearly stood out among his peers for his scholastic aptitude and probity. In 1986, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok conferred on him his Dharma name of Tsultrim (*tshul khrims*—‘ethical discipline’) Lodro (*blo gros*—‘discerning intellect’), widely known to be an alternate name of the fourteenth century Nyingma master, Longchen Rabjam (*klong chen rab ‘byams*) (1308–1364).

Before long, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro had distinguished himself, not only as a promising scholar-practitioner,<sup>5</sup> but as a versatile and talented assistant. When Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok led his entire saṅgha and an estimated 10,000 followers on a pilgrimage to the sacred Buddhist centre of Wutaishan in Shanxi Province in 1987, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro served with devotion as his secretary, Tibetan–Chinese translator, and cook.

During the 1990s, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok went on to give Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro a leading role in shaping the institutionalisation and systematisation of monastic education at Larung Gar. In 1990, he was dispatched on a ten-month teaching assignment to Nyaklhang Monastery (*nyag lhang brag de’u tri*) in Nyarong County (*nyag rong rdzong*, Ch. *xinlong xian* 新龙县), where a shedra (*bshad grwa*) had been newly founded. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro returned to Larung Gar in 1991 and, after passing a set of rigorous examinations, was awarded the khenpo (*mkhan po*) degree at the highest level of distinction. While the duration required to complete this challenging degree was traditionally in the order of fifteen years, the urgent need for trained monastics to power the educational revival underway at Larung Gar, and elsewhere, led Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok to award it in some cases, including in that of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro, considerably sooner. That same year, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok appointed him to the newly created position of Dean of Studies (*slob don khang gi gtso ‘gan pa*; Ch. *jiaowuzhang* 教务长), in addition to his daily teaching duties in the shedra programme. As Larung Gar’s first ever Dean of Studies, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro was responsible for overseeing its new Education Office (established between the autumn of 1990 and the summer of 1991) and for administrative tasks, such as developing the

curriculum, setting examinations, and systematising the process for awarding degrees. He continued in this role until 2013, when he passed his administrative responsibilities to a cohort of younger khenpos, whom he had personally trained for the purpose.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's first decade as Dean of Studies accompanied a period of rapid growth, diversification, and globalisation for the Larung community more generally. His guru's burgeoning charisma among Tibetan and Han Chinese audiences saw the encampment's population increase upwards of seven hundred percent by the beginning of the new millennium. Larung Gar's initially small population of Tibetan nuns had massively expanded, making it one of the primary centres for female monasticism in Eastern Tibet. From 1993, when a designated 'Chinese Division' (Ch. *hanseng bu* 汉僧部) was established in response to the demand of a growing stream of Han Chinese Dharma-seekers, it had also become one of the few religious communities in Eastern Tibet to pedagogically accommodate Sinophone Buddhists. While Larung Gar remained on the geographic margins of the exile-based and transnational arenas of Tibetan Buddhism, the relatively relaxed cultural policies of this period enabled Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, and a small retinue of close disciples, to undertake several extensive teaching tours across Asia, Europe, and America. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro was himself sent on teaching assignments to Southeast Asia and Taiwan in 1994 and 1997, which both launched his career of international Dharma outreach and opened his eyes to the wider world. Meanwhile, from the mid-1990s, he began to develop and articulate a forceful socioreligious voice of his own through verbal and written engagement with wider Tibetan society.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly after the beginning of the new millennium, Larung Gar's decade of vigorous growth and widening international exchange suffered harsh setbacks. The delicate matrix of political conditions, regulatory openings, and personal connections that had allowed it to develop into the largest religious community in the Tibetan Buddhist world, under the watchful gaze of the Chinese state, collapsed. A series of government-ordered demolitions, beginning in 2001, led to the top-down razing of thousands of monastic dwellings, the mass expulsion of practitioners, and the imposition of a restrictive official population ceiling. Khenpo Jigme Phuntok's movements were circumscribed and his health progressively declined. On 7 January 2004, at age 71, he died. Having expressed his intent to take rebirth in Sukhāvatī, he left explicit instructions that his reincarnation should not be sought. Responsibility for continuing his legacy passed to his second-generation disciples, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro already prominent among them.

### 3. 'The Earlier Period'

#### 3.1. Monastic Education: *thos-bsam-sgom* as the Core Path

From a vantage point four decades after Larung Gar's founding, Gayley (2021, p. 17) writes that 'Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's revival of monastic scholasticism stands as one of the crowning achievements of his legacy.' Indeed, few today would deny that the results in this area have been remarkable, both in scale and in quality.<sup>7</sup> During the early decades of the post-Mao period, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's activities vis-à-vis the revival of monastic education had two components, as described by Germano (1998, p. 66), on the basis of fieldwork conducted in 1990: 'The development of rigorous scholastic training programs at Larung ... [and] at the other [shedra] in Eastern Tibet that he founded during the 1980s'.

Moreover, as Kapstein (2004, p. 252) describes on the basis of fieldwork in 1998 and 2000, over the years, Larung Gar increasingly became a key hub for a 'widespread Buddhist educational movement in Eastern Tibet' that went well beyond the monastic institutions that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok had himself founded. A key practical element of Larung Gar's role in this movement, as Kapstein identifies, was the training of a new generation of educated Buddhist clergy—khenpos, in Larung Gar's case, given its predominantly Nyingma affiliation—who could then go on to teach in their own right elsewhere. That is not to say that Larung Gar was the sole engine of this movement. Indeed, galvanising monastic quality through education was a widespread concern throughout the Tibetan Buddhist landscape, with other large monasteries, such as Labrang in northeastern Tibet, playing



leading roles in other regions (see also [Caple 2019](#), especially Chapter Four). The return of lamas from exile, where a monastic educational revival had already been underway since the 1960s (see e.g., [Brentano 2018](#)), further stoked the momentum. Nonetheless, Larung Gar was key, providing practical support, discursive guidance, and an inspirational example through the scale and sophistication of its own scholarly activities (see e.g., [Kapstein 2004](#), p. 252).<sup>8</sup>

From the beginning,<sup>9</sup> *thos-bsam-sgom* was an important emic framework through which the monastics training at Larung Gar, and promoting its mission elsewhere, discursively conceived of their activities. While Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok can rightly be described as traversing Tibetan Buddhism's two affective poles—the clerical, scholarly, and ethical at one end, and the yogic, magical, and visionary at the other (see [Samuel 1993](#))—expressed in a certain way, such binary framing can give the impression that the two poles are all but irreconcilable. At Larung Gar, however, the two poles were understood as comprising a synthetic but consistent unity, the highest ideal of Tibetan Buddhism, embodied in Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok himself. One important way in which that unity of the two poles was discursively articulated and institutionally actualised in the education system at Larung Gar was in terms of the path linking them, namely, *thos-bsam-sgom*, conceived in accordance with the gradual approach of Mipham, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's most significant Nyingma influence, who argued that, for all but a spiritually advanced minority, there was a necessary link between the precise intellectual understanding of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka in particular, and the highest nonconceptual realisations of Dzogchen. As Mipham writes in his *Beacon of Certainty* ([Pettit 1999](#), p. 209): 'In cutting through to primordial purity/One needs to perfect the Prāsaṅgika view.' In his basic teachings, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (see e.g., [Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok 2015](#), pp. 112–14) was unequivocal that this gradual path was necessary.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, since *thos-bsam-sgom* is a framework recognised as authoritative by all the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism—deriving as it does, in its canonical form, from Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* VI.5—it was useful for conveying the nonsectarian (*ris med*) ethos that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok implemented at Larung Gar, allowing it to serve as a training hub for scholars of all sectarian affiliations who could then return to their home monasteries to pass on the core scriptural knowledge of the Indo-Tibetan Mahāyāna tradition, in particular the classic Five Major Topics of Vinaya (*'dul ba*), Abhidharma (*mngon pa*), Pramāṇa (*tshad ma*), Madhyamaka (*dbu ma*), and Prajñāpāramitā (*phar phyin*).

It might seem unsurprising that the community at Larung Gar conceived of its training, at least in part, in relation to *thos-bsam-sgom*. As [Dreyfus \(2003, p. 165\)](#) explains, it is the norm for Tibetan scholastics to 'explain the soteriological value of their studies' through that framework. However, whereas Dreyfus notes that, at the Three Seats (*gdan sa*) of the Geluk School, the actual practice of *sgom* was uncommon—given that meditative practice ([Dreyfus 2003, p. 166](#)) 'requires the calm and isolation that are difficult to find in scholastic centers'—at Larung Gar, under Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, all aspects of *thos-bsam-sgom* were equally emphasised. In an institutional form, this manifested in Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok establishing not only shedra programmes focusing on *thos-bsam*, but also drubdra (*sgrub grwa*) programmes focusing on *sgom*, both at Larung Gar and, as [Germano \(1998, p. 66\)](#) observes, at other monasteries in Eastern Tibet.<sup>11</sup> However, the establishment of a formal drubdra programme was not the only way in which Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's equal emphasis on *sgom* was actualised at Larung Gar. As he himself had undergone long periods of hermitic retreat and had attained the profound realisations that grant charismatic tantric authority in the Tibetan Buddhist context, he attracted many serious meditation practitioners, both monastic and lay, who came to Larung Gar not to be enrolled in formal programmes, but to receive meditative guidance in an informal, spontaneous fashion through personalised pith instructions.

The balanced emphasis that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok placed on the full framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* stands in subtle tension with the Chinese designation of 'foxueyuan' (佛学院; *nang bstan slob gling*), which Larung Gar received in 1987. This designation played a

crucial role in its long-term survival, allowing it to develop from a ‘Dharma encampment’, (*chos sgar*) with what Terrone (2009, p. 85) describes as ‘unofficial status’ outside the formal legal-political regulations of the PRC, and protected by little more than its remote location, into a Buddhist institution limited, but also afforded a durable protection, by those regulations (see also Germano 1998).<sup>12</sup> The concept of the *foxueyuan* originated with the Chinese Buddhist modernist reformer, Taixu (1890–1947), and, in its very name—‘Buddhist Academy’—it throws emphasis on the rationalised education-centric model of Buddhism that the CCP became prepared to (re)legitimise during the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> While, on one level, the framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* accords well with this model, providing as it does, through *thos-bsam*, a firm emphasis on the foundational necessity of study and intellectual reasoning on the Buddhist path, it could be argued that the spontaneous tantric flavour of the *sgom* that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok taught as an integral part of Larung Gar’s offering never sat entirely comfortably with the bureaucratic designation of *foxueyuan*.<sup>14</sup>

Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was doubtless conscious of this, but, under the influence of the Panchen Lama (see Terrone 2021, p. 3), was savvy enough to welcome the regulatory cover of *foxueyuan*, even while exploiting the space inherent in these legal-political regulations, and the relatively light touch with which they were first implemented, in order to maintain Larung Gar as a conducive environment for tantric meditation and related activities. In this regard, Caple (2019, p. 166) offers a useful framework for understanding monastic activities in Tibet in the post-Mao period, arguing that ‘State-imposed norms and regulations may have shaped what has been possible’, but that monastic actors have still been able to act with meaningful ‘agency and responsibility’ within those regulations.

Indeed, while Larung Gar’s official classification as a *foxueyuan* linked its institutional legitimacy to its capacity to serve as, first and foremost, a Tibetan Buddhist education provider, while Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was alive, minimal prescription evidently pertained with respect to the nature of the educational project enacted within its institutional parameters. Whereas the Buddhist academies founded by Taixu in the early twentieth century, as described by Birnbaum (2003, pp. 435–36), featured rationalised modern curricula combining the study of Buddhist philosophy with foreign languages and secular subjects, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok and his disciples utilised Larung Gar’s certification as a *foxueyuan* more than half a century later to develop what was, certain innovations aside, a traditional system and culture of Tibetan Buddhist education based on an indigenous educational theory and framework, namely, *thos-bsam-sgom*. It is also worth noting that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was skilled, as Gayley (2011, pp. 438–39) explains, in the ‘subaltern strategy of appropriating aspects of the dominant discourse and reframing them for counter-hegemonic ends.’ One important feature of dominant PRC discourse was (and remains) the importance of ‘education’ (*slob gso*; Ch. *jiaoyu* 教育). Not only does this concept possess political legitimacy, but it also carries powerful social and cultural prestige. By presenting Larung Gar’s activities as a sophisticated system of education, through the designation of *foxueyuan*, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok may well have been seeking, in the words of Gayley (2011, p. 443), ‘to reverse the label of backwardness (*rjes lus*; Ch. *luohou* 落后) assigned to Tibetans and other minorities in state-sponsored media and publications.’ In this regard, it is interesting to note the grandly intellectual full name that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok accepted for Larung Gar, which as Bianchi (2018, p. 113) describes, derived from the input of both the Panchen Lama and Zhao Puchu, the President of the Buddhist Association of China: ‘The Serta Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Academy (*gser rta bla rung lnga rig nang bstan slob gling*; Ch. *Seda Larong Wuming Foxueyuan* 色达喇荣五明佛学院).

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro was appointed ‘Dean of Studies’ in 1991 and, as such, he was an important player in the training of scholars at Larung Gar and, less directly, via the fact that Larung Gar was a key node for it, a player in the wider Buddhist educational movement across Eastern Tibet. Nonetheless, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok remained the absolute leader of all Larung Gar’s activities, including in educational matters. When Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok died, however, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro immediately found himself *de facto* responsible for carrying forward his guru’s legacy as Larung Gar’s preeminent educational leader.

Rather than faltering under the burden, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro embarked on a period of immense discursive and practical activity. While a distinction can be made between his practical activities at Larung Gar itself and those beyond, his discourse from this period can be interpreted as comprising a unified whole, in which he reaffirms the importance of monastic education from first principles as it pertains, not only to the smallest village monasteries, but also to the largest institutions with the greatest capacities, such as Larung Gar. This interpretation of his discourse as comprising a unified whole is informed both by its internal consistency over many years, and by the way in which his discourse has been propagated; even those speeches that were delivered at a specific place for a specific audience were either filmed or recorded and were later made into VCDs or CDs, or were transcribed in writing and turned into books that were then circulated at Larung Gar and across Tibet to both monastic and lay audiences.<sup>15</sup> Thus, even when he makes specific prescriptions for specific situations, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro is conscious that the ideas he propounds must have general applicability.

Turning first, briefly, to his practical activities in this period, at Larung Gar, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro redoubled his commitment to the project of institutionalising mass monastic education that had begun in 1991 with the establishment of the encampment's Education Office. In a teaching given in 2006 (SS3, p. 346), he acknowledges significant progress during his, by then, fifteen-year tenure as Dean of Studies in building a comprehensive shedra curriculum, replete with 'core' (*rtsa ba*) and 'branch' (*yan lag*) courses. It should be noted that the systematisation and refinement of learning conditions among Larung Gar's separate academic divisions proceeded at different paces, with the Tibetan monks' shedra, in which Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro also taught (see e.g., [Duckworth 2021](#)), blazing the trail with its well-developed khenpo programme. While the direction of his work as Dean of Studies remained consistent with before, the impetus to further improve and consolidate the encampment's educational system was doubtless heightened in the post-guru period.

Beyond Larung Gar, meanwhile, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro stepped up efforts to unite Tibetan monastic communities across regional and sectarian lines around the cause of improving monastic education.<sup>16</sup> Between 2003–2007, for example, he claims to have travelled to more than ninety Tibetan settlements with monasteries (KTL 2012, p. 12). In doing so, he was not only forging links that would support those monasteries in establishing and strengthening their educational programmes—with or without the direct logistical support of Larung Gar—but was also doing what might, in an academic context, be described as 'fieldwork', in order to further inform his understanding of the issues on the ground. For example, he describes going to thirteen monasteries north of Kokonor (*mtsho byang*) and observing that only two had set up learning systems (MTT, pp. 153–54). The empirical 'data' from this fieldwork, interpreted with reference to Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's extensive reading in fields ranging from modern science to the histories of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist religions, and analysed in his typically intellectual fashion into categorised patterns of cause and effect, strongly shapes his discourse on monastic education in this period. With a deft political sensitivity for the art of the possible, even within the PRC, he details the problems that he observes and presents specific prescriptions for their remedy.

Turning then to this discourse, in framing Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's writings relating to the 'ten virtues' (*dge bcu*) lay ethics movement, [Gayley \(2013, pp. 250–51\)](#) observes: 'Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok provides the broad ideological backdrop for the movement . . . and Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro formulates this into a coherent series of action points in a later work.' This observation provides a useful basis for a discussion of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse in general, and captures the important fact that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok initiated, in some form, many of the discursive (and practical) activities that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro has carried forward. However, with regard to the areas under discussion here—not only monastic education, but also monastic governance and monastic–lay relations—this article seeks to give greater weight to Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's own contribution. This approach is underpinned by three key reasons. Firstly, legacies do not flow onward in

and of themselves, but depend on purposive and substantive acts of reinvestment on the part of those who follow next in line. After Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, the reaffirming and re-enacting of what Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok had initiated was, thus, a critically important step, without which various aspects of his legacy may have dissipated. Secondly, while one of the distinctive qualities of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse is, indeed, to formulate 'broad ideologies' into 'coherent action points,' in the areas under discussion such phrasing would not do justice to the erudition and systematic clarity entailed in formulating such action points in a detailed and consistent manner, nor to the ways in which Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse is not only intellectually skilful, but also morally powerful and emotionally inspiring. When advocating specific prescriptions in scholarly, pedagogical, and administrative matters—matters that can easily become dry and dull—Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro brings a didactic vigour that has undoubtedly played a key role in the adoption of those prescriptions. Thirdly, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's contribution can be understood, to some degree, as not only reiterating and promulgating Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's legacy in a compelling fashion, but also as developing that legacy in significant ways.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's speeches and writings on monastic education in the years leading up to and after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death (and subsequently) convey a deep moral concern about the corruptions of Tibetan Buddhism that he observes in his contemporary milieu, which he sees as both negative in themselves, and as threatening to the long-term survival of Tibetan Buddhism. In this regard, he follows his guru, who sought, as [Germano \(1998, pp. 69–70\)](#) describes, to purify the corruptions in Tibetan Buddhism arising from the Cultural Revolution and who put considerable thought, as [Gayley \(2011\)](#) shows, into the long-term interrelated survival of both Tibetan Buddhism and wider Tibetan culture. An important difference, however, is that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro came to maturity through the period of major socioreligious transformation in Tibet from the 1980s onwards, with the result that the corruptions he observes and seeks to address in his discourse are less those arising from the Cultural Revolution—the desecration of monasteries, the harming of lamas, the breaking of vows, and so forth—and more those arising from unwholesome trends within the Tibetan Buddhist revival, such as an excessive emphasis on building material culture, such as temples, stupas, and statues, and the problem of incompetent, or even fake, Buddhist leaders exploiting the commercialisation of society to offer flamboyant initiations and superficial spiritual guidance to those able to pay (KTL 2000, p. 299) (see [Caple 2019](#)).<sup>17</sup>

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's solution to the corruptions he observes likewise follows that of his guru in emphasising monastic ethics and monastic education as key. Like his guru, moreover, he sees ethics and education as symbiotic, with ethical discipline providing a supporting condition for learning—in accordance with Vasubandhu's canonical exposition in *Abhidharmakośa* VI.5—and learning, in turn, giving rise to the virtuous qualities that make ethical discipline and ethical comportment a natural way of life. As education is the focus here, what will be stressed is Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's unequivocal reaffirmation of his guru's idea that monastics must not be defined by their external appearance, but must, within their minds, *know* the content of the Buddhadharma, with the ever greater degrees of knowledge, understanding, and realisation that they should strive to possess articulated through the framework of *thos-bsam-sgom*.

One characteristic feature of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse is that, when he advocates something, he also makes clear what he opposes. Whenever speaking or writing about monastics—which, in context, usually refers explicitly to monks, but should also, according to his own prescriptions that they are equal, be understood as referring implicitly to nuns—Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro consistently criticises those who only know how to perform rituals such as village rites (*grong chog*) (KTL 2000, p. 316), and whose only skills are the likes of chanting quickly, beating drums (KTL 2004, p. 19), or dancing (KTL 2004, p. 319). Following his guru (see [Gayley 2021, p. 26](#)), Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro does not object to ritualistic activities per se—he affirms that rites are essential in certain cases, such as after



death (SS1, p. 451), and he states that ritual music and dances should be preserved and passed on in an authentic form (KTL 2004, p. 394)—but he is, nonetheless, clear that they should not comprise the main substance of the monastic path. If monastics are trained only in these matters then, at best, they will do little good for themselves, Tibetan Buddhism, and wider society, and, at worst, they will commit deeds that do harm to Buddhism's reputation, since despite wearing robes, they are no different in their minds from lay people (KTL 2000, p. 316).

When directly addressing what must change at monasteries where formalistic practices are all that are offered, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's language from this period is often strident, exhorting monastics to practise *thos-bsam* as their first task, and stressing that monastic learning institutions, most notably shedra, should be built as the most urgent priority:

*'There is nothing more important than establishing proper shedra in monasteries'*<sup>18</sup> (KTL 2000, p. 317); *'Those who have never done any thos-bsam training whatsoever ... do not benefit the core purpose of monasteries, which is the Dharma of scripture and realisation'*<sup>19</sup> (KTL 2004, pp. 389–90); *'There are some monasteries that only focus on rituals and ceremonies and so on but not on thos-bsam ... That is pitiful ... We should expend more effort these days solely on building up the foundations of study and practice'*<sup>20</sup> (KTL 2004, p. 395); *'We should respect the learned ones ... these days it is like this ... people look upon those who have wealth and power as very valuable and pay deference to them but do not see learned ones as valuable. But actually ... as it is said, it is learned ones who we should really respect'*<sup>21</sup> (SS3, p. 495); *'Without a shedra, it is the same whether a monastery exists or does not exist ... Don't think that a monastery is just having some monks gathering for rituals and ceremonies and going out to do village rites. There is no meaning in having monasteries like this.'*<sup>22</sup> (MTT, pp. 313–15)

As a serious pedagogue, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro (2004, p. 391) recognises that intellectual study best begins early in life, while the mind still has a greater capacity for tasks such as memorisation. He therefore asserts that Buddhist education for future monastics should ideally begin in childhood, at designated monastery schools (*slob grwa/yig grwa*), where children should receive language training, a basic cultural education (*rig gnas*), and some foundational Buddhist teachings. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro believes this education will benefit them whether they grow up to become monastics or not (KTL 2004, p. 392). While, in recent years, the political space for monasteries to teach children has narrowed significantly, Kapstein (2004, pp. 253–54) documents how, in the 1990s, Dzogchen Monastery, as well as other smaller institutions, were involved in such activities.

Notwithstanding his emphasis on childhood education, the principal institution through which Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro prescribes that monastics—ideally in young adulthood—should receive a full Buddhist education is the shedra. In his discourse from this period, he gives concrete practical guidance, describing the exact progression of a model shedra curriculum in a nonsectarian fashion (KTL 2004, p. 394).<sup>23</sup> He tells monasteries that Larung Gar can send khenpos to teach if needs be (KTL 2012, p. 38), and leaves no loophole for excuses, saying that monasteries should send their monastics elsewhere if they cannot offer them a proper education (KTL 2004, pp. 394–95).

While *thos-bsam* and the building of shedra is the first priority in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's writing, which accords with its foundational position in the framework of *thos-bsam-sgom*, he also makes it clear that monasteries should, insofar as they are able, build drubdra to provide for the practice of *sgom* (SS1, p. 395). He therefore opposes the idea—which one might even interpret as implied in some of his own rhetoric—that activities related to *thos-bsam*, such as debate, are more important than *sgom*. Expressing concern that young debate-minded monastics 'will not understand that their own practice and benefiting others are the core of the Dharma but rather think that debating is the core'<sup>24</sup> (SS1, p. 58), he deploys the traditional Mahāyāna idiom of 'not falling to the extreme' (*mtha' gnyis su mi lung*) of only focusing on scripture and reasoning (SS1, p. 59).

In some of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's rhetoric it is *thos-bsam* alone, institutionalised in a shedra, that seems to comprise what he understands by 'education', with *sgom* treated as a second, separate activity to be undertaken on completion of that education. In other places, however, it is the entire framework of *thos-bsam-sgom*, institutionalised in both a shedra and a drubdra,<sup>25</sup> that seems to comprise what he understands by 'education' in the fullest sense. Thus, he speaks about both shedra and drubdra in works titled 'Some Thoughts on the Need for Education in Monasteries' (KTL 2004) and 'General Remarks on Improving Monastic Education' (KTL 2012, pp. 1–106). Moreover, while his writings from this 'earlier period' do not go into great detail in defining the three stages of the framework and the relationships between those stages—perhaps because he thinks that such an explanation is redundant for monastics who already have access to texts explaining *thos-bsam-sgom*—in his later foundational teachings for Chinese lay audiences, he speaks of *thos-bsam* as providing an intellectual understanding of Buddhist doctrines, and of *sgom* transforming that intellectual understanding into practical understanding. In one teaching (KTL 2015), he describes this progression, in modern idiom, as analogous to the transition between knowing the theory of driving a car and actually being able to drive a car. This analogy throws some light on why Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro might conceive of *sgom* itself as part of 'education' in its fullest sense: what is gained from *sgom* is not separate from what is learnt through *thos-bsam*, but, rather, is a deeper and more embodied form of the same knowledge.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro encapsulates the totality of the system that should be implemented for monastic education at 'qualified monasteries' (*dgon pa mtshan nyid ba*), across sectarian traditions, through the formula of 'three schools and one village' (*grwa gsum sde gcig*). He writes: 'Modest paintings, statues and buildings are enough for monasteries. If you have some money, you should spend that on building shedra, drubdra and lobdra. A qualified monastery needs "three schools and one village" . . . The one "village" is a place where lay people, when they get a bit older, can practice the Dharma'<sup>26</sup> (SS3, p. 355). The 'village' will be further discussed below. What should be observed at this point, however, is the concision and practicality of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's formula, which he originated himself: 'Even though the situation of "three schools, one village" existed in the past, the term itself is new'<sup>27</sup> (SS3, p. 357).

Three further issues of interest emerge from Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse on monastic education in this period. Firstly, when speaking about nuns in particular, he tends to be unequivocal that their practice of *thos-bsam-sgom* should be identical to that of monks: 'As for nuns, the requirements are the same, there is not the slightest difference at all . . . the younger ones should work hard. No one is saying nuns cannot do *thos-bsam*, and no one should ever oppress them in this way. In general, there is no one stopping them, least of all at Larung Gar'<sup>28</sup> (SS3, pp. 237–38).

In this regard, he follows Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, who, as Liang and Taylor (2020) describe, established Tibet's first khenmo (*mkhan mo*) programme. Given that this programme had not established a deep foothold at the time of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, in order to survive as equal in status to that of the monks, it relied on the support and encouragement of influential second-generation leaders at Larung Gar, notably, of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro himself. While his discourse alludes to the fact that, on average, the nuns have not yet attained the same level of learning as the monks, he does indeed offer them such encouragement, often in quite a paternalistic strict tone (see 'Don't Blame Ghosts and Spirits all the Time' (SS3, pp. 53–55)).<sup>29</sup> He endorses the principle of the equality of nuns with monks, but stresses that practical actions—the nuns' own proactive engagement in scholarship, benefiting of society through the Buddhadharma, and advancing of Tibetan culture—will speak louder than mere words with respect to the realisation of that equality (SS3, p. 237).

Secondly, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro asserts that it is through *thos-bsam-sgom* alone, and particularly through *thos-bsam*, that monastics can preserve the Buddhadharma into the future: ' . . . the responsibility for holding the fundamental Buddhist teachings lies on the

shoulders of monks [but] that is probably not possible without education’<sup>30</sup> (KTL 2012, p. 63). He justifies this, in another discourse, through the history of the Chan School of Chinese Buddhism, which, in his reading (SS3, p. 234), ‘only focused on *sgom* but neglected teaching and studying, including exposition, debate and composition . . . Eventually, *thos-bsam-sgom* disappeared’<sup>31</sup> (i.e., even the *sgom* that the Chan School focused on disappeared). This style of well-read transcultural historical analysis is indicative of how, in certain ways, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro develops his guru’s legacy according to his own distinctive capacities.

Thirdly, while there is a clear affirmation of the importance of the entire sequence of *thos-bsam-sgom*, with *thos-bsam* more strongly emphasised for younger monastics, and *sgom* more strongly emphasised for older monastics (KTL 2012, p. 62), it is contended that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s writings from this period, despite his explicit warnings to the contrary, do indeed give greater prestige to the rational values associated with *thos-bsam* than they do to the meditative values associated with *sgom*. This is a matter of nuance. It is not difficult to find examples of him praising meditation practice in retreat as ‘the best of the best’ (*ang dang po’i nang gi dang po*) (KTL 2012, p. 54). Nonetheless, in speaking of building a shedra to practise *thos-bsam* as the priority for monasteries, in suggesting that even through *thos-bsam* alone many contemporary ills within the monastic saṅgha can be solved, and through arguing that *thos-bsam*, in particular, is key to the preservation of Buddhism, he does seem to attribute slightly higher value to intellectual attributes than to meditative ones. Moreover, in certain places, he even seems to suggest (SS1, p. 468) that it is those who are less capable who should seek to go into retreat.

The act of paying such close attention to Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse might leave the misleading impression that his prescriptions were universally adopted by his wide-ranging audiences. This was far from the case. Even at Larung Gar, there continued to be discrepancies between his prescriptions for *thos-bsam-sgom* as the mainstay of monastic life and the actual situation on the ground, while, beyond Larung Gar, the reality was even more varied. To a great degree, the uptake of educational reforms was in the hands of monastic leaders. Therefore, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse on monastic governance will now be examined.

### 3.2. Monastic Governance: Learned and Democratic Leadership

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse relating to the fulfilment of *thos-bsam-sgom* at monasteries is not limited to explaining what a full monastic education system should include. He has a realist’s grasp of the fact that education systems can only be implemented by those who actually run monasteries. With this in mind, he sets forth clear and strongly worded proposals for the reform of monastic governance. While Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s proposals for monastic governance reform have precedent in Buddhist modernist movements, including in reforms pushed by the likes of the Dalai Lama in exile, and reflect the broader influence of liberal-democratic discourse among monks across the Tibetan world during the post-Mao revival (see e.g., Caple 2011; Lempert 2016),<sup>32</sup> they nevertheless represent a radical shift in values from Tibetan tradition, and, even if influenced in spirit by Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s ideals, they mark a clear expansion of his guru’s vision.

Three interrelated issues appear to provide the context and motivation for his proposals. First, his empirical observation in this period that certain types of monastic leadership are obstructing the implementation of monastic education. Second, his sincere commitment to democratic egalitarian ideals and his evident distaste for the pitfalls of traditional Tibetan Buddhist models of leadership. Third, the pressing need at Larung Gar itself to create a new and durable leadership structure after the death of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok in order to ‘institutionalise his charisma’ in a way that could protect and carry forward his legacy, even while conforming with the political-regulatory constraints entailed in the designation of Larung Gar as a *foxueyuan*.

The first issue links most explicitly to monastic education itself. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro writes: ‘You might be wondering whether there are people who say that we don’t

need study and practice (*bshad sgrub*)<sup>33</sup> in monasteries; [I can tell you] there are many of these types indeed'<sup>34</sup> (KTL 2012, p. 30). The most significant polemical targets of his rhetoric are the traditional leaders of monasteries, whether reincarnate tulkus (*sprul sku*) or hereditary lamas, who—in the non-Geluk schools especially—are often noncelibate, and who Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro often refers to collectively as the 'monastery leaders' (*dgon dpon*). He takes a two-pronged approach to navigating the power and sensibilities of this broad and diverse group. On the one hand, he holds them responsible for the training and behaviour of the monks in their monasteries, calling upon them to set up systems of monastic education, and praising them if they do so. Thus, he says: 'It is ultimately up to the monastery leaders whether or not there is a division for study and practice. It is thanks to the monastery leader if a virtuous attitude is developed within a monastery'<sup>35</sup> (SS1, p. 290).

On the other hand, he says monastery leaders should not implement these changes by themselves (KTL 2012, p. 18), but should instead set up a 'monastic committee' (*dge 'dun mthun tshogs*) to address issues including, but not limited to, monastic education:

*'So the first thing to do is form a committee in the monastery to manage all the internal and external matters of the monastery . . . It has to be a group of more than four people who are elected by monks, who have a comprehensive understanding of the Buddhadharma, who have a pure-minded attitude of service towards the Dharma, and especially who care greatly for study and practice.'*<sup>36</sup> (KTL 2004, p. 389)

The qualities of the monks who should be elected to the committee, namely, learnedness and compassion, reflect the very qualities that, in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's view, monastic education generates. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro suggests that, ideally, the committee should be inclusive of both ordinary monks and the traditional monastery leaders, if those leaders possess the relevant qualities: 'Whether monastery leaders or ngakpa, if they possess the qualities mentioned earlier they should be selected in the committee'<sup>37</sup> (KTL 2012, p. 29).

However, what if the leaders are reluctant to introduce monastic education? In this case, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro seems to suggest that the monks should proceed with establishing the proposed committee anyway: 'Monastic study and practice should not be ignored just because one person cares less about it; it has to be held deeply at heart and be well organised by the committee elected by the monks'<sup>38</sup> (KTL 2004, p. 390).

While, from one perspective, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro seems to be mainly focused on ensuring a governance structure that will deliver effective monastic education, and is prepared to accept a prominent role for traditional monastery leaders if they support monastic education, there is also plentiful material in his discourse that suggests he sees weakening the power of traditional monastery leaders amid the moral depredations of the contemporary context as an end in itself. In one teaching (KTL 2012, p. 27), he disparages the self-interest of those present-day lamas and tulkus who 'imitate big bosses' (*tshong pa chen po dag gi lad mo byas*), 'compete over the height of their thrones' (*khri mtho dman brtsad*), and 'solely copy the style of big kings' (*mi chen rgyal po'i lad mo sha stag byed*) in their quest for wealth and power, and is emphatic that such individuals bring 'no benefit whatsoever' (*phan gang yang thogs kyi mi 'dug*).

In some regards, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's evident antipathy towards the abuses of traditional models of leadership, such as the tulku system, is a direct continuation of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's legacy in this regard (see [Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok 2015](#), p. 108).<sup>39</sup> As Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro himself notes: 'Among us Nyingmapa there was no one more qualified than Lama Wishfulfilling Jewel to recognise tulkus but he never recognised a single tulku in his entire lifetime. This tells us something'<sup>40</sup> (KTL 2012, pp. 34–35). Furthermore, as [Germano \(1998, p. 69\)](#) notes, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was sceptical of noncelibate practitioners who, in his view, often 'used the claim of a 'tantric lifestyle' to legitimize doing as they pleased under the spell of sexual desire.' Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro echoes this scepticism about noncelibacy in remarks suggesting, indirectly, that the leaders



who do not introduce education systems are often the very ones who ‘are not monastics and have wives’ (*rab byung ma red bud med ‘dug*) (KTL 2012, p. 32). Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s influence can even be seen in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s criticism of the ‘kingly decree’ (*rgyal po’i smra ba lan gcig*) (KTL 2012, pp. 22–30) at many monasteries, whereby one leader decides and has the final say on everything. During the 1990s, as noted above, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok had taken steps to give positions of important leadership and responsibility to disciples, including Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro himself, rather than monopolising all the power.

While his negative critique of the potential for abuse in traditional leadership models echoes that of his guru, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s positive case for a democratic model is more distinctively a development of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s legacy, even if it is far from original in the wider context of Buddhist modernism. His rhetoric (KTL 2012, p. 35) reveals that he has read about American democracy and the advantages of the separation of powers. He suggests (SS3, pp. 484–85) that there is a relationship between democracy and the internal unity of a community, even while recognising that this is a fragile construct and that it may allow for certain misuses of democracy, such as endless disputation or disrespect for elected leaders, which can exacerbate division. Finally, an underlying theme in his discourse is that democratic elections are more likely to deliver meritocratic outcomes than a monarchical system, and are, thus, more likely to give responsibility to those who are learned and virtuous.

Even while advocating for democratic changes that are influenced by modern ideals, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro attributes the foundation of many of these ideals to the Buddha: ‘In fact, the Buddha was the first to initiate a democratic system before democracy even existed in the world’<sup>41</sup> (KTL 2012, p. 19). He thus implicitly suggests that the situation he is trying to rectify is the corruption of an original and purer model. Indeed, the choice of four as the minimum number of monastics on the committee clearly echoes the traditional minimum number of monks required to be present to form a quorum for ordination. It is also significant that, in calling for greater democracy—which, in its socialist rather than liberal conception, is an important and prestigious concept in the PRC—Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro not only articulates his ideas for governance within the linguistic space allowed by the PRC’s legal-political regulations, but also, in the manner discussed above, follows his guru in seeking to counter the assertions of ‘backwardness’ and—in this governance context—of ‘feudalism’ (Ch. *fengjian* 封建), which are mainstays of PRC discourse about Tibetans (see Gayley 2011, 2021).<sup>42</sup>

Three further points should be noted. Firstly, there is a degree of tension between certain essential aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and democratisation. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro addresses this issue directly by distinguishing between the ‘religious system’ (*chos kyi lam lugs*), namely, issues of monastic management, rules, and regulations, which can be democratised, and the ‘Buddhadharma’ (*chos*) itself, with its teachings on the absolute authority of the guru in the guru–disciple relationship, and on the truth of orthodox doctrines, which cannot: ‘We cannot say that whether or not we listen to a lama possessing the three kindnesses should be decided through a raising of hands. . . . Likewise, there is no way that we would determine whether to accept karmic cause and effect by raising our hands’<sup>43</sup> (SS3, p. 487).

Secondly, while Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro advocates for a weakening of the power of traditional monastery leaders, he has no desire to cause conflict. Indeed, he follows his guru (see Gayley 2011, p. 448) in emphasising unity among the Tibetans, and instead seeks compromise:

*‘It is up to the monasteries to decide what to do with tulkus, but as for those tulkus who were recognised by spiritual forefathers, regardless of whether they are good or bad, all the monks should respect them even if they do not know basic grammar or how to read. When having festivals and assemblies, they should sit at the front on a high seat... They should also be included and consulted in the discussions of monastery matters’<sup>44</sup> (KTL 2012, pp. 32–33); ‘... we should not dethrone the monastery leader but should let him*

*stay in his position . . . otherwise it will create violent conflicts . . . but these monastery leaders must rotate from time to time. There are strong reasons why global leaders serve five-year terms.*<sup>45</sup> (KTL 2012, p. 37)

This suggests that the deep reform of monastic governance is not the very highest of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's priorities, and that, given his practical and realistic bent, he would rather work with traditional hierarchies to increase monastic education than position himself against them.

Thirdly, in alignment with what was asserted at the end of the discussion of monastic education, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse with respect to monastic governance in this earlier period tends to valorise *thos-bsam* over *sgom*. From an emic perspective, traditional monastic leaders legitimately wield power because they are believed to possess (from previous lives, in the case of tulkus) prestigious spiritual qualities associated with the practice of *sgom*. While Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro does not deny that certain traditional leaders nowadays may indeed possess these qualities, by stating that such qualities are chiefly valuable in specific contexts, such as in tantric initiations or rituals, and by making clear that they do not automatically equip their bearers to legitimately wield power over the management of monasteries, he undercuts and limits the value of *sgom*. Moreover, by asserting that it is the intellectually learned who are the most qualified participants in the management of monasteries, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro can be seen as bolstering the prestige of those who possess the qualities derived from *thos-bsam*.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse on monastic governance in this period cannot be separated from the context of the significant transformation in monastic governance at Larung Gar after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death. The full nexus of causation between the two is impossible to fully map, but it is beyond doubt that they influenced each other, with Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's ideas feeding into what was implemented at Larung Gar, and that implementation, and its attendant lessons drawn from trial and error, in turn, feeding back into his discourse. Here, the changes at Larung Gar will be briefly described, without any deep effort to analyse the causes, but with the aim that the parallels and resonance with Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse can be seen.

After the guru's death, Larung Gar witnessed a quintessential 'institutionalisation', or 'routinisation', of charisma—the process whereby conditions for long-term organisational survival are created by stabilising the charismatic authority of an individual into ongoing structures. According to Weber's (1978, p. 241) paradigmatic analysis, an orderly determination of who legitimately wields power must be arrived at in order for a social organisation to endure beyond the period of its initial charismatic leader.

Thus, the issue for Larung Gar after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death was not that the second-generation disciples might somehow misinterpret his legacy, but rather that, in seeking to carry his legacy forward, they might fail to divide up and structure their separate responsibilities in a way that avoided conflict and that guaranteed the legitimacy of the new system of governance.

This challenge was smoothed over by the fact that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok had already taken steps to institutionalise some power outside his own charismatic person in the 1990s. For one thing, his longstanding tantric tutelage of his niece, Jestunma Mume Yeshe Tsomo (*rje btsun ma mu med ye shes mtsho mo*) (1966–), known in the Larung community by the honorific title of Lama Mumtso, positioned her as his logical ritual successor.<sup>46</sup> Echoing the hereditary 'bones' (*rus pa*) principle of succession common in the Nyingma tradition, after his death, she took the role of the formal tantric leader of Larung Gar, who sits on the highest throne to lead the community's tantric empowerments. She also took the formal Chinese title of 'yuanzhang' (*gling gtso*; 院长), the technical head of the *foxueyuan* required by regulation. To manage all the other aspects of Larung Gar's governance, however, by 2007, the second-generation disciples had formed a committee of senior khenpos and had established a rotating system whereby two representatives were elected to hold executive administrative leadership for five-year terms. Significantly, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro was one of the first two executive leaders holding this post in the immediate post-guru period.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, outside the formal leadership structure, principles of equality were institutionalised for the entire Larung community, which, in time, became known as the ‘five equalities’ (*‘dra mnyam lnga*):<sup>48</sup> (1) Equality of income (donations are divided equally between even the most senior leaders and the most junior novices); (2) Equality of place (no one is entitled to a higher seat unless actually engaged in the act of teaching or leading a ritual); (3) Equality of works (everyone has to share in community chores); (4) Equality of gender (monks and nuns, as well as lay practitioners of both genders, have equal status); (5) Equality of ethnicity (Tibetans, Chinese, and any other ethnicities have equal status). Irrespective of whether these ‘five equalities’ have been consistently, fully, and universally implemented at Larung Gar, they have served as an influential social contract for the community in the era after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s death.

In these institutional changes, there is much that resonates with Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse on monastic governance. Nonetheless, tensions can also be observed. To tease out just one example, the manner of Lama Mumtso’s succession, which echoes hereditary principles, seems slightly discordant with the egalitarian and democratic model that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro advocates. However, both the fact that she is a woman and the fact that her role as the symbolic figurehead and tantric lineage holder of the community is not coterminous with its everyday educational management, and is, therefore, in line with the principle of the separation of powers, seems concordant with that model.

Such issues will now be put to one side, however, in order to turn to another important aspect of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse, which concerns monastic–lay relations.

### 3.3. Monastic–Lay Relations: Teaching as the Key Activity

In Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse from this period, the practice of *thos-bsam-sgom* is, to some degree, presented as an end in itself for monastics, both because it will bring about positive transformations in their individual minds, and because it will make it possible for the monastic saṅgha collectively to preserve the Buddhadharma for future generations. However, the dominant theme of his writings is that training in *thos-bsam-sgom* should not be seen purely as an end in itself, but, rather, should prepare monastics to benefit beings in accordance with the bodhisattva ideal of the Mahāyāna tradition. On the deepest level, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro sees benefitting beings not merely as the activity that monastics should perform as the next task after completing substantive educational programmes in *thos-bsam-sgom*, but rather as the ultimate aim and justification of that very training, which should underpin their motivation and orientation throughout.

*‘As for our Gar, if it [continues] to be a place that benefits sentient beings for a long time, then it is good that it remains. If it is not beneficial then I am not so sure whether there is much meaning in it being here.’*<sup>49</sup> (SS3, p. 324)

Following Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (see Gayley 2011, pp. 458–59), Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro speaks of sentient beings less in terms of the traditional Buddhist cosmology of the six realms, and more through what Gayley (id.) describes as a ‘this-worldly’ framework, comprising widening spheres of human lay society: individual Tibetan villages, Tibetan society at large, the entire Chinese nation, and the whole world. While there is ample textual evidence of his concern for other sentient beings, especially animals, as seen through his advocacy of vegetarianism, life-release and the non-slaughter movement (see Gaerrang 2015, 2016; Gayley 2017; Barstow 2018; Hardie 2019), the focus here is the human realm. His key prescription is for monastics to proactively engage in teaching ordinary Tibetans the foundations of the Buddhadharma. This is influenced by, and builds upon, the vision of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, who was himself deeply engaged in teaching lay audiences, as evidenced, for example, by the *Heart Advice* that Gayley (2011) analyses, and who often sent his own disciples, including Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro, to teach elsewhere, but who seemingly did not systematise to the same degree the idea that teaching is a core activity for all monastics.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro writes:

*‘Lay people in many areas just see the Dharma as a good thing that is beneficial for the next life; they can recite some mani and sado mantras,<sup>50</sup> but they have no idea about the content of the Dharma and the right ways to practise it. There are so many Buddhist scriptures in the Tibetan language and the contents are so rich. Even though we possess such rich contents of the Dharma, it is really sad that so many people do not have even a basic knowledge and pass empty-handed into the next life. The core reason for this is because we have not been able to promote Buddhism and spread an understanding of it among the people.’<sup>51</sup> (KTL 2000, p. 324)*

As an orthodox Buddhist scholastic who vigorously upholds the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth (see [Sheehy 2021](#)), Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro believes that teaching on this topic will benefit lay people by creating the causes for their liberation in future lives. However, following his guru (see [Gayley 2011](#)), Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro is also deeply concerned with addressing the contemporary social problems in Tibetan society. In powerful language, he argues that the key to solving these problems is lay people knowing the Buddhadharma, and that it is well-educated monastics who must be the ones to teach them:

*‘Monasteries not only should educate monks, but also educate and care about the faithful masses in their divine communities or those with whom they have a connection. This is extremely important . . . ’<sup>52</sup> (KTL 2004, p. 395); ‘If every monastery has a quality teaching system, monks will have the opportunity to understand and practise Buddhism profoundly. They will not only be able to stand on their own feet but will also be able to guide others on the path of liberation. As a result, the Buddhadharma will last for a long time. Because people’s minds will become tamed, they will not kill, steal, fight or cheat. All the causes of suffering will grow fewer and they will attain happiness immediately.’<sup>53</sup> (KTL 2004, pp. 393–94)*

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro states that monastics should engage in teaching as an end in itself, in accordance with *bodhicitta*, not as a means to receive donations. He urges them not to ‘look for comfortable places or places where one can get a lot of offerings’, but to ‘go to poor places bereft of the Dharma’<sup>54</sup> (KTL 2000, p. 318). This indicates an important difference between his approach to the relationship between the monastic saṅgha and lay society, and the approach articulated by [Germano \(1998, p. 70\)](#)—and adopted by [Liang and Taylor \(2020\)](#)—when he explains the reasons for Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s strict monastic values: ‘In this way [Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok] felt that monastic communities could purify themselves and again become worthy fields of merit for lay people to honor, offer alms, and go to for refuge. It cannot be overemphasized how central this ethical issue is in terms of the relationships between lay individuals and monks, since ethical purity (especially celibacy) is what qualifies the monks as recipients of offerings from the lay community’.

Two points should be examined in this context. Firstly, Germano suggests that the relationship between the monastic saṅgha and lay society is, in an important sense, a defensive one: the monastic saṅgha needs something that lay society possesses, namely, offerings, and it therefore has to justify receiving those offerings by providing something in turn. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s approach is far more confident: the monastic saṅgha possesses something that lay society needs, namely, the substantive content of the Buddhadharma, and they should go out and share it. It should be noted that, unlike the situation facing Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok when he first founded Larung Gar in the 1980s, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse responds to a contemporary reality in which certain monasteries, including Larung Gar, are increasingly awash with donations. These donations, moreover, often derive from Chinese, and even foreign sources, rather than Tibetan sources. While the lack of total reliance on financial support from Tibetan lay people may partly account for the confident emphasis of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s approach, his approach is noteworthy, nonetheless. Secondly, even insofar as Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro acknowledges that lay devotion to and support for the monastic saṅgha is crucial for Buddhism’s survival, and sees this as anchored, to some degree, in reciprocal exchange, he describes the goods given by the monastic saṅgha in exchange for donations less in terms of intangible benefits



relating to future lives conveyed via the passive process of the monastic saṅgha serving as a field of merit, and more in terms of concrete benefits relating to this life conveyed via the active process of the monastic saṅgha engaging in teaching.

In emphasising that the monastic saṅgha should provide concrete tangible benefits for lay people, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro follows in a tradition of Buddhist modernists in the Chinese world, such as Taixu (1890–1947), and his successor, Zhao Puchu (1907–2000).<sup>55</sup> It is therefore notable that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro, in several discourses, goes out of his way to distinguish his approach from Taixu's and Zhao Puchu's 'Humanistic Buddhism' (*mi yul kyi nang bstan*; Ch. *renjian fojiao* 人间佛教) (see Goossaert and Palmer 2011, pp. 79–83 and 160–61). Even though, in general, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro (2000, p. 320) advocates that Buddhists engage in philanthropic deeds, he asserts (KTL 2012, p. 84; SS1, p. 463; SS2, p. 120) that Humanistic Buddhists fell into the extreme of overemphasising activities such as helping the poor, building schools, and building hospitals, to the extent that they lost sight of *thos-bsam-sgom* altogether. He describes *thos-bsam-sgom* as the 'root' (*rtsa ba*) of the monastic path, and philanthropic activities as the 'branches' (*yal ga*) and 'leaves' (*lo ma*) (SS1, p. 463). While he affirms that both the root as well as the branches and leaves should be practised, he makes clear that the root is more fundamental: 'If you think building schools, hospitals, and helping poor people are more important and *thos-bsam-sgom* is not important, that is totally wrong'<sup>56</sup> (SS3, p. 226). Although Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro does not explicitly discuss teaching the Dharma to lay people in the passages distinguishing the 'root' and the philanthropic 'branches,' he makes clear elsewhere that Dharma teaching is a more valuable act than mere material philanthropy.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro goes into considerable detail in describing how exactly the Buddhist teaching of lay people should be enacted. He is conscious of the need to be smart in navigating government regulations and policies (SS3, p. 392), and is concerned (SS3, p. 326) to ensure that political leaders do not get the impression that Larung Gar is the leader of a cross-plateau movement, but, for the most part, he seems to treat such regulations and policies as leaving ample space for what he proposes.<sup>57</sup> For one, he advocates that monasteries set up lay teaching programmes through dedicated institutions. Thus, within the context of the 'qualified monastery' described above, he imagines the 'school' (*slob grwa/yig grwa*) serving as a centre for the teaching of both monastic novices and lay children, and the 'lay village' (*dge bsnyen sde*) serving as a centre, not only for the elderly to retire to, but also for the teaching of lay people in general, including young adults (SS3, p. 356). However, as not all monasteries are able to set up such centres, he also advocates that learned monastics should play a leading role in what might best be understood as a comprehensive missionary programme, with the important proviso being that the objects of their mission are not non-Buddhists to be converted, but rather faithful Buddhists to be taught:<sup>58</sup>

*'Although Buddhism is well-developed in Tibetan areas generally, there are still many places, including remote regions, where the righteous Dharma is extremely scarce . . . They also cannot afford [to invite teachers from other places] . . . So, we should volunteer with altruistic minds to go to those poor and humble places that lack the noble Dharma and give teachings. At the same time, we should also go to cities and promote the Dharma because cities are the centres of economy and culture. This is important because there is no meaning if we just let the Buddhadharma remain in mountain valleys. In addition, it is important to make books, videos and audio materials to transmit basic knowledge of the Buddhadharma.'*<sup>59</sup> (KTL 2000, p. 326)

With his typical eye for detail, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro even describes a basic curriculum that monastics could teach to Tibetan lay people, which follows the 'stages of the path' (*lam rim*) approach, and which, he stresses, must be adapted according to the abilities of the audience. This begins with the refuge vow and at least some lay precepts, and proceeds through the paths for the 'three kinds of person,' (*skyes bu gsum*), covering

‘the good qualities of the Three Jewels, the benefits of liberation, the detriments of cyclic existence, past and future lives, the law of karmic causality, and so on’<sup>60</sup> (KTL 2000, p. 325).

In order to serve as good teachers in practice, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro says that monastics must have, themselves, developed a deep understanding of the Dharma through training in *thos-bsam-sgom*. However, there is an emphasis in his overall discourse on the training in *thos-bsam* being especially key. As evidenced by the style of his own writings, his conception of a successful Dharma teaching is one that, first and foremost, provides a clear conceptual explanation of the Dharma, not one that is inspiring in some vague poetic sense. Thus, while Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro never expresses it in such explicit terms, it nonetheless seems to be the case that, from his perspective, a monastic who has attained personal realisation through training in the entire framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* may perhaps be able to give a better Dharma teaching than a monastic who only possesses intellectual knowledge through *thos-bsam*. However, a monastic who only possesses intellectual knowledge through *thos-bsam* will certainly be able to give a better Dharma teaching than a monastic who has practised some *sgom*, but who lacks a foundation in *thos-bsam*.

Moreover, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro states that, in order to successfully engage with lay society, monastics must learn knowledge other than Buddhism:

*‘In [the scriptures and commentaries], it is said that a bodhisattva should learn everything. As long as it is for the temporary or ultimate happiness of people, we must learn as much as we can. So our study as monastics is of utmost importance.’*<sup>61</sup> (SS1, p. 449)

The three main areas of knowledge that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro cites, with differing degrees of emphasis (KTL 2012, p. 89; SS1, p. 464; SS2, p. 126), are cultural knowledge (*rig gnas*), which seems to refer primarily to the five major and five minor sciences—excluding Buddhism—revered in Tibetan culture since introduced by Sakya Paṇḍita;<sup>62</sup> other languages, most notably English and Chinese;<sup>63</sup> and modern knowledge, in particular the natural sciences, such as physics and astronomy. In part, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro seems to think such knowledge will allow monastics to frame and articulate their teachings according to the zeitgeist, making them accessible by adopting the idioms and psychology of contemporary society. His analysis of the success of Christian missionaries is their mastery of such methods: ‘Even though the religion in essence is not reasoned, precisely because it is in the hands of [people with modern knowledge and missionary know-how] it has spread across the five continents’<sup>64</sup> (SS2, p. 111).

At the same time, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro also sees such wider knowledge as necessary in order for monastics to defend Buddhism from polemical attack when they engage in lay society. His discourse is situated within a context in which attacks and challenges appear to come from all sides. For example, there is a need to defend both Tibetan Buddhism and wider Tibetan culture from the charge of ‘backwardness’ laid against it by PRC state discourse, which, in turn, requires knowledge of the sophistication of Tibet’s historical culture. There is a need to defend Tibetan Buddhism from the charge levelled by the likes of the secularly educated Tibetan ‘New Thinkers’ (*bsam blo ba gsar ba*), that it is responsible for the ills and predicaments of Tibetan society (see Ronis 2021, p. 110). Moreover, as is most pronounced in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s own discourse, there is a need to defend the core doctrines of Tibetan Buddhism, such as rebirth, against the challenges posed by modern science. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro himself is renowned on the Tibetan plateau for his efforts to mount a rational defence of Buddhist doctrines (see Duckworth 2015; Sheehy 2021). His corpus is filled with statements that Buddhism is a rational religion rather than a religion based solely on faith. He argues that Buddhism has nothing to fear from science and adopts various—sometimes seemingly contradictory—rhetorical postures to make his case. For example, in the ‘Clear Mirror’ (KTL 2000), he argues that Buddhism can neither be proven nor disproven by science, that Buddhism is corroborated by science, and that Buddhism is, in fact, more advanced than science.

It was noted above, when discussing his discourse around monastic education and monastic governance in this ‘earlier period,’ that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro seems to place

a somewhat greater emphasis on *thos-bsam* than *sgom*. This sense is strengthened by the points just made about his discourse relating to teaching. One result of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's emphasis on the further secular knowledge and intellectual skills required to be a good teacher and polemicist in lay society—when considered alongside the way in which Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro, through his own example, shows that Dharma teachings should be systematic and rational—is that the attributes associated with *thos-bsam* receive greater valorisation in his discourse about teaching to lay people than the attributes associated with *sgom*. By affirming that the ultimate purpose of *thos-bsam-sgom* is to benefit beings, by stating that lay Tibetans are best served by Dharma teaching, and by describing how such teaching is best conducted in practice, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro makes a powerful case for the value of intellectual capacities, but, perhaps unintentionally, does not make a correspondingly strong case for the value of meditative capacities.

#### 4. 'The Later Period': Reweighting towards *sgom*

Taken collectively, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse and action in the fields of monastic education, monastic governance, and monastic–lay relations over the two decades in question have a striking consistency. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect, from the period beginning roughly around the year 2013, a subtle shift of emphasis towards the meditative values associated with *sgom*, which rebalances the stronger emphasis he seems to place on *thos-bsam* in what has been termed, 'the earlier period.'<sup>65</sup> The extent of this shift should not be overstated; after this point, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro continues to uphold everything that he upheld previously. Nor should the shift be understood as happening at one particular moment or in one particular text or action; it is a subtle reweighting that can be observed only in relation to a wide range of his discourse and action. It arises not because of any change in his conception of *thos-bsam-sgom*, in its totality, as the core of the Mahāyāna path, but in response to and as a corrective of issues he observes in the apparent implementation of study and practice in his milieu. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's underlying motivation, as in the period immediately after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, is still to carry forward his guru's legacy with regard to the entire framework of *thos-bsam-sgom*, in what he perceives to be a balanced fashion.

Given the subtlety of the reweighting, one might question why it is worth drawing attention to at all. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, the fact that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro makes adjustments to his discourse relating to *thos-bsam-sgom* in light of what he observes further reinforces the point that has been made about his empirical and practical disposition. While his discourse on *thos-bsam-sgom* is firmly anchored in Tibetan Buddhist tradition, he is not inflexible in how he goes about articulating that framework, and he perceives its implementation to be a matter of constant balancing and rebalancing.<sup>66</sup> Secondly, the subtle shift in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse parallels, and responds to, important evolutions at Larung Gar and in wider Tibetan Buddhist society in the years after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death. The socioreligious environment did not remain static in these years, and it is therefore valuable to show how Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse and actions are not static, but, rather, evolve in a dynamic fashion. The subtle shift can be seen in his teachings to two broad audiences: monastics and lay people.

The issues informing his reweighted emphasis on *sgom* for monastic audiences seem to have arisen primarily from the evolution of Larung Gar itself in the decade after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, following the demolitions of the early 2000s. On the one hand, this evolution was successful, resulting in Larung Gar growing even larger than its previous size.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, this evolution was not perfectly balanced with regard to *thos-bsam-sgom*. While the shedra-based educational programmes for both monks and nuns, Tibetan and Chinese, flourished,<sup>68</sup> with the result that ever more khenpos and khenmos graduated from Larung Gar with a strong training in *thos-bsam*, Larung Gar seems to have become a slightly less conducive environment for the meditative practice of *sgom*. It is not the intention here to pick apart the full nexus of causes and effects and give accurate weight to each, but the following range of factors can be suggested as important.

Firstly, as a result of the increased state attention that followed the first cycle of demolitions and Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, which was further exacerbated by the CCP's general crackdown in response to the 2008 protests and to the subsequent series of self-immolations in Eastern Tibet, the second-generation leaders collectively had to take ever greater care to secure Larung Gar's existence. Therefore, they not only restrained Larung Gar's monastic population from becoming involved in the political upheavals of the times, but also emphasised those aspects of Larung Gar's mission that accorded best with the designation of *foxueyuan*, namely, the khenpo and khenmo programmes at the shedra of the monks and nuns respectively, which, as McDougal (2016, p. 57) observes, became ever more institutionalised into a rationalised and bureaucratised system of classes, examinations, and qualifications that accorded with the academic university-like approach favoured by the state.

Secondly, with its increased resident population, the improved roads leading to it, and the increased number of pilgrims and tourists visiting, Larung Gar became too big, busy, noisy, and distracting for the effective practice of *sgom*, at least at certain times of the year.

Thirdly, after the death of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, no second-generation leader was able to fully step into his centralised role as the tantric guru to inspire and lead the meditative activities of the whole community through large-scale empowerments and spontaneous individualised pith instruction. Although Lama Mumtso formally inherited the role of tantric leader, in part because of the strict equality of the second generation, in part because of her ill health throughout the entire period after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, and in part because of the patriarchal norms of Tibetan society constraining her ability to serve as the active guide of the male monastic population, she was not able to wholly embody Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's legacy in this regard, and nor was any other leader of the second generation.<sup>69</sup> Serious tantric meditation in a Tibetan context has never been upheld only through institutionalised courses such as drubdra programmes or three-year retreats; rather, it has received its fullest actualisation either in relatively spontaneous, unstructured, free communities, centred on a tantric guru, or in solitary hermitic or wandering retreats. Thus, notwithstanding that Larung Gar's drubdra programme remained in place it was probably inevitable that, after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, the *sgom* of *thos-bsam-sgom* would decline to some degree at Larung Gar.

Fourthly, during this period, the nearby Nyingma institution of Yachen Gar (*ya chen sgar*; Ch. *yaqing si* 亚青寺) increased in relative prominence as a centre of *sgom*, in part because its first-generation leader, Akhyuk Rinpoche (*a khyug lung rtogs rgyal mtshan*) (1927–2011), outlived Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok and, thus, attracted many of his meditation students after his death—including a large population of nuns who were forced out of Larung Gar after the demolitions of the early 2000s—and in part because, even after Akhyuk Rinpoche's death,<sup>70</sup> Yachen Gar adopted a different model of second-generation leadership than Larung Gar, with Tulku Asang (*sprul sku a gsang*) (1975–) more directly filling Akhyuk Rinpoche's role as the tantric guru of the community (see also Padma 'tsho 2014).<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Yachen Gar, despite its vast size, was never instituted as a *foxueyuan* and retained, to a higher degree, the atmosphere of a spontaneous tantric meditation community.<sup>72</sup> As a consequence, notwithstanding that Larung Gar, beginning in 2008, acted to strengthen *sgom* by introducing a compulsory annual meditation retreat (*tshams*; Ch. *biguan* 闭关) for all monastics, including students in the shedra programme, a discourse emerged in certain Nyingma circles in Eastern Tibet that 'one goes to Larung Gar to do *thos-bsam*, and one goes to Yachen Gar to do *sgom*.'<sup>73</sup>

Finally, in the decade after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's own star shone ever brighter among the second-generation leadership, matched only by that of Khenpo Sodargye (*mkhan po bsod dar rgyas*) (1962–). His discourse on monastic education reform, with its tendency to place greater emphasis on the attributes of *thos-bsam*, therefore inevitably played some role in Larung Gar's overall tendency towards *thos-bsam* during this period. His individual discursive influence should not, however, be overstated compared to the other factors mentioned above.



Given its ongoing and, perhaps, even increasing influence after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, Larung Gar's overall internal leaning towards *thos-bsam*, as analysed above, had a wider effect across Eastern Tibet. For example, McDougal (2016, p. 58) observes during fieldwork an increase in scholastic education in Nangchen County (*nang chen rdzong*), and attributes this, in part, to the influence of Larung Gar, as well as to wider secular, rational, and educational forces sweeping through Tibetan society, with the support of the Chinese state. She suggests that this has brought about a corresponding weakening of the meditative culture of *sgom*.<sup>74</sup> While Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro would not acquiesce to any necessary relationship between a strengthening of *thos-bsam* and a weakening of *sgom*—quite the opposite in fact—he does, in various places in his discourses from roughly 2013, observe the same phenomenon as McDougal. Thus, he recognises, and treats as a positive development, the increase in both monastic education and wider education across Eastern Tibet, while also acknowledging that *sgom* has received too little attention. For example, in 2013, before an audience of monastery leaders in Nangchen (KTL 2013a, disk 6 time-stamp 1 h: 22:00–30:00 min), he states that scholastic training in Tibetan monasteries is now sufficiently strong to survive for one or two hundred years, but that traditions of meditative practice are at risk of dying out in just twenty or thirty years.<sup>75</sup>

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's practical response to what he observed in this period did not constitute a dramatic about-face. For example, he did not seek to weaken Larung Gar's shedra programmes or to set himself, or anyone else, up as tantric guru in Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's mould. That said, he did play a role in bringing about some small, but still noteworthy, practical changes: in 2018, for example, he integrated a short daily *sgom* component into his annual summer teachings at Larung Gar. His discourse, however, undergoes a more significant reweighting in this period, albeit not a radical change. He continues, for example, to strongly emphasise (KTL 2019, session 44/65 time-stamp 42:00–56:00 min) to the monastic saṅgha that Buddhism is a rational religion whose truth should be tested through analysis rather than blindly accepted through faith. He also continues to argue that monastics should play a key role in teaching to lay people, and that broad knowledge and intellectual skills are required to be effective teachers. Nonetheless, there is an evident shift in the way he makes clear that the very best path a monastic can follow is to go into meditative retreat. While statements along these lines can be found in his earlier teachings (see e.g., KTL 2012, p. 54), Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro is more emphatic and systematic in spelling this out in his reweighted teachings in this 'later period.' Not only does he discursively undercut the value of *thos-bsam* without *sgom*, but, perhaps more significantly, he situates meditative retreat at the top of clear hierarchies and makes clear that the young should practise *sgom* as well as the old:<sup>76</sup>

*'As a monastic, the best thing to do is to stay in a solitary and remote place and do meditation and practice . . . And the second is to study the scriptures well and then teach people with pure motivations. The third is to at least properly learn Tibetan grammar and spelling, and with a virtuous mind go about eliminating illiteracy and educating people about hygiene and environmental protection.'*<sup>77</sup> (KTL 2017a, p. 34)

*'Even the mere understanding we gain from listening and reflecting helps but it is not enough. So, we have to practise meditation. At Larung Gar, there are some meditators and also some people who do retreat for certain amount of time each year. This is still not enough. We should [all] start doing meditation practice from a young age.'* (KTL 2020, session 1/3 time-stamp 6:00 min)

At the same time, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro clearly articulates how *sgom* should be conducted. Of note is the emphasis he places on a gradual path also within meditation, beginning with those meditations that he summarises as 'mind training' (*blo sbyong*)—namely, those rooted in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the likes of the 'four thoughts that turn the mind' (*blo ldog rnam bzhi*)—alongside the full tantric preliminaries (*sngon 'gro*) described in Patrul Rinpoche's *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, before moving on to higher

meditations, such as generation and completion stage practices, and Dzogchen. He gives repeated and emphatic rhetorical validation to the worth of basic mind-training meditations, which goes hand in hand with his support for young monastics engaging in *sgom*, as otherwise they would not have anything to practice appropriate to their level. With regard to the more senior members of the monastic community at Larung Gar, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro describes (KTL 2020, session 1/3 time-stamp 6:37 min) how it can be practically arranged for them to take some time away from their teaching and administrative duties, in order that they too can spend time in retreat.

The second aspect of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's overall reweighting towards *sgom* concerns lay people. As has been discussed, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro argues in 'the earlier period' that providing basic ethical Buddhist teachings to lay people should be a core duty of the monastic saṅgha. He continues to emphasise this in 'the later period.' However, in addition to this, in his personal capacity as a teacher, he began, even in the years immediately after Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, to offer an increasing quantity of systematic higher-level teachings to those better-educated lay people who had the ability to follow a compressed version of the monastic path of *thos-bsam-sgom*.<sup>78</sup> This audience primarily included Chinese lay people<sup>79</sup>—on average better-educated than their Tibetan counterparts<sup>80</sup>—who, in part as a result of the pioneering outreach efforts of Khenpo Sodargye,<sup>81</sup> became an increasingly important part of the Larung textual community in the post-guru period.

The same reweighting towards a balanced emphasis on *sgom* seen in his teachings to monastics is paralleled in his outreach activities among these better-educated lay people, from 2013 onwards. In that year, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro founded a new training programme for a Chinese lay audience called Luminous Wisdom Meditation (*Huideng Chanxiu* 慧灯禅修).<sup>82</sup> One reason for its name and focus was perhaps to counterbalance Khenpo Sodargye's pre-existing Bodhi Study Association (*Puti Xuehui* 菩提学会) programme, which placed its central emphasis on textual study.

In addition, from some of his assumptions about his Chinese lay audience that emerge across his various teachings, it is possible to extrapolate some further reasons that may have influenced the emphasis that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro places on *sgom* in this programme: the fact that many of them are, on average, reasonably well-educated and do not need such extensive intellectual training; the fact that many of them are busy with work and other responsibilities and do not have as much time as monastics to engage in lengthy *thos-bsam* on the Five Major Topics; and the fact that, as a result of worldly life, with its attendant psychological challenges, many of them have an acute realisation of the sufferings of cyclic existence—greater, perhaps, than that of monastics living sheltered lives—and, therefore, both do not need to study such matters in such extensive theoretical detail and are able to derive great benefit from meditation training.

Furthermore, in the years from 2014–2018, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro travelled widely, visiting such places as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and observed the emphasis that lay Buddhists were placing on the practice of meditation, and the positive results they were experiencing in doing so.<sup>83</sup> In 2016 in the United States, for example, he engaged in a dialogue with neuroscience professor, Richie Davidson, famous for performing experiments on the effects of meditation on the brains of monks; he visited Naropa University, where meditative practice is integrated throughout the curriculum; he took part in events with American Buddhist meditation teachers, including Alan Wallace, Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, and Tara Brach; and he engaged in numerous dialogues with university academics and researchers interested in the benefits of meditation, particularly mindfulness, in everyday life. Such experiences doubtless strengthened his pre-existing reweighting towards *sgom* and further convinced him that meditative practice, which had, in Tibet, traditionally been the domain of religious specialists, might indeed be valuable for wider lay audiences.

As a conclusion to this section, some aspects of his discourse to Chinese lay audiences after 2013 will be highlighted. This will illuminate important features of his presentation of the whole balanced framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* (Ch. *wen-si-xiu* 闻思修) for this Chinese audience, which, in turn, resonates with some of the important themes discussed throughout this article.

Firstly, he repeatedly emphasises the entire framework of *wen-si-xiu* as the proper way to practice Buddhism; for example:

*‘When we study Buddhism, we need to learn theory . . . and also to practise. We need to do both. Studying Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism, three words are emphasised. They are wen-si-xiu.’*<sup>84</sup> (KTL 2013b)

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro contrasts this sharply with the ritualistic temple devotions undertaken by many self-proclaimed Buddhists in China, which he refers to as *‘shaoxiangbaifo’* (烧香拜佛—‘offering incense and praying to the Buddha’), as well as with other common Chinese Buddhist practices, such as copying out sūtras and vegetarianism. He praises such practices but says that they only constitute merit-making activities, and are no substitute for the core path of *wen-si-xiu*, which, using Chinese modernist idiom, he describes as *‘xuefo’* (学佛—‘studying Buddhism’): ‘If we are able to practice both core and formalistic elements, this is the best of all. However, if we have to choose between the former and the latter, then we must definitely choose the former’<sup>85</sup> (KTL 2013c).

Secondly, he stresses that *wen-si-xiu* is the core path of Mahāyāna Buddhism as a whole and, thus, is an appropriate practice for Chinese Buddhists who might not formally affiliate themselves with Tibetan Buddhism, even while noting repeatedly that it is a framework that has been preserved in Tibetan Buddhism in particular. He thus builds on Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s mission to reverse the charge that Tibetan Buddhism is ‘backward’ by subtly stating that it has preserved its Mahāyāna heritage better than Chinese Buddhism, where practices, such as *shaoxiangbaifo*, that are more easily characterised as ‘superstitious’ (*mixin* 迷信) have been overemphasised.<sup>86</sup>

Thirdly, he iterates that Buddhism is a rational religion ‘that does not rigidly prescribe blind obedience or blind faith’<sup>87</sup> (LW9) and, thus, that it is compatible with modern scientific standards of reasoning based in logic and evidence (see also Sodargye and Yü 2017). This also counters the implicit charge of backwardness and superstition.

Fourthly, he stresses that the practice of *wen-si-xiu* will not only result in such Buddhist soteriological goals as liberation, but that it will also provide a measurable solution to problems in this life, especially the psychological problems that he observes arising from the relentless and stressful materialism of Chinese society: ‘Actually, we could say that the Buddha Śākyamuni’s Dharma is a science of happiness. It is a super science of happiness, a super psychology’ (KTL 2013c).<sup>88</sup>

Finally, given that he assumes Chinese lay audiences are far less familiar than Tibetan monastic audiences with the framework of *wen-si-xiu*, and given that, within his programme, his teachings are self-sufficient and do not rely on reference to further canonical texts, it is here, more than anywhere else in the entirety of his spoken and written corpus, that he details the definitions of each of *thos*, *bsam*, and *sgom* and articulates the relationships between them. His discourse here, which often employs modern colloquial language, such as ‘updating an operating system’ and ‘going to the gym,’ thus stands as the clearest evidence of his orthodox gradualist approach to the framework. In accordance with Mipham’s teachings, as explained by Pettit (1999, p. 191), he stresses the theoretical conviction that one must first gain through *wen-si*, and *si* most especially:

*‘It’s not enough just to listen; we need to reflect on things . . . [given that] the view taught by the Buddha is very different to our commonsense understanding.’*<sup>89</sup> (KTL 2013b)

*‘We need to reflect repeatedly. Only after reflecting over and over again are we able to truly understand the meaning of the Buddha.’*<sup>90</sup> (KTL 2015)

This theoretical conviction is not, however, an end in itself and must serve as a preliminary to the deep practical realisation that can only be gained through *xiu*, which he describes, repeatedly and emphatically, as (KTL 2015): ‘the most important part.’ Nonetheless, his overall presentation of the framework is balanced, and he stresses that, even though *xiu* is the most important, for the vast majority of people, *wen-si* is a necessary foundation. He illustrates this with his usual erudition through a Chinese Buddhist example (LW9):

*‘Of course, there is an extremely small number of people with mature causes-and-conditions, such as the Sixth Patriarch Huineng and some other great figures in Buddhist history who really did attain enlightenment without wen-si. But how many people are like Master Huineng? Therefore, we still need to be down to earth and do wen-si-xiu.’<sup>91</sup>*

## 5. Conclusions

In the eighteen years since Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s death, his prodigious institutional legacy has been collectively carried forward by his close cohort of second-generation heart disciples who have come to embody complementary, but distinct, leadership roles vis-à-vis the Larung community. In this article, we have focused on the second-generation Larung leader, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro, and his ‘shouldering of his guru’s legacy’ with respect to the paṇḍita dimensions of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s activities. We have sought to provide a broad and nuanced analysis of his discourse in relation to the areas of monastic education, monastic governance, and monastic–lay relations. We have also sought to contextualise this discourse through a discussion of the institutional changes at Larung Gar, and the sociopolitical changes in broader Tibetan and Chinese society in the period in question, on the basis of the presumption of an interdependence between Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse and the contexts at hand.

In this article, we have demonstrated how the threefold framework of *thos-bsam-sgom*, articulated in flexible and various ways, and in conjunction with a range of Buddhist and secular concepts, has served as the fulcrum of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse on monastic education, monastic governance, and monastic–lay relations in the two decades in question.

We have shown how *thos-bsam-gom*—accompanied by the dictum that contemporary Tibetan monastics must *know* the Buddhadharma—is core to the reformist message he delivers to audiences at Larung Gar and beyond. Inveighing against monasteries filled with uneducated monks preoccupied with formalistic rituals, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro champions the ideal of a monastic saṅgha who are trained from youth in *thos-bsam-sgom*—or *thos-bsam*, as a minimum—and argues that it is only by means of expanding monastic education through the establishment of shedra and drubdra in monastic communities that a range of pressing problems, challenges, and corruptions in the contemporary milieu of Tibetan Buddhism can be addressed. By accompanying his modernist prescriptions in this area with forceful proposals for reforms of traditional governance, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro sanctions new models of monastic meritocratic leadership that are grounded in democratic values as conducive to institutionalising *thos-bsam-sgom* at monasteries and as a positive end in itself.

We have contended that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s concern in the past two decades has been to carry forward the entire threefold framework of *thos-bsam-sgom* in a balanced manner. Even so, we have argued that, throughout his discourse in what we have termed ‘the earlier period,’ the rational and intellectual values associated with *thos-bsam* can be seen as receiving more emphasis and cultural valorisation than the meditative values associated with *sgom*. An implicit privileging of *thos-bsam* is particularly discernible in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s call for educated monastics to proactively and tangibly serve lay society in the most beneficial way possible, namely, by giving the gift of Dharma in the form of systematic discursive teachings on foundational Buddhist topics. While making a vigorous case for the importance of monastics with broad knowledge and honed intellectual capacities for Buddhism’s ongoing survival, he does not make an equivalently strong case for monastics trained in meditative methods.



Notwithstanding a remarkable continuity and consistency in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse on matters of monastic education, monastic governance, and monastic–lay relations throughout the 'earlier' and 'later' periods, we have, nevertheless, posited a subtle but significant shift in his words (and in his actions) in the later period, pertaining to the relative weight given by him to the intellectual and meditative aspects of the threefold framework. Namely, in this period, we have observed a rebalanced emphasis on the importance of *sgom* for monastic and lay practitioners alike.

Through this analysis, we have sought to contribute to an enriched understanding of how Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro has carried forward his guru's legacy in the domain of monastic education and in related fields. In looking to build on this work, scholars may find it fruitful to examine his actions and discourse in the field of education more widely, including in secular education, as well as his suggestion that 'cultural knowledge' (*rig gnas*) is more important to the preservation of Tibet's national and ethnic identity than economic and political forces (see e.g., SS1, pp. 214–17). Such scholarly work would throw further light on the dynamic and resilient process by which Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's legacy not only has been sustained and developed, but continues to be so, even despite ongoing challenges, such as the recent series of demolitions at Larung Gar.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In this article we employ the *Treasury of Lives* system of transliteration for Tibetan names and words. However, we have used Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok rather than Khenpo Jigme Puntsok as we believe the former has now become the common usage. The first time a name or word is used we also include the Wylie transliteration for reference.
- <sup>2</sup> While the primary methodology we use in this article is discourse analysis of texts available in the public domain, our contextualisation and analysis of this discourse draws on insights gleaned from our separate multiple fieldwork activities in Eastern Tibet throughout the 2010s, which included visits to Larung Gar.
- <sup>3</sup> In this article we choose to translate *sgom* within the context of the threefold framework as 'meditation.' While we endorse Deroche's (2021, p. 22) explanation of *sgom* as a process whereby the contents of one's listening and reflection are 'fully assimilated and embodied as a part of one's own being,' we consider that, insofar as each of the three activities is capable of effecting positive transformations in the subjectivity or disposition of the Buddhist practitioner, the English term 'cultivation'—Deroche's preferred translation of *sgom*—perhaps better serves as a description of the threefold framework holistically than as a translation of *sgom* in isolation. Moreover, in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse the term *sgom* is sometimes used in the specific sense of 'seated meditation' and at other times in the broader sense of 'practice' or 'familiarisation' (where it is often used interchangeably with *nyams len* 'to take into experience'). Since arguably no single English word fully captures both conceptions, for concision's sake we translate *sgom* as 'meditation' in the present article.
- <sup>4</sup> The textual sources we draw on for this article span a period of twenty-one years and include polemic essays written by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro himself and volumes of books (both officially and unofficially published) containing his transcribed teachings. For 'the later period' analysis we also draw on oral teachings given by him in both Chinese and Tibetan. Much of the latter material can be accessed respectively via his Chinese mobile app 慧灯之光 and Tibetan mobile app 慧音. The six unofficially published texts drawn on in this article that do not have a clearly marked year of publication are cited throughout according to the following abbreviations: *Summer Sunshine Volume One* [SS1] (KTL n.d. a); *Summer Sunshine Volume Two* [SS2] (KTL n.d. b); *Summer Sunshine Volume Three* [SS3] (KTL n.d. c); *Medicine for The Times* [MTT] (KTL n.d. d); *Light of Wisdom Volume Nine* [LW9] (KTL n.d. e) and *Training of the Mind* [TOM] (KTL n.d. f).

- 5 While Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro received meditation training alongside scriptural instruction at Larung Gar, time spent in extended multi-year retreat did not form part of his foundational education.
- 6 Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro began composing Buddhist polemics directed at audiences beyond Larung Gar from as early as 1995, when he assisted Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok in writing the widely circulated *Heart Advice to Tibetans for the 21st Century* (see Gayley 2011, 2021). Upon completion of this important work, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok bestowed formal thanks and offerings on Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro in front of the assembled Larung saṅgha. Around the turn of the millennium, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's own essays and petitions on vegetarianism, animal rights, and lay ethics (including 'Clear Mirror' (KTL 2000)) were already circulating unofficially in Eastern Tibet. Two volumes of his compiled works (*gsung 'bum*) were published in 2006.
- 7 As Goldstein (1998, p. 15) notes, in pre-1959 Tibetan society it was the *quantity* of monastics that was most valued, not the *quality* of their training or attainments. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, by contrast, emphasised the quality of monastics' training but even so managed to expand this training to a vast number of monastics.
- 8 Kapstein (2004, p. 252) records that in the summer of 2000 Larung Gar had 9300 residents, a large proportion of whom must have been engaged in scholarly activity.
- 9 In a teaching given to the Larung Gar saṅgha on Dodrubchen Tenpai Nyingma's *Heart Advice* (*rdo grub zhal gdams*) རྡོ་གུཐ་ལཱ་གདམས། Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro (2020, session 1/3 time-stamp 11:42 min) notes, 'It is now 40 years since the founding of Larung ... and *thos-bsam-sgom* has been here all along'.
- 10 Although, as Duckworth (2011, p. 5) describes, Mipham spent much of his life in retreat, his primary reputation is as a great scholar. Thus Smith (2001, p. 231) writes: 'Mipham's greatest contribution to the cultural history of Tibet lies in his brilliant and strikingly original commentaries on the important Indic treatises.' Karma Phuntsho (2007, p. 200) states: 'Of all (Mipham's) writings, his writings on *Madhyamaka* thought attracted the most attention from other scholars and brought popularity and fame in religious and scholarly circles.' Given that Mipham was not a recognised tertön (*gter ston*) in the manner of other Nyingma luminaries such as Jigme Lingpa (*'jigs med gling pa*) (1730–1798), it might be mistakenly assumed that there is some tension between scholarly attainments and yogic accomplishment. In this regard it is notable that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's (2008) own biography of Mipham emphasises his miraculous powers, thus implicitly reaffirming that the yogic pole should not be seen as contradictory with the scholarly.
- 11 This combination of shedra and drubdra was not unprecedented in the Nyingma school, which has traditionally prioritised meditative cultivation at least as highly as scholarly activity. For example, pre-1959, Dzogchen Monastery in Eastern Tibet had both the Śrī Sīṃha Shedra and a designated retreat centre at Pema Tang.
- 12 While designation as a *foxueyuan* brought limitations, these were not as great as the limitations that would have been incurred if Larung Gar had been designated as a formal monastery, which, as Terrone (2009, p. 86) observes, were strictly controlled in this period. Germano (1998, pp. 64–65) also records that Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok thought designation as a monastery would bring about 'inevitable sectarian tendencies' contradictory to Larung Gar's nonsectarian ethos. Moreover, in an interview conducted by Catherine Hardie on 16 August 2016, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro notes that monasteries traditionally have more arduous responsibilities to provide ritual services to the Tibetan lay community than *chos sgar*.
- 13 A number of state-sponsored Tibetan *foxueyuan* were established in the 1980s at the instigation of the Panchen Lama, though there is some minor dispute about the exact dates. Kolås and Thowsen (2005, p. 77) list *foxueyuan* founded in 1985 at Nechung Monastery in Lhasa in the TAR, at Labrang Tashikyil Monastery in Gansu, and at Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai, as well as the 'High-Level Tibetan Buddhist Institute of China' (*Zhongguo Zangyuxi Gaoji Foxueyuan*) founded in Beijing in 1987. Tuttle (2005, p. 231) also records 1987 as the date for the *foxueyuan* in Beijing but Terrone (2021, p. 3) states that it was in fact founded in 1986. Furthermore, a *foxueyuan* was founded in Kardze in Sichuan, perhaps as early as 1984 according to our sources, and another was founded in Dechen Prefecture in Yunnan in subsequent years. Thus, from the 1980s there appears to have existed the leading Tibetan *foxueyuan* in Beijing and subsidiaries in the five provinces with ethnic Tibetan populations. Monastics at these state-sponsored institutions studied a curriculum with both traditional and modern components, and were not expected to engage in ritual activities. Kolås and Thowsen (2005, p. 78) state that the *foxueyuan* in Kardze stopped taking students in 1998; as of 2017 it has been relocated to Chengdu, with a sub-branch in Ngaba Prefecture opened in 2021. Moreover, a further *foxueyuan* seems either to have been established or recently upgraded in Yushu, Qinghai. Together with Larung Gar, which appears unique among the institutions designated as *foxueyuan* not to have been founded by state diktat, this totals nine Tibetan *foxueyuan*. This total number seems to accord with and even exceed a plan announced at the 18th National Congress in 2012.
- 14 The designation of *foxueyuan* does allow for meditation (*chanxiu*) as a legitimate monastic activity, but one could argue that its implicit conception of that activity conforms better with sūtric ideals than the tantric approaches taught at Larung Gar.
- 15 With the exception of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's early polemical essays, which were geared from the outset towards a broad monastic and lay readership beyond Larung Gar (what one might gloss as the 'Tibetan public'), his other teachings and speeches consulted for this article were originally delivered either at Larung Gar or to the local Eastern Tibetan communities he visited on his outreach peregrinations. These included communities from diverse sectarian traditions in Kham and Amdo, with audiences sometimes comprised solely of monastics and other times of lay people and monastics combined. Once turned into DVD and especially book format (which removed dialect barriers through the use of standard written Tibetan), these teachings travelled widely, not only reaching audiences across northern Kham and parts of Amdo, but also more distant corners of the Tibetan world.

Notably, *Timely Rain* (KTL 2012), an edited collection of his teachings given in Kham and Amdo from 2006–2010, was reprinted in India for an exile readership in 2012, following its initial publication in the PRC.

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro was also active in the creation of a ‘Buddhist Association’ (*nang bstan mthun tshogs*) that brought together monastic leaders in Northern Kham across regional and sectarian lines to discuss monastic education, lay ethical reform, and other matters of common interest from 2010–2013.

As Caple’s (2019) work on Geluk monastic revival in Rebkong shows, deepseated moral concerns of this nature have been pervasive among Tibetan monastics and lay people throughout the post-Mao revival of institutional Buddhism. Inasmuch as Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro follows in his guru’s footsteps in criticising corruptions in his midst, he is also participating in, and helping to shape, a transregional, trans-sectarian and polyvocal moral discourse on the appropriate course of Tibetan Buddhist monastic development in a drastically reconfigured and rapidly changing historical context.

*dgonpa rnams kyi nang du bshad grwa tshad ldan re ‘dzugs rgyu ‘di las gal che ba gzhan ci yang med.*

*thosbsam slob gnyer ci yang byed ma myong ba ... dgon pa’i snying don lung rtogs la phan thogs ci yang med.*

*dgon pa ‘ga’ res ni dus mchod sogs kho na la mthong chen byed pa las thos bsam slob gnyer la do snang ye mi byed ... de ni bya ba tha shal ba yin ... de ni bshad sgrub kyi gzhi cung zad re ‘dzugs rgyu kho na la ‘bad dgos.*

*mkhas pa rnams ni bkur dgos pa red ... kha sang de ring de ‘dra zhig red ... rgyu yod dang dbang yod gcig yin na de la ha cang rin thang can du brtsis nas tshang mas gus zhum byed kyin yod mkhas pa zhig yod na de la rin thang can du brtsi ba ma red kyang ... gtso bo ngo ma mkhas pa rnams bkur dgos gsungs.*

*bshad grwa med na dgon pa zhig yod dang med don gcig red ... dgon pa zer ba de grwa pa re gnyis tsam yar dgon pa’i nang la ‘tshogs rgyu yod nas tshogs dus mchod ‘dra yod mar grong chog la ‘gro mkhan zhig yod na des nyan snang ma skye de ‘dra’i dgon pa zhig yod ma yod chen po ci yang mi ‘dug.*

Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro follows his guru in upholding nonsectarian ideals. As Duckworth shows (Duckworth 2021, p. 170), in a translation of a work by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro on Madhayamaka, even when he propounds the view of his own Nyingma tradition he still praises the luminaries of other traditions. However, it should be acknowledged that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro holds most sway within his own tradition. Thus, while he offers discursive and practical support to monasteries of all sectarian affiliations, it is among Nyingmapas that his actual influence has been greatest.

*chos kyi snying po ngo ma rang gi nyams len dang sems can la phan pa bsgrub rgyu yin pa de mi shes nas chos kyi snying po ngo ma de rtsod pa brgyag rgyu dang de tsho yin snang skye ‘gro ba red.*

On one reading, *sgrub grwa* also refers to a type of ‘school’-*grwa*—which accords with its conception as part of a system of education.

*dgon pa rnams kyis lha bris rten bzhengs sogs gang la gang ‘tsham tsam gyis chog gi ‘dug so so la sgor mo cung zad yod na bshad grwa dang sgrub grwa slob grwa btsugs nas dgon pa mtshan nyid pa zhig yin na grwa gsum dang sde gcig tshang dgos ... sde gcig gang red zer na mi skya pho mo rnams lo cung zad chen po chags dus chos sgrub sa’i dge bsnyen gyi sde ‘dzugs dgos.*

*grwa gsum sde gcig zer ba de don sngar nas yod pa red kyang tha snyad gsar du byung ba zhig red.*

*de bzhin du jo mo tshang la mtshon na ‘dra ‘dra yin dgos pa red khyad par spu’i rtse mo tsam yang mi ‘dug ... de’i phyir na lo nyung rnams kyis rgod rgod gyis de bzhin du jo mos thos bsam byed mi dgos zer mkhan zhig yod pa ma red kyang de ‘dra bshad nas mgo su gcig gis mnan mi rung spyir mgo gnon mkhan yod pa ma red la nged cag bla rung sgar na de bas kyang med.*

It nonetheless should be emphasised that Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro’s discourse on monastic education is primarily directed towards an audience of male monastics.

*gzhi rtsa’i bstan pa ‘dzin pa’i khur thang de dge ‘dun pa la yod phan chad rig gnas med phyin ‘dzin lugs mi shes.*

*chos bshad rgyu dang rtsod pa rgyag rgyu dang bstan bcos brtsam rgyu sogs ‘chad nyan gyi skor la mthong chen mi byed nas sgom kho na brtsal ‘don byas pa yin ‘dug ... de’i rjes su thos bsam sgom gsum med par gyur.*

Caple (2011) describes the inspiration of liberal-democratic modernist discourse among Geluk monks inside the PRC, and its role as an alternative source of scientific rationalism to that promoted by the Chinese state. Lempert (2016) describes the use of liberal-democratic principles to reimagine Tibetan patrimony and monastic governance in the contemporary Geluk exile context.

While some translators render *bshad sgrub* as ‘teaching and practice,’ in a personal communication in October 2021 Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro indicated his preference for the Chinese translation ‘*xue xiu*’ (学修) which we follow here by translating *bshad sgrub* as ‘study and practice.’

*‘o na dgon par bshad sgrub mi dgos zer mkhan zhig e yod na snyam na de rigs shin tu mang po ‘dug.*

*bshad sgrub kyi sde yod med de phugs gtugs na dgon dpon rnams la thug bsdad yod bas rtsa ba ngo ma dgon dpon rnams la thug bsdad yod pa red dge sems yod na dgon dpon rnams kyi bka’ drin yin.*

*thog mar bya dgos pa ni dgon pa de’i phyi nang gi bya ba thams cad la bdag gnyer bgyid pa’i dge ‘dun gyi sde tshogs shig ‘dzugs dgos ... sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa spyi la go ba chags shing bstan ‘gro la lhag bsam rnam par dag pa yod pa dang khyad par du bshad sgrub kyi bstan pa la thugs khur yang dag bzhes nges pa’i gang zag bzhi yan chad tshang ba zhig dge ‘dun gyis bsko dgos.*

*khong du bshad pa’i mtshan nyid tshang na dgon dpon yin na’ang ‘dra sngags pa yin na’ang ‘dra dgon pa’i tshogs pa’i nang du ‘jog dgos.*

- 38 dgon pa'i bshad sgrub kyi bstan pa ni mi gcig gi bsam tshul dang bstun te btang snyoms su gzhas tu med pas dge 'dun spyis bskos pa'i tshogs  
pa yang dag pa des dgon pa'i slob gnyer de thugs dam gyi mthil du bzung ste bkod sgrig legs po bya dgos so.
- 39 Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's reluctance to personally recognise any tulkus stood in contrast with the proliferation of tulkus across  
Tibet during the post-Mao Tibetan Buddhist revival. This is not to suggest that he was resistant to a way of seeing the world that  
recognised continuities across lives—indeed, ample evidence demonstrates the absolute contrary. At the same time, his saṅgha  
at Larung Gar included a sizeable contingent of tulkus, and, at one point, he took the initiative of organising a 'tulku class' to  
provide them with special instruction, befitting of their important social and religious function in Tibetan society. A number of  
his close disciples, including his niece, Lama Mumtso, were recognised as tulkus by lamas at other monasteries.
- 40 rang re rnying ma'i phyogs la ni sprul sku zhig ngos 'dzin byas na bla ma yid bzhin nor bus mi byed na sus byed snyam pa zhig yin na yang  
sku tshe gang por sprul sku gcig kyang ngos 'dzin byas med pa 'dis gnad cig bstan yod pa red.
- 41 'dzam bu gling gi thog tu dmangs gtso gtan nas ma dar ba'i skabs su thog mar dmangs gtso mdzad mkhan de sangs rgyas shākya thub pa red.
- 42 It is interesting to reflect on how Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro might be said to be positioned with relation to the phenomenon often  
referred to as 'Buddhist modernism.' While this is a complex and diverse phenomenon that belies simple categorisation, one axis  
of differentiation can be drawn between those archetypal 'modernists' who seek to reject swathes of their received Buddhist  
heritage, such as rituals, in favour of a reworked interpretation of Buddhism more compatible with the values of individualistic  
rational modernity (but who may still justify their interpretation on the 'conservative' grounds of being in tune with the historical  
Buddha's original intent), and those archetypal 'conservatives' who seek to defend and uphold their received Buddhist heritage  
(but who may still employ 'modernist' rhetoric in bolstering that defence). Gayley (2021, p. 26) says that one might be tempted to  
characterise Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok as someone firmly in the latter camp, but asserts that, in fact, 'he does not treat tradition as  
if it were a static entity to be reproduced wholesale,' and that 'it might be more apt to consider his approach to be reformist and  
constructive rather than conservative per se.' It is unsurprising, given the influence of his guru, that something similar could  
be argued of Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro. He is inclined to defend and uphold Tibet's Buddhist heritage but is not uncritical of  
that heritage and seeks to reform its failings. Nonetheless, we suggest that the likes of his proposed democratic reforms within  
monasteries and his serious engagement with scientific thought arguably situate him further towards the 'modernist' end of the  
axis than his guru.
- 43 'di nga tsho'i bka' drin gsum ldan gyi bla ma red kyang phan chad nga tshos 'di'i bka' brtsi dang mi brtsi de ring nga tshos lag pa zhig bkyag  
zer na ci yang byed rgyu yod pa ma yin ... de bzhin du ... nga tshos las rgyu 'bras khas len dang mi len lag pa bkyag zer rgyu yod pa ma red.
- 44 sprulsku dag gang 'dra byed min de dgon pa rang gis thag gcod dgos na yang bla ma gong ma dag gis ngos 'dzin gnang bzhag pa zhig yin na  
bzang rung ngan rung tha na sum rtags dag gsum tsam yang mi shes mkhan dang yi ge yag po zhig kyang klog mi shes mkhan zhig yin yang  
brnyas bcos lta ga la ste dgon dpon gyi sa nas bzhag sgrub pa 'dra 'tshogs skabs yin na gral mgo dang khri mthon po'i thog tu bzhugs su gsol  
te ... blo 'dri dang gros kyi gral du bzhag.
- 45 dgondpon mar phab nas med par bzo rgyu min par dgon dpon dgon dpon gyi sa nas 'jog dgos ... ma gtogs byod mi sha rta bab la thug gi red  
... dgon dpon 'di dag kyang skabs shig nas brje len byed dgos nges red 'dzam bu gling gi tho na mgo khrid dag lo lnga re na brje dgos pa 'di la  
gnad sgo shin tu chen po yod pa red.
- 46 Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok and Lama Mumtso are said to have benefited beings together for a garland of lifetimes in multiple  
relational configurations, including master-disciple and tertön-consort.
- 47 Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro was appointed to the rotating position of Larung Gar's managing director (Ch. *changwu lishi*, 常务理事)  
in 2007. When he finished his official term in 2012, he continued to serve as its deputy managing principal (Ch. *changwu fuyuanzhang*, 常务副院长). After the state-led reorganisation of Larung Gar's management system between 2016–2017, Khenpo  
Tsultrim Lodro was made one of Larung Gar's five vice principals (Ch. *fuyuanzhang*, 副院长).
- 48 The five equalities are enumerated in *Medicine for the Mind* (KTL 2017a, pp. 31–32), where Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro describes the  
principle of equality as Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's sole and supreme strategy for keeping the Larung community harmonious and  
united.
- 49 nged cag gi sgar la mtshon na sems can la phan thogs na yun ring po'i bar du gnas na ha can bzang po red sems can la phan ma thogs pa yin  
na yod med gang dga' pa yin ha mi go ba 'dug.
- 50 'Mani and sado mantras' refers to the Chenrezik and Vajrasattva heart mantras, two of the most popular mantras across the  
Tibetan plateau.
- 51 da lta yul gru shin tu mang po zhig na khyim pa pho mo rnams kyi dam pa'i chos zhes pa bzang po zhig dang tshe phyi mar phan 'dogs byed  
cig yin snyam pa tsam dang kha nas ma ni sa twa re 'don shes pa tsam ma gtogs dam pa'i chos kyi nang don dngos dang de bsgrub lugs ji ltar  
yin rtsa ba nas go bar mi 'dug bod kyi skad yig gi steng na bka' bstan mdo sngags kyi chos tshul ji 'dra'i phun sum tshogs pa zhig 'dug de 'dra  
yod bzhin du chos kyi go don phal ba tsam yang ma rnyed pas mi rab tu mang po zhig chos sa chos yul du skyes kyang chos med lag stong du  
tshe phyi mar chas dgos byung ste 'di ni ches yid pham pa'i gnas shin red 'o na de'i rtsa ba gang la thug yod ce na rang re rnams kyi dad ldan  
mang tshogs kyi khrod du dam pa'i chos kyi go don khyab gdal du spel ma thub pa'i skyon de la thug yod.
- 52 dgonpa dag gis rang gi grwa pa rnams kyi slob spyong legs po'ong bar byed dgos par ma zad rang gi lha sde'am rang dang 'brel ba'i dad ldan  
mang tshogs la'ang dam pa'i chos kyi slob spyong legs po'yong ba'i thugs khur nges par bzhes dgos 'di ni shin tu don che.



- 53 dgonpa so so la bshad sgrub kyi bstan pa spus dag re yod na grwa pa rnams kyis dam pa'i chos rnal ma'i dgongs pa legs par rtogs shing ci rigs  
par nyams su blangs pas rang mgo thon par ma zad sems can gzhan pa rnams la'ang thar pa'i lam ston byed nus shing de'i dbang gis bstan pa  
rin po che'ang yun du gnas par 'gyur.
- 54 yulgang skyid dang rnyed pa gar yod sogs rang gi don la mi sems par chos kyis phongs shing 'byor ba med pa'i sa phyogs rnams su song.
- 55 The same Zhao Puchu who, as President of the Buddhist Association of China, was involved in giving Larung Gar its full name.
- 56 nged cag gis spyi tshogs kyi thog la slob grwa dang sman khang dang de bzhin du dbul skyob sogs la brtson bstad na gal che sa 'dug thos bsam  
sgom gsum gtso bor yin sa mi 'dug snyam na de tsho rtso ba ma yin.
- 57 Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's discourse from this period suggests that, irrespective of the political turbulence, political space continued  
to exist for teaching activities throughout the 2000s and well into the 2010s.
- 58 The missionary sense is amplified by his rhetoric about the competitive nature of the religious market place: 'These days, there is  
a tendency for religions in the world to also [seek to get more market share] . . . Even though our territory is being taken away by  
others, Buddhists are still pretending not to notice and are staying in the mountains. In the future when you attain Buddhahood  
and want to go out and benefit beings you will find it difficult!' (SS2, p. 127)—dzams bu gling gi chos lugs rnams kyis kyang de 'dra  
byed bzhin yod . . . rang gi sa thams cad gzhan pas za 'gro bzhin yod pa red kyang da dung mi go khul byas nas yar re sgang gzhi la song nas  
bsdad yod rjes ma sangs rgyas nas mar thon yong dus 'gro don byed bsams na de dus dka' mo yin.
- 59 de yang spyir bod kyi yul na chos dar yang mtha' mtshams la sogs yul gru mang po na chos gsha' ma shin tu dkon . . . gdan zhu byed pa'i cha  
rkyen yang med . . . des na dbul po nyam chung chos med kyi yul de dag tu rang mos kyis song ste phan sems kho nas dam pa'i chos 'chad spel  
bya dgos yang grong khyer rnams ni dpal 'byor dang rig gnas kyi lte gnas yin pas de rnams su'ang khyab spel bya dgos kyi rang re'i chos 'di  
re khugs dang lung kyog rnams na yod pa tsam gyis ci yang mi 'ong pa'i phyir te 'di gal che'o gzhan yang dpe deb dang sgra brnyan dang  
gzugs brnyan gyi lam nas kyang rmang gzhi'i skor gyi shes bya 'di rnams khyab gdal du gtong dgos.
- 60 de nas dkon mchog gi yon tan dang thar pa'i phan yon 'khor ba'i nyes pa tshe snga phi las rgyu 'bras bcas kyi rnam gzhas rnams bshad.
- 61 rgyalsras byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyis gang la yin na spyang dgos pa red mdor na sems can rnams la gnas skabs kyi phan pa dang mthar  
thug gi bde ba 'byung byed cig yin nas bzung ste sbyang dgos gsungs pa red de'i phyir na nged cag dge 'dun rnams kyis slob sbyong byed  
rgyu de ha cang gal chen po'i nang nas gal chen po yin.
- 62 Five major sciences: craftsmanship (bzo rig pa), logic (gtan tshigs), grammar (sgra), medicine (gso ba), Dharma (nang don rig pa).  
Five minor sciences: synonyms (mngon brjod), astrology (skar rtsis), drama (zlos gar), poetry (snyan ngag), composition (sdeb sbyor).
- 63 There is, however, some ambivalence about Chinese language learning for Tibetan monastics in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's  
discourse, due to his concern that Chinese-speaking Tibetan monastics may become lured to the opportunities for economic  
enrichment in China, and thus cause harm to themselves and the Dharma. One might note in this connection that unlike other  
foxueyuan Larung Gar has never instituted a compulsory Chinese (or second) language learning component in its curriculum.
- 64 chos lugs kho rang ngo bo'i sgom nas rgyu mtshan ci yang med na'ang mi de 'dra rkyang rkyang gi lag tu yod pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis 'dzam  
bu gling 'dir spel nas gling chen snga'am bdun la khyab bsdad yod.
- 65 While a subtle shift in Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's published discourse can be observed from around 2013, there is evidence his  
concern about the relative status of *sgom*, especially at Larung Gar, predated this time. For example, in 2008, during his tenure as  
Dean of Studies, the first compulsory annual meditation retreat for all monastics was introduced. It is important to note that an  
analysis of other discourses by Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro on monastic education from this period (of which we were unaware at the  
time of writing this paper) could well justify some revision of the periodisation employed herein.
- 66 In an academic dialogue at the University of Virginia in 2016, Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro (2016, time-stamp 32:30–33:05 min) says that  
charting a pedagogical path that balances scholastic (or 'academic') and meditative (or 'contemplative') aspects is a frequently  
discussed topic among leaders at Larung Gar.
- 67 While the exact size of the Larung community before the 2016–2017 government-led population-reduction campaign has never  
officially been made known, it is generally believed to have been home to well over 10,000 residents. During festivals in the  
summer pilgrimage season, the population was known to double in size.
- 68 While the Larung Chinese Division's educational structure is roughly analogous to that of the Tibetan monks and nuns, insofar as  
it has offered full-time resident practitioners the choice of enrolling in a shedra-style '*wensi ban*' (闻思班—'listening and reflecting  
stream') or a drubdra-style '*xiuxing ban*' (修行班—'meditation practice stream'), there have also been significant differences  
between the Chinese and Tibetan programmes, which have been administered separately. One notable difference pertains to  
award structures. Whereas completion of the shedra curriculum and the award of khenpo or khenmo degrees for Tibetan monks  
and nuns typically entails fifteen years of study, for Chinese practitioners the equivalent award of '*fashi*' (Ch. 法师) (also referred  
to, following the Tibetan nomenclature, as '*kanbu*' (Ch. 堪布) and '*kanmu*' (Ch. 堪母)) has been attainable within eight to ten years.
- 69 Lama Mumtso has nevertheless played an important role in the continuity of Larung Gar's tantric transmission, primarily by  
presiding over the empowerment rituals that form part of the community's four major Dharma assemblies, as her health has  
permitted. Tulku Tenzin Gyatso (*sprul ku bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho*) (1968–), another second-generation heart son, has also conferred  
empowerments on the Larung sangha in the period since Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's death, as has Tulku Lungtok (*sprul ku lung  
rtogs*) (1953–) who primarily resides at his home monastery, Do Ngak Monastery (*mdo sngags chos byung dgon*; Ch: Xianmi Fayuan  
Si 显密法源寺) in Dawu County (*rta'u rdzong*; Ch: Dawu Xian 道孚县) in Sichuan.

- 70 Akhyuk Rinpoche's body is said to have shrunk dramatically after his death, a sign of having attained the Rainbow Body ('ja' lus). This likewise served to inspire practitioners across the plateau and strengthen Yachen Gar's reputation as a community of meditative realisation.
- 71 Padma 'tsho (2014, p. 187) records how nuns came to Yachen Gar out of faith in Tulku Asang.
- 72 Cho (2019, pp. 829–30) describes Yachen Gar's 'informality as a meditation-focused encampment.'
- 73 Initially, the retreat was fixed as one month in duration, with Larung Gar's different divisions undertaking their retreat at different times. No standardised retreat programme applied across all divisions. In recent years, the ninth month of the Tibetan calendar serves as retreat month for all monastics, and a standardised retreat programme has been introduced. Since the retreat month overlaps with Larung Gar's annual week-long Amitabha Dharma Assembly (*bde chen zhing sgrub chen mo*; Ch. *jile fahui* 极乐法会), many monastics leave retreat to take part in the assembly and thus effectively spend roughly twenty days in retreat.
- 74 There is no hard data to corroborate such a weakening and different accounts can give opposing impressions. Turek (2013, p. 104), for example, describes, on the basis of fieldwork in Nangchen up to 2008, the 'rapidly expanding phenomenon of meditation schools.'
- 75 McDougal (2016, p. 100) records him making very similar comments to another audience of Tibetan Buddhist teachers in October 2015.
- 76 The enforcement of an official population ceiling of five thousand on Larung Gar in 2016 strengthened an institutional expectation that once students (particularly male monastics) completed their formal training programmes they would move on to monastic careers elsewhere. Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's positioning of meditative retreat at the top of a hierarchy of monastic career paths implicitly assumes that monastics who choose to pursue this lifestyle would be doing so somewhere other than at Larung Gar.
- 77 *nga tsho rab tu byung ba zhig yin nas bzung rab na dpen pa'i ri khrod 'grims te sgom sgrub nyams len e thub ltos ... 'bring na dpe cha bltas te bsam pa rnam dag gis gzhan la chos kyi kho brda legs po sprod tha na yang sum rtags dag gsum spyangs te mang tshogs la bsam pa rnam dag gis yig rmongs bsal rgyu dang gtsang sbra 'phrod bsten khor yug sprung skyong gi thog nas mang tshogs la go brda yag po sprod.* Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro also repeated this hierarchical arrangement (KTL 2021, session 25/41 time-stamp 13:00–41:30 min) in an oral teaching on Gyelse Tokme Zangpo's commentary on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* given at Larung Gar in 2021.
- 78 Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro seems to have thought this higher-level lay audience would not only benefit from such teachings themselves, but would also be able to play a role in preserving the Buddhadharma alongside the monastic sangha, which might serve to compensate for the decline in total monastic numbers across Tibet in this period (see KTL 2017b, p. 100). In another discourse (KTL 2013a), Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro deems declining monastic numbers in Tibet as an inevitable trend and urges greater attention to consolidating monastic quality through education to offset its effects.
- 79 Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's Dharma teaching to Chinese lay audiences began in the 1990s. His first Chinese language Dharma book *Theories of Past and Future Lives* (Ch. *qianshi jinsheng lun* 前世今生论) was unofficially published in 2002. The first volume of his *Light of Wisdom* (Ch. *Huideng zhi guang* 慧灯之光) series was unofficially published in 2003. Volumes 1–6 were officially published in 2010. He established a Chinese language website and began giving online teachings for Chinese lay Buddhists in 2011. His current website, upgraded in 2016, is <https://luminouswisdom.org>.
- 80 Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro also gave a series of teachings emphasising the importance of meditation for lay Buddhists to a group of Tibetan intellectuals at Wutaishan in 2017. The teachings were later transcribed and turned into the unofficially published book, *Training of the Mind* (*sems kyi sbyong brdar*) (TOM). His recent teachings given at Larung Gar are freely available to Tibetan listeners via his Tibetan language mobile app 慧音FM (as of 1 December 2021).
- 81 Khenpo Sodargye was primarily responsible for carrying forward his guru's legacy in the field of Chinese outreach and had enormous success. Aside from serving as the Director of the Chinese Division at Larung Gar from 1993 onwards, he also launched a digitally-mediated lay study network named the Bodhi Study Association (*Puti Xuehui*) for Sinophone students in 2006, which expanded rapidly in the 2010s before it was closed down by state authorities in 2019. His Chinese Weibo currently has 2.9 million followers.
- 82 While higher tantric meditation is touched on in this programme, the mainstream of his teachings is at a foundational level, aligning broadly with the mind training (*blo sbyong*) level discussed above. His teachings on non-dual wisdom typically draw on approaches from the sūtric vehicle.
- 83 From 2015–2018 Catherine Hardie served as Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro's English translator during his teaching and academic exchange visits in the West.
- 84 Ch. 我们学佛的时候,我们需要理论... 然后也要去修行。这两个都需... 要的学佛,尤其是藏传佛教,它强调三个字,那这三个字是什么呢,就是闻,思,修,就这三个字。
- 85 Ch. 当然我们核心形式都做到了,那当然是非常圆满了。但是如果这些形式和这个核心当中,让我们选,那我们肯定要选这个核心。
- 86 Such discourse is echoed in the formulation heard among many Chinese Buddhists in Eastern Tibet, who say 'temples in China are like kindergartens, monasteries in Tibet are like universities'.
- 87 Ch. 不是硬性规定必须盲目, 迷信...
- 88 Ch. 实际上释迦牟尼佛的佛法,它是一种幸福学,可以这么说,它是一种超级的幸福学,它是一种超级的心理学。
- 89 Ch. 我们光是听还不够,要去思考问题... [因为]那这个常识跟佛教告诉我们的见解是有非常不一样的地方。

- <sup>90</sup> Ch. 所以我们听完了以后, 要去思考, 反复地去思考, 反复地去思考以后, 我们才能够真正地了解到佛的这个意思。From the section 《闻思修的原理 一。闻思修三, 不可脱节》no page reference.
- <sup>91</sup> Ch. 当然, 有极个别因缘非常成熟的人, 六祖慧能大师, 以及佛教历史上出现过的一些很了不起的人, 他们确实是不经闻思而成就的。但六祖慧能大师这样的人有多少呢? 所以, 我们还是应该脚踏实地闻思修。From section on 《缘起赞》略释, no page reference.

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