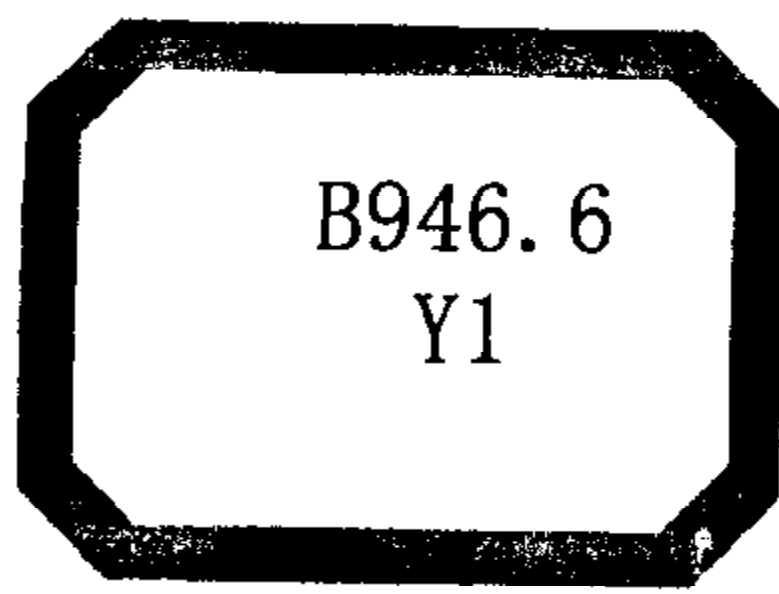


THE SYSTEM OF THE DALAI LAMA REINCARNATION

Chen Qingying



China Intercontinental Press



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I. Tibetan Buddhism and the System of Living Buddha Reincarnation

The Living Buddha Reincarnation System as a means of providing for succession among leaders of Tibetan Buddhism is unique to it.

In the 7th century, Buddhism was promoted in Tibet from both India and the Central Plains, as represented by two vivid examples, namely the marriages between Tubo Tsampo (king) Songtsan Gampo and Nepal Princess Bhributi as well as Princess Wencheng of the Tang Dynasty. Both of the two princesses brought a Buddhist figure to the Tubo Kingdom. Princess Bhributi brought an image of the 8-year-old Sakyamuni and Princess Wencheng brought an image of Sakyamuni at 12. These images were set up for worship in the Rampoche Monastery and Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa respectively.

The position of Buddhism gradually became stable with the support of

Potala palace: Residence of the Dalai Lama. CHEN ZONGLIE

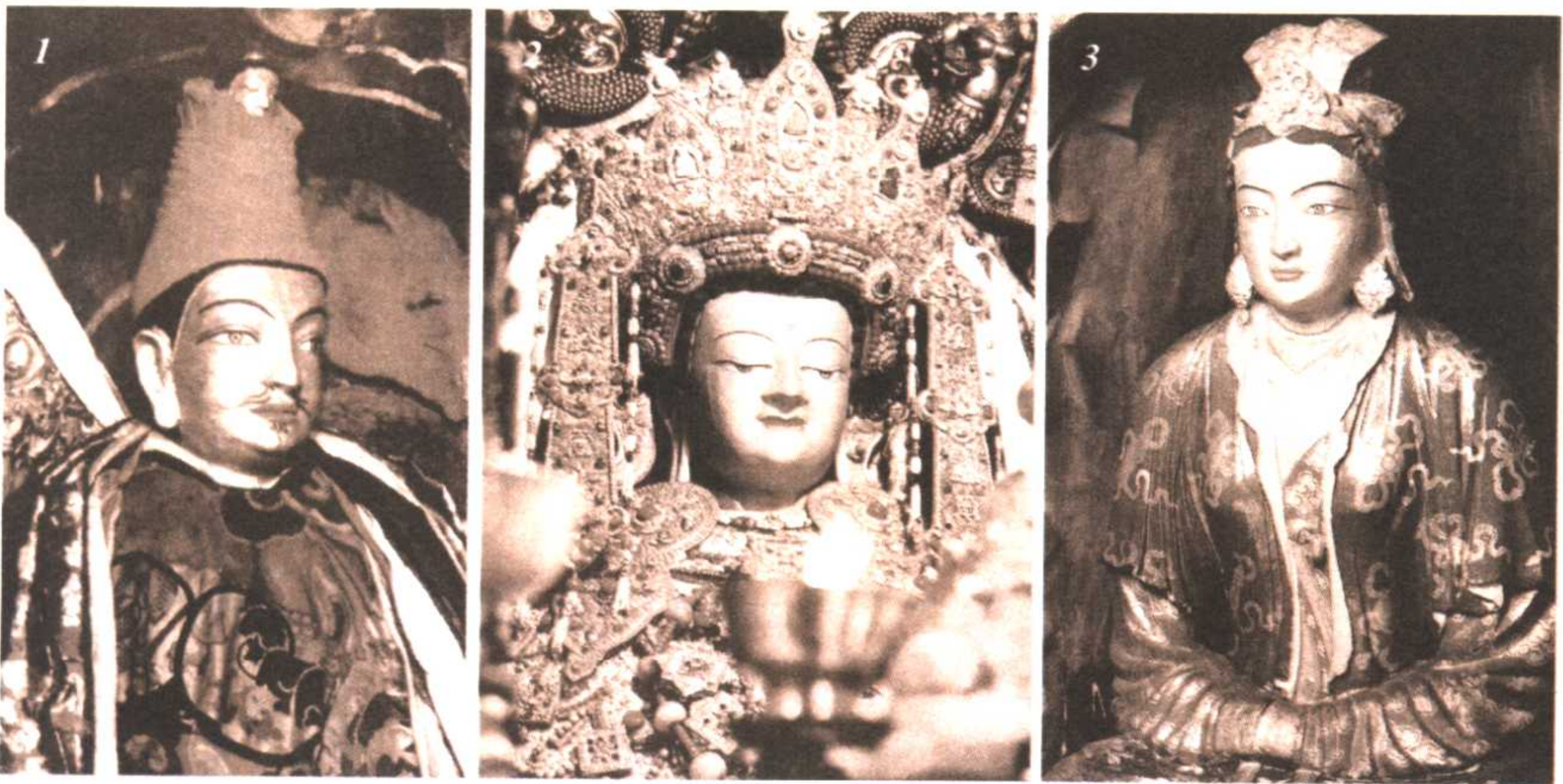




the Tubo royal family. At that time, 12 monasteries were established, but they were so small that they contained no monks, only a figure of Buddha. Songtsan Gampo took charge of the translation of many sutras and established laws requiring people to believe in Buddhism, which helped its rapid spread.

In 779, Samye Monastery was established, and became the first to have monks ; seven royal children became monks, which was a significant event in Tibetan Buddhist history.

Some 200 years later, Buddhism enjoyed a fresh revival during the reign of the eighth Tsanpo Rabajun. He stipulated that residents in Tubo give alms and that one member of each family should become a monk and every seven families should support one monk. At the same time, he also invited leading monks and scholars from everywhere to translate the sutras. They translated sutras according to uniform stylistic rules and layout and completed the first Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionary. These actions of the Tsanpo strengthened the power of the monastic groups and aroused the dissatisfaction of followers of the traditional Bon religion. In 841, when the Bon



1 2 3
 ^ *Statues of songtsan Gambo, Napaless Princess Bhributi and Tang Dynasty Princess Wencheng: In the 7 th Century, Songtsan Gambo married Napalese Princess Bhributi and Tang Dynasty Princess Wencheng. The three statues are preserved in the Potala palace.*
 CHEN ZONGLIE

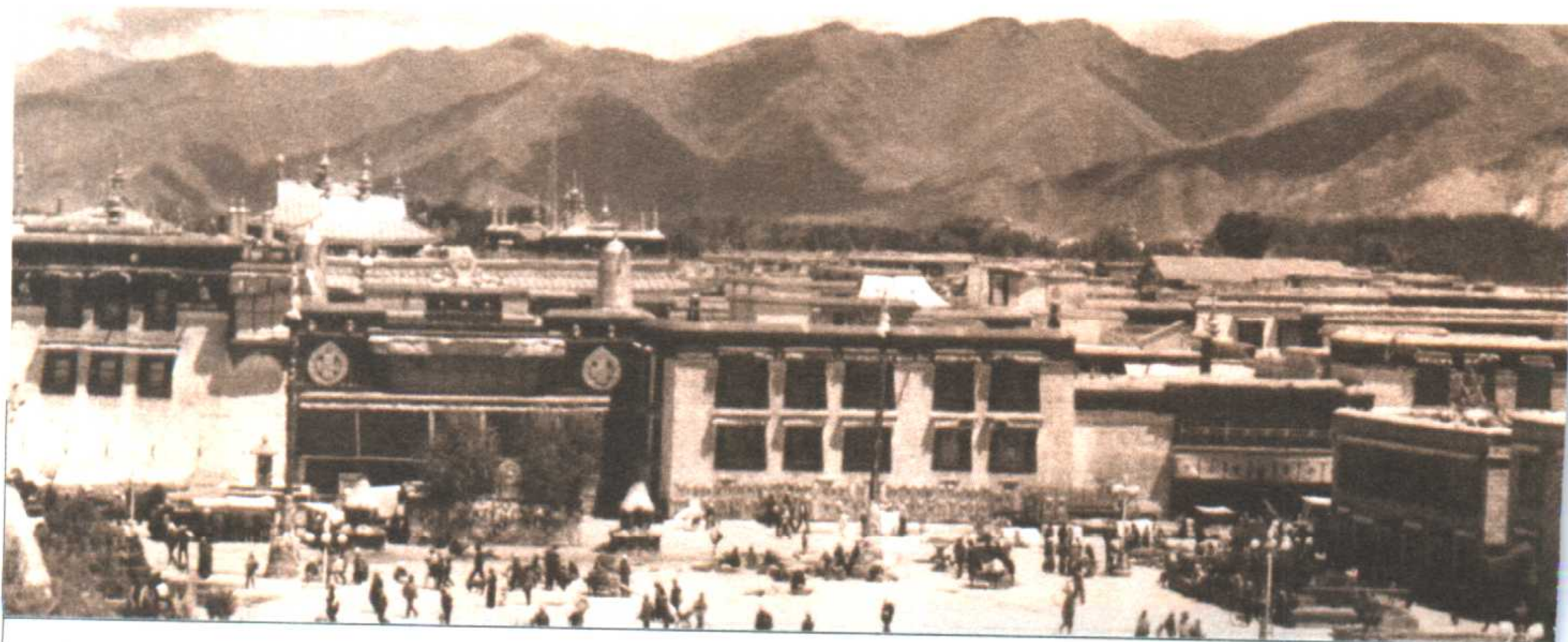


*Princess Wencheng (second left)
brought the statue of the 12-year-old
Sakyamuni to Tibet.*

CHEN ZONGLIE

adherent Dalhun Weda Nagyian killed Rabajun, and the latter's younger brother, Lang Darma, he assumed power with Bon support. In 843, it was stipulated that all monasteries in Tibet were to be closed, figures of Buddha destroyed and monks forced to return to secular life in posts such as butcher or hunter, and all sutras burned or sealed up. This put an end to the first propagation period of Tibetan Buddhism.

However, Tibetan Buddhism did not die out. Some followers of Buddhism escaped from the central region of Tibet and began to propagate Buddhism in Dokang (Amdo and Kham area) and Ngari. Moreover, they invited some famous monks such as Atisa to help spread the faith. Supported by local political power, these two areas became a remote Buddhist center. Around 970, Tibetan Buddhism entered U-Tsang from Dokang and Ngari, helping launch the second great propagation period of Tibetan Buddhism.





During this time, over 20 sects and branches came into being, with the Nyingma, Gedan, Sagya and Gagyü sects as the four leading ones. Among sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingma Sect has the longest history, with strong local cultural traits and an emphasis on execration and exorcism. It has loose management and its disciples are decentralized. Under this revival, its major sutras were dug out from their underground hiding places or caves. Until the 16th and 17th century, the Nyingma Sect had its own monasteries, the major ones being Dorjezha Monastery, located near the meeting place of Yarlung Zangbo River and Lhasa River, and Mingzhuling Monastery in Shannan Zhanang County.



Statue of Bribhuti preserved in the Potala Palace.

CHEN ZONGLIE

The Gedan Sect originated from Atisa, whose disciple Zongdainba was its formal founder. In 1055, Zongdainba held a mourning ceremony for Atisa in Nyitang and established a monastery there for preserving his mentor's remains. In 1056, he came to Razheng and established Razheng Monastery, which became the base for the Gedan Sect's development.

The Sagya Sect got its name from its main base, Sagya Monastery. On its walls were painted three-color stripes of red, white and black, which symbolize Wisdom Buddha, Goddess of Meray, and Diamond Buddha. The Sagya Sect has five significant founders. Sapan Gunggar Gyaincain, the fourth founder, played an important role in bringing Tibet and the hinterland together in 13th century. Kublai Khan, Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, granted Pagba, the fifth founder, the title of Imperial Tutor. Later, Pagba was granted the title of Prince of Great Treasure to command thirteen 10,000-households, pioneering the system of mixed temporal and religious

Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa built during the period of songtsan Gambo.

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Portraits of three generations of Tibetan King--Songtsan Gambo (middle), Trisung Detsan (left) and Rabejun (Tashilhunpo Monastery mural). CHEN ZONGLIE



administration.

The Gagyü Sect emphasized oral instruction and paid more attention to secret cultivation that depends on it (and from which the name is derived). This sect was founded in the 11th century. It had many branches and had two reincarnation systems from the very beginning, namely Shangba Gagyü and Dabu Gagyü. Shangba Gagyü flourished for a while. The Sengding Monastery was established by the sect, headed by a female Living Buddha holding a very high Buddhist position. Tongdong Gyibo, who was famous for building an iron bridge in the 15th century, was also a monk of Shangba Gagyü. But this sect disappeared in the 15th century. Dabu Gagyü continues to this day and its founder, Dabo Lhagyia Soinam Renqen, was born in Lhunzi County, Tibet. He studied medicine early in life and became monk at the age of 26. He majored in both the open and secret schools of Tibetan Buddhism and formally acknowledged Milha Riba as his teacher. Gradually the Dabo Gagyü Sect came into being. His four most famous disciples established monasteries and accepted disciples in the Lhasa area to form four major branches: Garma Gagyü, Chaba Gagyü, Barong Gagyü and Pagzhub Gagyü. In addition, Pagzhub Gagyü had eight sub-branches. The Garma Gagyü Sect was divided into the Black and Red Hat sects based on the gift of this headwear from the Yuan emperor. Reincarnation of Living Buddha was founded by the Black Hat Gagyü Sect. According to *Blue Annals*, in 1283, Garma Baxie, master of Curpu Monastery in the moun-



tains northwest of Lhasa, told his disciples when dying, "I am going to leave for a while. After my death, the inheritor of the secret school of the Black Hat Sect will appear in Lhadui far away. Before his coming, you will serve as a temporary representative for Buddha." Then, he took off his gilt-edged hat and placed it on the head of Wogyiaba before dying.

In 1284, in Gungtang in the Xigaze area, the hometown of Milha Riba, master instructor of Gagyü Sect, a child was born. Five years later, he was recognized as the reincarnated soul boy of Garma Baxie. He was the first boy to be recognized as a reincarnated soul boy of a former monk in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. In 1289, this boy was invited to Curpu Monastery and became a monk following Wogyiaba, disciple of Garma Baxie. He was given the Buddhist name as Shangqoin Dorje. The details of this event were described in *Blue Annals*: When Shangqoin Dorje came to Curpu Monastery with his parents, he felt free to sit on the high seat facing Wogyiaba. Wogyiaba was astonished and asked, "Boy, why do you sit on my master's seat?" Shangqoin Dorje answered, "Your master is me." Wogyiaba suddenly recalled his master's last words and acknowledged that this boy was the reincarnation of his master. So, he said, "Now, take a seat below," and began to teach him.

The establishment of the Living Buddha Reincarnation System is the Garma Gagyü Sect's major contribution to Tibetan Buddhism. Before its establishment, there were mainly two modes of reincarnation among the religious sects. One was reincarnation from father to son or between fam-



Samye Monastery in Zhaxiang county (built in the 8th century).

CHEN ZONGLIE



^ ^
^ Tashilhunpo Monastery. CHEN ZONGLIE

ily members; the other was reincarnation from master to disciple. The Nyingma Sect adopted the father-son mode. As the monks of this religious sect could marry and have children, a son could inherit the father's ěbusinessí. The significant representatives of the Nyingma Sect were a grandparent, a parent and a grandchild of three successive generations. Mingzhuling Monastery and Dorjezha Monastery, located respectively on the southern and northern banks of the Yarlung Zangbo River in the Lhasa area, were ancestral monasteries of the Nyingma Sect. In the middle period between 16th century and 17th century, these two monasteries adopted respectively incarnation from father to son and from father-in-law to son-in-law. Even today, Mingzhuling Monastery has a father-son incarnation system. In the Sagya Sect, family members inherited the dominant position. The first ancestral abbot of the Sagya Sect was Gunggar Nyingba, upon whose death his second son Soinam Zemo inherited the abbotship. When



he died, his brother Zhaba Gyaincain became the third ancestral abbot, succeeded in due course by his nephew, who was Sagya Pandit Gungar Gyaincain, famous in history. After his death, his nephew Pagba inherited became the fifth ancestral master. Pagba acknowledged Kublai Khan, first Emperor of Yuan Dynasty, and was granted a title as Imperial Tutor, which made the Sagya Sect dominant in Tibet. However, the Gedan Sect adopted the mode of reincarnation from master to disciple. Its ancestral abbot Zongdainba had many disciples. He built up Razheng Monastery and asked his disciple Gungbawa to take over after his death, and this system remains today.

The Living Buddha Reincarnation System came into being in the 13th century and had its particular social historical background. At that time, Tibetan Buddhism was enjoying its second major propagation period. All religious sects built up their own monasteries and the independent monastic economy gradually came into being. Monasteries owned land, herds and pasture in addition to tenants. But this triggered severe political and economic competition and mutual mergers among the religious sects. In order to keep a stable position in the competition and to ensure they would continue to flourish, all the religious sects recognized that there must be an influential and steady leader, as well as a proper reincarnation system for passing on the post. Due to this



Garma Bashie (tangka), leader of the Black-Hat Garma Gagyü Sect.

CHEN ZONGLIE



situation, different sects gradually adopted the Living Buddha Reincarnation System. Dorjezha Monastery of the Nyingma Sect, Sangding Monastery and Zhigung Monastery of the Gagyü Sect's Shangba Gagyü and others all changed their own former reincarnation mode to the Living Buddha Reincarnation system.

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✓ *Lamas with the Zhaibung Monastery
Performing Buddhist rituals in Barkor
Street, Lhasa.* CHEN ZONGLIE





II. Gelug Sect Adopts the Living Buddha Reincarnation System

In the early days of the 15th century, the Gelug Sect flourished in Tibetan areas. Zongkapa Lobsang Zhaba (1357-1419) was its founder. He was born in the place where Qinghai Tar Monastery is located today. His father was a leader of Tibetan Longben Tribe and once served as an official of the Yuan Dynasty. At the age of seven, Zongkapa was sent by his family to Xaqoin Monastery by the Yellow River in what is now Hualong County, Qinghai Province. He became a monk following the eminent monk Toinzhub Renqen who returned from the U-Tsang area after learning Buddhism. At the age of 16 (1372), he went to Tibet to learn Buddhism. He formally acknowledged many famous scholars of religious sects as his teachers to learn the doctrines of the open and secret schools of Tibetan Buddhism. After the conclusion of his studies, he propagated Buddhist tenets and wrote books for preaching. With growing influence, he drew around him a group of disciples. In 1401, Zongkapa and his teacher Rendawa Xunnu Lozui (an eminent monk of Sagya Sect), as well as Gyiaqiao Besang (another eminent monk of the same sect who once received Rendawa and Zongkapa in Dagcangzong in 1390) called in hundreds of monks and held a Buddhist summons ceremony in Razheng Monastery, the ancestral monastery of the Gedan Sect. He called for the consolidation of religious discipline and the reformation of Tibetan Buddhism. This movement lasted for almost two years. But, towards the end, Rendawa and Gyiaqiao Besang left in quick succession, and after this, Zongkapa prepared to found his own sect instead of staying within the existing structure of the Sagya and Gagyü sects. From 1403 to 1419, when he died, a group of promising youths coming from various parts of Tibet assembled around Master Zongkapa. They became the skeleton force to establish the Gelug Sect. The important Living Buddha Reincar-



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Gendun zhupa (1391-1474), a disciple of Zongkapa, later became the 1st Dalai Lama. The sculpture is preserved in the Tashilhunpo Monastery.

CHEN ZONGLIE

nation System of the early Gelug Sect descends from one of these disciples, as does the Dalai Lama Living Buddha Reincarnation System.

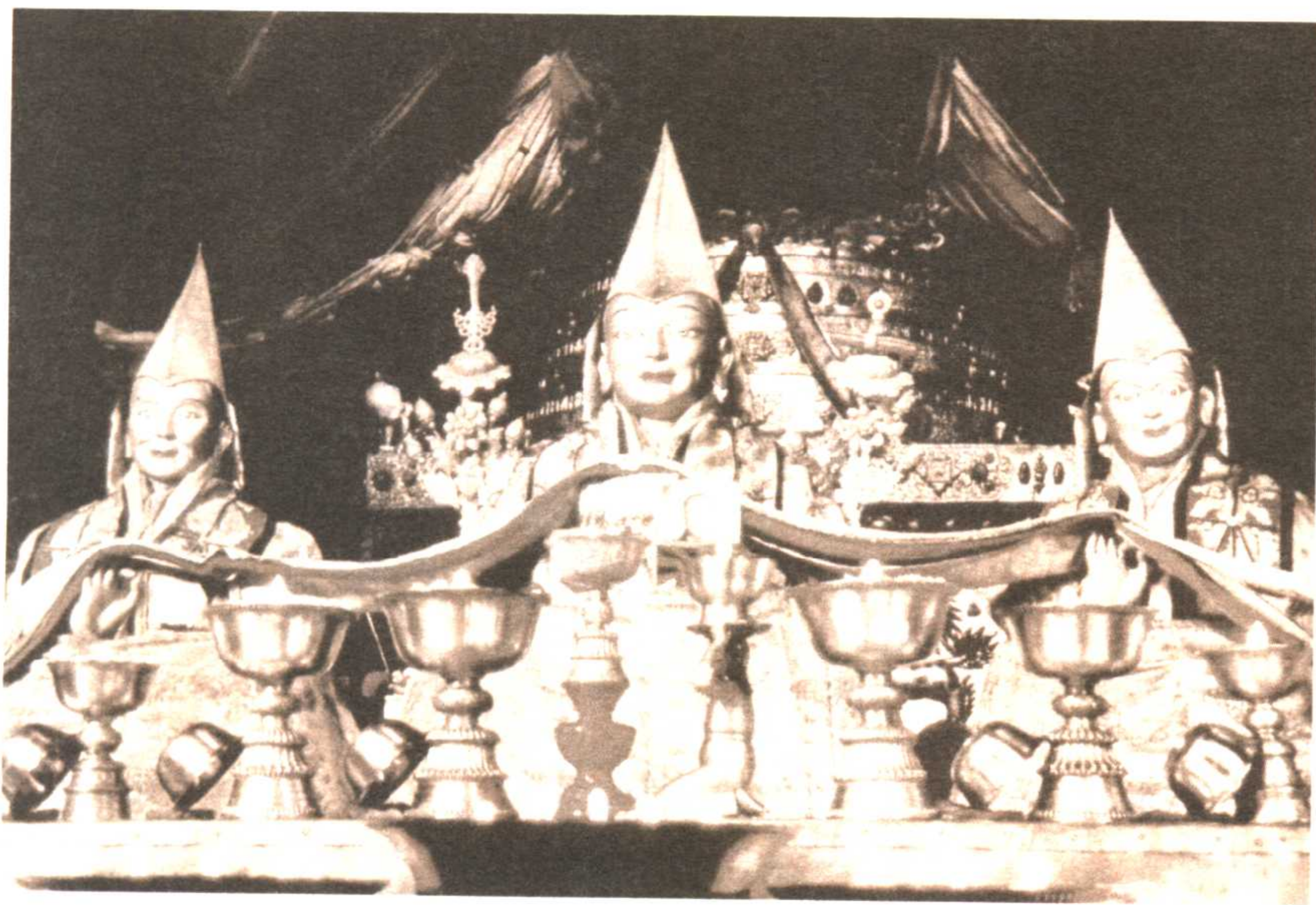
In 1409, with the support from Dixi, the

local political power in the Pagzhub area of Tibet holding the title of Prince of Propagation Zhaba Gyaincain granted by the Ming Dynasty, Zongkapa held the first Grand Summons Ceremony in Lhasa (at Jokhang Monastery) during the first Tibetan month. In the same year, he built up Gandain Monastery, the first to be established by the Gelug Sect, in Dagze County in northeastern Lhasa. Hence, a new sect of Tibetan Buddhism came into being. After its establishment, monks were sent to the Xigaze, Kham and Amdo areas to build respectively the Zhaibung Monastery, Sera Monastery, Tashilhunpo Monastery and others to further enhance its influence. Some monasteries of other religious sects (especially the numerous monasteries of Gedan Sect) submitted to or changed to the



Gelug Sect, enabling it to have monasteries all over Tibet and gradually grasp power. Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty once invited Zongkapa to Beijing, but due to illness and too much business, he sent his disciple Shvakya-ye-shes in his place. Emperor Yongle granted him the title of Western Paradise Buddhist Grand National Master. Later, Emperor Xuande granted him as the title as Daxi Buddhist Master. The political and economic support from the court and the Prince of Propagation played an important role in the formation and early development of the Gelug Sect.

Early on, the Gelug Sect adopted the mode of inheritance from master to disciple. As Zongkapa took the post of abbot in Gandain Monastery, all the following abbots were recognized as the inheritor of Zongkapa's position. The supreme leader of religious sects was every abbot (that is Triba, pronounced as khri-pa in Tibetan) of Gandain Monastery, who is



Zongka (1357-1419) and his two disciples-Gyacaogyi (left) and Kezhubgyia (later the 1st Panchen Erdeni) (right).

CHEN ZONGLIE



<< *Gandain Monastery.* CHEN ZONGLIE

called Gandain Triba in Tibetan. As Zongkapa was viewed as an incarnation of the Wisdom Buddha, seven Gandain Tribas, including Gyiacaogyi and Kezhubgyia, after him were all born in the Xigaze area. Gandain Triba adopted the term system. Two masters of Tantri

Zhacang (Lhasa Upper and Lower Tantric School) of Gandain Monastery served as Gandain Triba in turns. The inheritance system of Gandain Triba ensured the Gelug Sect's affairs were managed by an eminent monk, which played an important role in prevention of an internal power and maintenance of religious unity of the sect in this early period. Later, such a struggle did develop among the religious sects, because the monks who served as Gandain Triba were old and lacked energy. In addition, they were changed frequently without religious holiness and mystery, so they could not establish steady and long-term power in religion and politics. The designation system of Gandain Triba exposed its weakness. In order to strengthen its cohesive power and cultivate its own powerful leader, the Gelug Sect gradually adopted the Living Buddha Reincarnation system at the same time as maintaining the designation system of Gandain Triba. Thus, the religious theories and rules about Living Buddha Reincarnation came into being.

Living Buddha Reincarnation System is based mainly on incarnation theories. This theology is very popular and well known by disciples. They can accept the mode of Living Buddha Reincarnation without problems.

Simply speaking, the Living Buddha is Buddha or Bodhisattva who