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Monastic Meat: The Question of Meat Eating and Vegetarianism in Tibetan Buddhist Monastic Guidelines (*bca' yig*)

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Abstract: The practice of vegetarianism has long been connected with monasticism in Tibet, despite explicit statements in the vinaya that monks and nuns are allowed to eat meat. This paper examines one particular aspect of this connection: the rules governing meat eating found in monastic guidelines. Texts of this genre reveal a variety of approaches to the question of meat eating, from avoiding the issue entirely (the most common) to banning meat outright (the least). In this paper I argue that, when viewed collectively, those monastic guidelines that discuss meat do so in a measured way that makes clear that while meat is not fully condoned, individual monks or nuns can choose how strictly they will adhere to this ideal. Meat was, thus, generally permitted, but within a context in which it was still viewed in a negative light.

Keywords: Tibet; Buddhism; vegetarianism; meat eating; animal ethics; monasticism; monasteries

1. Introduction

One of the most striking things about vegetarianism in Tibet[1] is the diet's strong connection with monasticism. We can see this connection in the way texts against meat were often framed for a monastic audience, in their concern for understanding and contextualizing the vinaya rules (*'dul ba*; the formal rules for monks and nuns) regarding meat, and in the numerous biographical references to individuals adopting vegetarianism at the same time they took monastic vows. There are even instances in which a religious leader claims that while monastics should be vegetarian, other professional religious practitioners are excused from this requirement. In this paper, I investigate one particular aspect of this connection between vegetarianism and monasticism: how the rules found in monastic guidelines framed the practice of vegetarianism in Tibetan monasteries.[2] Most of the monastic guidelines do not mention

[1] "Vegetarianism" was not a defined diet in Tibet, with culturally established rules for what constituted being a vegetarian. When I use the terms "vegetarian" and "vegetarianism" in this article, therefore, I am not referring to a set, defined diet. Rather, I am referring to a wide variety of practices that are all united by the conscious rejection of meat (to one degree or another) for religious and ethical reasons. Such practices include full vegetarianism, of course, but also attempts to simply reduce one's meat consumption, rejecting meat during particularly holy days or months, and a variety of other flavors of what we might call "partial" vegetarianism. I have discussed this definition in depth in *Food of Sinful Demons*, and refer readers there for more details (Barstow 2018, pp. 3–7).

[2] One of the most difficult aspects of this project has been identifying the relevant texts. At the outset, therefore, I want to express my gratitude to the friends and colleagues who have pointed me towards the texts that I have examined here. Without their assistance, this project would not have been possible. In particular, I wish to thank

meat eating, but those that do are all critical of the practice to one degree or another. While they are critical of meat eating and supportive of vegetarianism, however, many of these texts are worded in a way that allows individual monks or nuns to continue to eat meat if they so choose, effectively allowing each monastic to decide for themselves whether or not to eat meat. At the same time as these rules allowed individual latitude on this issue, however, their very presence preserved and perpetuated vegetarianism as a monastic ideal. Thus, I argue, while the practical impact of these rules may have been limited, they fostered a culture in which vegetarianism, while practically and culturally difficult, remained the ideal diet for Buddhist monastics.

2. Meat's Monastic Connection

Vegetarianism was a complex practice in Tibet. The vast majority of Tibetans ate meat, while a relatively small number adopted some form of vegetarianism, either by rejecting meat entirely, reducing the amount of meat they ate, or seeking only to mitigate the negative karma of consuming meat through prayers for the animal. Different individuals gave different arguments to support their rejection of meat, and emphasized it to different degrees, but to the best of my knowledge, all forms of vegetarianism in pre-1950 Tibet were religiously motivated. While some contemporary Tibetans adopt vegetarianism primarily for health reasons or out of environmental concern, for instance, I have found no reference to such ideologies in pre-1950 material. Further, and importantly for this paper, vegetarianism was particularly associated with monastic forms of Buddhism. This connection between vegetarianism and monasticism was both broad and deep, spanning centuries and sectarian affiliations. There are exceptions, of course, but when vegetarianism was discussed, it seems to have been primarily understood as a practice for monastics, with laity and non-monastic religious practitioners excluded.

Evidence for this association comes in several forms. Many discussions of vegetarianism, for instance, are found in texts that explicitly address monastic concerns, such as commentaries on the vinaya, or discussions of the three vows (*sdom gsum*).[3] Commentaries on the vinaya are obviously aimed at monastics, but treatises on the three vows include discussion of all three sets of vows commonly adopted by religious Tibetans, including the vinaya, of course, but also the Bodhisattva vow and tantric commitments as well. These latter vows are taken by monks and nuns alongside their monastic vows, but they are also taken by practitioners who are not monks or nuns. When texts that cover all three sets of vows discuss meat eating, however, it is usually in the context of the vinaya, rather than the Bodhisattva vow or tantric commitments. By placing their discussion of vegetarianism in the section of the text dealing with the monastic vows, these works reinforce the idea that vegetarianism is a question for monastics rather than non-monastic practitioners. The connection between meat and monasticism is reinforced by a common pattern in biographical literature in which an individual is said to adopt vegetarianism at the same time they take their monastic vows. A good example of this pattern is found in the thirteenth century biography of the seminal Kagyü master Jigten Sumgön: "After receiving full ordination, he did not eat after noon, and his tongue was clean, unfamiliar with meat or alcohol" (shes rab 'byung gnas 2002, p. 176).[4] For Jigten Sumgön, vegetarianism seems to have been part and parcel of

Berthe Jansen, who introduced me to three of the sources here and who offered insightful comments on a previous version of this paper. This paper would not have been possible without her help. Brenton Sullivan introduced me to another source, for which I am grateful. I want to thank the Tibetan monks and scholars in Tibet who introduced me to texts and who shared their time and expertise, but who I will not name here in order to preserve their privacy. Finally, this paper was originally delivered at the Buddhist Beasts Conference, and I wish to thank the sponsors of that conference, the Glorisun Charitable Foundation, Tzu-Chi Canada, SSHRC Partnership FROGBEAR Project, and the UBC Buddhist Studies Forum.

[3] The most extensive work on three vows in Tibetan Buddhism to date is (Sobisch 2002).

[4] Tib: *rab tu gshegs nas dro 'phyis pa yang ma gsol zhing/ sha chang ljags la bstar ma myong ste*

his monastic practice, and in this he was not alone: numerous other Tibetans also chose to adopt vegetarianism at the time they took their vows.

Even more striking are the few instances in which vegetarianism is required of monastics, but other professional religious practitioners are explicitly excused. Perhaps the clearest example of this comes from *The Chronicle of Padma*, a fourteenth century treasure text revealed by Orgyen Lingpa.[5] Here, *The Chronicle of Padma* states that, "For thirst, monks should only drink milk and tea. For food, they may eat grain, molasses, honey and cheese. … They may not consume black alcohol, meat, or dirty food" (o rgyan gling pa n.d., p. 302).[6] After forbidding meat to monks, however, the text next discusses mantrins (*sngags pa*). Like monks, mantrins dedicate their lives to the study and practice of Buddhism (at least ideally), perform rituals for sponsors, and adopt distinctive dress that publicly marks their mantrin status (white robes and long hair instead of the monastics' red robes and shaved heads). However, unlike monks and nuns, mantrins do not take monastic vows, are allowed to marry and have children, and, while they are expected to adhere to general Buddhist ethical norms, they are broadly excused from the specific rules that govern monastic life. In contrast to monastics, *The Chronicle of Padma* opines, "Mantrins can eat whatever they enjoy, as long as it is not poison" (o rgyan gling pa n.d., p. 302).[7] In this text's presentation, the rules governing meat eating were notably looser for mantrins than for monks.

Such opinions were not universal, and some mantrins, particularly from the eighteenth century onwards, did adopt vegetarianism. The nineteenth century mantrin Nyala Pema Dündül, for instance, was an adamant vegetarian (Pearcey forthcoming), as was the early twentieth century mantrin Sera Khandro (Jacoby 2014). Further, different religious lineages emphasized the practice of vegetarianism among monastics to different degrees. Ngorchen Künga Zangpo required strict vegetarianism at Ngor, the monastery he founded in 1429, and there is strong evidence that this rule was enforced at Ngor for several centuries after his passing (Heimbel 2017b, p. 251). Writing only a few years after Ngorchen (and likely in direct response), the seminal Geluk figure Khedrup Jé argued at length that monks are not required to be vegetarian (Johnson forthcoming), an opinion that seems to have caused vegetarianism to have been relatively rare at Geluk monasteries.[8]

At the risk of repeating myself, I want to emphasize again that, to the best of my knowledge, most Tibetan monastics were not vegetarian. With some localized exceptions (such as Ngor Monastery and perhaps a handful of other institutions), vegetarianism largely remained a practice available to, but not expected of, most monks and nuns. Nevertheless, despite the fact that most monks were not vegetarian and that different monastic lineages emphasized vegetarianism to different degrees, it remains the case that vegetarianism as a diet remained a largely monastic phenomenon. When vegetarianism was discussed or practiced, it was usually within a monastic context, rather than among mantrins or lay-people. Not all Tibetan vegetarians were monks or nuns, but the evidence suggests that most of them were.

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[5] The authorship of this text is notably complex. Apart from the fact that it is a treasure text (*gter ma*), R.A. Stein has suggested that this passage reflects an earlier set of law codes, possibly dating to the reign of Trisong Detsen (Stein 1972, pp. 143–44). Whether or not this is the case, the inclusion of this passage in Orgyen Lingpa's treasure text suggests that it's ideas remained relevant in the fourteenth century.

[6] Tib: *dge 'dun skom du dkar dang ja gsol cig/ zas su bru dang bur sgrang mar thud gsol/ … chang nag sha dang lhad zas ma sten cig/*
For an alternate translation, see (Stein 1972, p. 144).

[7] Tib: *zas su ci dgar longs spyod dug ma za/*
For an alternate translation, see (Stein 1972, p. 144).

[8] It is interesting to note that Khedrup Jé was in some degree of conflict or competition with Ngorchen Künga Zangpo, the founder of Ngor monastery. This is speculative, but it may be that this sense of competition with the adamantly vegetarian Ngorchen may have influenced Khedrup's defense of monastic meat eating. For more on Khedrup's conflict with Ngorchen, see (Heimbel 2017a).

This strong association between vegetarianism and monasticism is striking for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fact that the vinaya explicitly allows monks to eat meat as long as that meat has threefold purity (*rnam gsum dag pa'i sha*). Threefold purity is a complex rule, with a wide variety of different interpretations among Tibetan scholars.[9] A full accounting of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but the nineteenth century scholar Khenpo Shenga provides a concise presentation that summarizes the most common take on the rule of threefold purity: "Meat is not allowed if one has seen, heard, or suspected that the meat was prepared by the donor specifically for the eater" (gzhan phan chos kyi snang ba 2004, vol. 1, p. 583).[10] In Khenpo Shenga's presentation, as in most other interpretations of threefold purity, the crucial point is that the monk or nun must not even suspect that the animal was killed specifically for them. Thus, most Tibetan monastics felt that this rule allowed them to eat meat as long as they, as a specific individual, were not directly responsible for the death of the animal. We are, therefore, left with the curious situation of vegetarianism being primarily (though not always) associated with monasticism, despite the fact that the monastic vows were generally understood to allow monks to eat meat.

3. Meat in Monastic Guidelines

I have explored the broad relationship between monasticism and vegetarianism—including what I understand to be the reasons for this connection—in some detail elsewhere (Barstow 2018, pp. 44–69). For the present, I will only note that, in my analysis, the association between monasticism and vegetarianism rests on monasticism's broad association with renunciation. Monks, in other words, were broadly associated with the renunciation of worldly pleasures in favor of religious discipline. Vegetarianism fit this vision well, despite the fact that it was not required by the vinaya. Rather than rehash my earlier arguments on this point, this present paper will focus on one specific aspect of the association between monasticism and vegetarianism: the ways in which rules regarding meat eating were conceived and implemented in monasteries. That is, my concern here is not why vegetarianism was associated with monasticism, or with specific arguments for or against monastic vegetarianism, or even with the ways individual monks or nuns practiced vegetarianism. Rather, my interest here is with the ways in which restrictions on meat eating were conceived and implemented on a monastery-wide scale.

To do this, I rely primarily on a genre of text known as monastic guidelines (*bca' yig*).[11] By far the most significant studies of these texts have been done by Berthe Jansen, particularly in her recent monograph on the genre, *The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet*.[12] As she explains, monastic guidelines are, in essence, rulebooks, containing "practical instructions that seek to regulate monastic life" (Jansen 2018, p. 19). Monastic guidelines tell monks and nuns how they were expected to behave, what they could and couldn't do, and so on. Unlike the vinaya, these rules were not intended to apply to all monks everywhere. Instead, they were written for a particular monastery and addressed concerns relevant to that monastery, often in granular and colorful detail. These texts might, for instance, outline the seating hierarchy during rituals or explain the responsibilities of a particular monastic officer. They might also regulate access to particular monastery buildings or dictate who had

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[9] For several different takes on threefold purity, see the texts contained in (Barstow forthcoming b).

[10] Tib: *za ba po'i phyir sbyin bdag gis sha bsngos par mthong ba dang thos pa dang dogs pa'i sgo nas shes na bza' bar mi bya'o*/.

[11] The Tibetan term *bca' yig* has been translated in various ways, including "monastic constitution," "monastic customary," and "monastic rulebook" (the latter is the translation I use in *Food of Sinful Demons*). Here, I follow the translation used by Berthe Jansen in *The Monastery Rules*, with the assumption that Jansen's choice will become the standard.

[12] In addition to this monograph, see Jansen (2014) and Jansen (2015). In addition to Jansen's work on this topic, see (Ellingson 1990).

access to financial resources.[13] Given that these documents were meant to apply only to particular monasteries, it is not surprising that individual senior religious leaders might write different sets of guidelines for different monasteries.

Further, these texts were not written in a vacuum; often they were written in response to specific events and concerns. As Jansen explains, "These texts document situations that were seen by the authors as problematic. In many monastic guidelines, new rules are introduced by first noting how certain issues were dealt with wrongly in the past, and how 'from now on' people need to behave or manage the monastery differently" (Jansen 2014 p. 140). Further, these concerns were not necessarily focused only on intra-monastery circumstances. Often, these texts display a strong concern with how the monastic community was viewed by the broader public. Again, Jansen explains this well: "many monastic guidelines demonstrate great concern for the reputation that the monks enjoyed among lay-people. The reasoning often given for creating certain rules is that if the monks do not behave properly the lay-people would lose faith in the community of monks and thereby in the Sangha, one of the three Jewels" (Jansen 2014, p. 140). Concern for the public face of the monastery is certainly not the only reason monastic guidelines would have been written, but it was an important concern. We may speculate, therefore, that many of these texts were likely written when religious authorities felt that a particular monastery was conducting itself in a way that the broader public might find unacceptable.

Overall, then, these monastic guidelines provide a unique glimpse into the lives of particular monasteries. As I will discuss further below, we should not assume that all of the monks or nuns resident in a monastery actually followed these rules. Nevertheless, given the highly localized nature of these texts, they give us a much more granular insight into the lived practice of monasticism than, say, the vinaya, with its fixed rules meant to apply to all monastics at all times.

Fortunately for this paper, monastic guidelines sometimes discuss meat eating. At the outset, it is important to note that not all monastic guidelines discuss meat, either explicitly or implicitly. I have not done a full survey of all available monastic guidelines and do not want to speculate on exactly what percentage of these texts discuss meat. My impression, however, is that most such texts do not even broach the topic. Those texts that do bring up meat eating present a wide variety of positions on the issue, as I will discuss momentarily. However, it is also important to remember that this is only a subset of available guidelines. I am quite certain that future research will reveal more of these texts that discuss meat eating, and this research will no doubt add complexity and nuance to my conclusions here. Nevertheless, there is enough consistency in the texts that I am aware of to justify some preliminary conclusions on the ways these texts present and understand the question of meat eating and vegetarianism.

Given their highly localized nature, it is not surprising that those monastic guidelines that do discuss meat eating approach the issue from a variety of perspectives. Perhaps the simplest position the authors of these texts might take would be to ban meat eating outright, and we do see a few texts that do so. Mikyö Dorjé, the eighth Karmapa incarnation,[14] does precisely this in his sixteenth century *Monastic Guidelines for Tsurpu Monastery*, writing that "Monks gathered here should, in particular, not eat meat or eggs" (mi bskyod rdo rje 2004a, vol. 3, p. 709).[15] Mikyö Dorjé wrote in support of vegetarianism in several places, including an extensive work focused solely on the faults of meat (mi bskyod rdo rje n.d.).[16] In addition to this standalone work, Mikyö Dorjé included a critique of monastic meat eating in his

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13 For a full description of the genre, see (Jansen 2018, pp. 14–30).

14 The Karmapas are one of the most prominent incarnation lineages in Tibetan Buddhism. They are the titular heads of the Karma Kagyü order, but have also often held authority beyond this specific school. For more on the eighth Karmapa in particular, see Rheingans, *The Eighth Karmapa's Life and His Interpretation of the Great Seal*.

15 Tib: *dir 'dus pa'i dge 'dun thams cad lhag par sha dang sgo nga la longs mi spyod/*.

16 This text is not found in Mikyö Dorjé's collected works. The only edition I am aware of is a manuscript found in a rural monastery in Nepal and microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project.

commentary on Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra* (mi bskyod rdo rje 2004b, vol. 7, pp. 541-544).[17] The *Vinayasūtra* was among the most important sources for the study of the vinaya in Tibetan monasteries, and so when Mikyö Dorjé critiques meat in his commentary, he is making clear that he saw meat as incompatible with properly upholding the monastic vows. Given his broad support for vegetarianism and his claims that monks, in particular, should avoid meat, his rejection of meat eating in the *Monastic Guidelines for Tsurpu Monastery* is not terribly surprising.

Another explicit rejection of all meat can be found in Kudün Sönam Lodrö's 1810 *Monastic Guidelines for Menri Monastery*. "As for food," this text states, "meat, alcohol, all types of garlic and onions, and eating after noon are forbidden" (Cech 1988, pp. 74, 80).[18] Unlike with Mikyö Dorjé, I have not found references to vegetarianism in Kudün Sönam Lodrö's other writings, so it is difficult to know where this rejection of meat within the monastery fits in his broader vision of appropriate monastic conduct. Still, this set of guidelines makes clear that for Kudün Sönam Lodrö, meat had no place in Menri Monastery. Before moving on, it is worth noting that neither Tsurpu nor Menri were marginal monasteries. Both, in fact, were the central monastery for their lineages, the Karma Kagyü and Bön. Further research will be required to understand the degree to which the guidelines implemented at these 'mother' monasteries influenced the guidelines at smaller 'son' monasteries. However, we may at least speculate that these guidelines, with their strict rejection of meat eating, may have served as a model for other monasteries in these lineages.

That said, evidence from fieldwork in contemporary Tibetan regions suggests that these bans may not have been enforced as strictly in practice as they were on paper.[19] As I and others have discussed elsewhere, there is currently an extensive and vibrant vegetarian movement in Tibet (Barstow 2018, pp. 187–210; Buffetrille 2014; Gayley 2017; Gaerrang 2016). This movement has spread widely and remarkably swiftly across the plateau. When I first started studying Tibetan vegetarianism in 2007, meat was openly consumed in many monasteries, without any apparent reservations. Five years later, it had become difficult to find a monastery that would serve meat openly or at public events.

In some cases, monks at these monasteries explained that the restrictions on meat eating were based on a newly strict interpretation of their old monastic guidelines. In other cases, I was told that it was due to the influence of particular charismatic religious leaders. This was particularly true for monasteries belonging to the Karma Kagyü lineage, sometimes also referred to as the Kamtsang Kagyü. In January of 2007, the seventeenth Karmapa[20] Orgyen Trinley Dorje gave a speech in which he expressed deep concern with meat eating. As part of this speech, he announced that "Any monastery that belongs to Kamtsang Kagyu, the monastery kitchen cannot and should not make any food with meat. And if you bring meat and cook it in the monastery kitchen then that means that you are not taking me as your teacher, you are not belonging to Karma Kagyu. Additionally, there is nothing to discuss about that. That's finished. That is very important" (Karmapa 17 Orgyen Trinley Dorje 2007). Although not presented as a formal text of monastic guidelines, Karma Kagyü monks and nuns repeatedly referred to this statement to explain to me why meat was no longer available in their monasteries.

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17 For a translation of the relevant portion of this text, see (Barstow forthcoming a).

18 Tib: *kha zas sde la mang thun sha dang yu ti chang/ sgog gcong rigs/ phyi dro'i kha zas.*

19 The fieldwork that this section is based on was conducted between 2007 and 2017, though the most intense period of research was between September 2011 and May 2012. It was conducted primarily in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham, but also included some fieldwork in Amdo, Central Tibet, and exile monasteries in India and Nepal.

20 There are currently two claimants to the title of Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje and Trinley Taye Dorje. By referring to Orgyen Trinley Dorje as the seventeenth Karmapa in this article, I am not intending to take a stand on this controversy. Among the Tibetans I have worked with in Tibet, however, Orgyen Trinley Dorjé is almost universally regarded as the Karmapa, so it is his voice on vegetarianism that my Tibetan interlocutors are engaging with.

At the same time, however, many of these monastics also explained that this restriction applied only in monastery kitchens, and thus only to communal events where the monks or nuns all ate together. I was frequently told that outside of such events, and especially outside of the monastery itself, monks and nuns could eat meat if they so chose. These monks and nuns were well aware that the Karmapa's speech was critical of meat eating in general, but understood his actual commandment to refer only to not preparing meat in the communal kitchen. Thus, despite the sweeping language found in the Karmapa's announcement, the rule he proposed was implemented in such a way that individual monastics retained significant autonomy over their choice to eat meat or not. It is always problematic to read the past through the experiences of the present, but the implementation of the seventeenth Karmapa's ban on meat suggests to me that it is also possible that strict bans on meat eating found in earlier generations of monastic guidelines (such as the one in his predecessor, the eighth Karmapa Mikyö Dorjé's *Monastic Guidelines for Tsurpu Monastery*) may have also been interpreted to allow for some flexibility.

Beyond the question of how strictly they were implemented, explicit denunciations of meat, such as found in Mikyö Dorjé and Kudum Sönam Lodrö's guidelines, are also relatively rare. More commonly, monastic guidelines addressed the question of meat and vegetarianism in a more restricted or nuanced manner. Sometimes this took the form of simply *suggesting* that meat should be avoided. A good example of this is the *Rules and Regulations for Mindroling Monastery*, written by Terdak Lingpa in 1689. "While we do not absolutely implement a rule of vegetarianism," these guidelines allow, "it is important that one should mostly have vegetarian food at festivals and the like, and that meat is not the main basis of one's diet" ('gro 'dul gter bdag gling pa 1992, p. 284).[21] A slightly different approach is taken by Pabongka Rinpoché in his 1935 *Monastic Guidelines for Drupdé Gegyé Tekchok Ling*, where he says, "It is taught that we must carry a water strainer in order to avoid harming beings. Therefore, when we gather we must use slaughtered meat [merely] to flavor vegetable soup" (pha bong kha pa bde chen snying po n.d., p. 752).[22] Like Terdak Lingpa, Pabongka Rinpoché does not ban meat outright. However, also like Terdak Lingpa, he makes clear that meat should be used sparingly, at least when monks are gathered in a group.

Rather than restricting the amount of meat eaten, the ninth Tai Situ incarnation, Padma Nyingjé Wangpo, focusses on the attitude and ritual context brought to its consumption. In his 1825 *Monastic Guidelines for Drubdé Samten Ling*, the ninth Tai Situ writes that monks should, "Abandon consuming meat and alcohol excessively or carelessly. They are to be consumed only after being transformed into divine nectar through blessings. If otherwise, then bind it to good karmic deeds as much as possible" (padma nyin byed dbang po 2006, p. 616).[23] For Padma Nyingjé Wangpo, meat should not be consumed casually, but only be eaten after it has been transformed into divine nectar through a ritual process. This process, the details of which are beyond the scope of this paper, involves taking a variety of food substances including meat and alcohol, and offering them to tantric Buddhist deities. After the conclusion of the ritual, these substances are understood to have been transformed into divine foods.[24] As such, it is acceptable to consume them. But producing such sacralized meat involved time and effort and might, therefore, not be practical for many. Thus, Padma Nyingjé Wangpo hedges even further, suggesting that if regular meat simply must be eaten, then the consumer should make sure that they use the energy derived from that meat to perform good deeds, presumably so that the death of the animal has not gone

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[21] Tib: *'dir mtha' gcig tu dkar rdor gyi sgrigs ma bcas kyang ston mo sogs dkar gro shas cher bya shing longs spyod kyi gzhi sha la mi byed par ci nas gal che/.*

[22] Tib: *sems can la gnod 'tshe spangs phyir du chu tshags tshun 'chang dgos par gsungs pas/_srog bcad pa'i sha 'di tshogs su tshod ma'i rdor bsil dang/* [Some of the terminology in this passage is obscure, and I have resorted to brackets in order to clarify the meaning. I am grateful to lama Gyaltsen of Corvallis, Oregon for helping me decipher some of the obscure terms in this passage.]

[23] Tib: *sha chang la'ang ha cang bag med spyod pa spang zhing byin gyis brlabs nas bdud rtsir bsgyur ba sogs byas la spyod/ gzhan dag kyang dge ba'i las la bkol gang nus byed pa dang/.*

[24] For a detailed discussion of the role of meat in Indian tantric ritual, see: (Wedemeyer 2012, p. 119). For a discussion of Tibetan attitudes towards meat in tantric ritual, see: (Barstow 2018, pp. 90–114).

to waste. Like Terdak Lingpa, Padma Nyingjé Wangpo does not reject meat outright. He does, however, express clear discomfort with eating meat casually, without reflection.

Other monastic guidelines had little to say about meat in general, but restricted it at particular times and places. The *Monastic Guidelines for Gönlung Monastery* written by Jigmé Yeshé Drakpa in the eighteenth century, for instance, suggests that, "During the summer dharma season, patrons must not hold meat feasts for those who have won titles or passed examinations" ('jigs med ye shes grags pa 1737, vol. 23, p. 31b).[25] Immediately after advising that when monks gather, meat should be used only to flavor soup, Pabongka Rinpoché's *Monastic Guidelines for Drupdé Gegyé Tekchok Ling* also advises that, "At events such as the end of summer feast, do not lay out extensive offerings of meat" (pha bong kha pa bde chen snying po n.d., p. 752).[26] Both of these texts make reference to the feast that traditionally comes at the end of the summer rains retreat. This event was both a time for monks to enjoy themselves, but as Jigmé Yeshé Drakpa suggests, it was often an occasion to recognize those monks who had passed examinations or otherwise won titles. These events could be quite celebratory, but both Jigmé Yeshé Drakpa and Pabongka caution participants not to use the occasions as an opportunity to indulge in excessive quantities of meat.

Finally, some monastic guidelines did not discuss meat per se but were concerned about distancing the monastery and its monks from the process of procuring that meat. Jampel Gyepé Dorjé's early twentieth century *Monastic Guidelines for Pelyül Dartang*, for instance, says that, "Slaughterhouses are forbidden within sight of the monastery, either inside or outside" ('jam dpal dgyes pa'i rdo rje 2009, p. 188).[27] All available evidence suggests that, throughout the history of Buddhism in Tibet, most monks ate meat. And most of them got that meat from butchers. One of the results of this is that monasteries sometimes had slaughterhouses in close proximity in order to supply the demand for meat (Sangseraima Ujeed forthcoming). As Jampel Gyepé Dorjé's work makes clear, however, not all religious leaders were comfortable with this practice. This does not necessarily mean that monks in monasteries such as Pelyül Dartang could not eat meat, but simply that the animals should not actually be slaughtered in the vicinity of the monastery.

Before concluding this section, it is worth recalling that most monastic guidelines do not mention meat at all. This is even true of monastic guidelines written by authors who were themselves adamant vegetarians. Perhaps the most interesting example of this is Shabkar Tsokdrük Rangdröl, an early nineteenth century lama from Amdo. Shabkar was himself a passionate vegetarian and was not shy about promoting a vegetarian diet, penning several texts specifically focused on criticizing meat and promoting vegetarianism (Shabkar 2004; Pang forthcoming). Shabkar's works promoting vegetarianism are so extensive that they have been described as "the most sweeping indictment of meat eating to be found in Tibetan literature" (Ricard 2003, pp. 21–22). Shabkar also wrote several monastic guidelines for institutions that he oversaw. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, none of these texts ban meat, or even suggest that monks should be vegetarian. Despite Shabkar's antipathy towards meat eating, it seems that he never actually banned it in his monasteries or among his followers.

Unsurprisingly, Shabkar does not explain why he does not ban meat in his monasteries. A similar contemporary situation, however, may help shed some light on this question. Arguably the most important proponent of contemporary Tibetan vegetarianism is Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, until recently the head of Larung Gar, among the largest monasteries in history. Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö is a personally committed vegetarian, and is well known for arguing extensively against meat eating, both in written works and recorded sermons (Gayley 2017; Gaerrang 2016; Barstow 2018). Yet Larung Gar does not have

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[25] Tib: *dbyar chos skabs su ming btags pa dang tshogs langs pa rnams/chos thog so so'i spying bdag bcas pas sha'i dga' stong gtan nas mi dzad cing/.*

[26] Tib: *chab zhugs lta bu'i skabs las/ sha gsol 'grems spyod rgya che mi bya/.*

[27] Tib: *gon pa mthong ba'i phyogs phyi nang gang nas kyang bshas ra 'dzin mi chog.*
For an alternate translation, see (Jansen 2018, p. 155).

a rule banning the consumption of meat. Meat may not be purchased in the monastery, and communal events are certainly vegetarian, but individual monks may eat what they like in their own rooms. When I asked Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö why he did not ban meat, he responded that some religious leaders and scholars were quite fond of eating meat and if he banned it they might not be willing to come to Larung Gar to teach. Vegetarianism is obviously important to Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö, but not so much that he would be willing to risk other important aspects of his mission—especially training young monks and nuns—simply to enforce a rule banning meat in the monastery.[28] Khenpo Tsültrim Lodrö's social and cultural context is quite different than Shabkar's. Nevertheless, the dynamics that can be seen at Larung Gar suggest a possible interpretation of Shabkar's reticence to ban meat at his monasteries. Perhaps he was simply concerned that a full ban may have been too much for the monks and scholars under his authority.

4. Concluding Reflections

The monastic guidelines surveyed in this paper express a variety of opinions on the question of meat eating, ranging from not mentioning the topic at all (the majority) to relatively strict bans (far fewer). Like the different rules themselves, there is also an apparent difference in the motivation behind the rules. In some cases, the authors of these texts seem to simply see meat as incompatible with monastic life. Karmapa Mikyö Dorjé is a good example of this. His commentary on the *Vinayasūtra* and other writings make clear that he felt meat was inappropriate for monks. His outright ban on meat at Tsurpu, therefore, can be understood to be based on this broader principle.

Other guideline authors, however, express reservations about meat without banning it outright. Vegetarianism was broadly understood to be a difficult diet in Tibet, for both practical and cultural reasons. Adopting it was believed to result in health problems, particularly a lack of strength and overall bodily weakness. This could be so bad that vegetarianism was understood to directly threaten an individual's lifespan (Barstow 2018, pp. 114–34). Further, vegetarianism conflicted with other deeply held cultural assumptions about the pursuit of wealth and normative male gender roles (Barstow 2018, pp. 135–67). Requiring that monks or nuns in a particular monastery give up all meat, therefore, would have been a heavy demand that monastic leaders may have been reluctant to make.

Further, there is a long-standing Buddhist ideal that monastics should accept all (or most) gifts that they receive. Laity make merit by donating money and goods to monasteries, and it is monks and nuns' responsibility to accept those items so that the laity could effectively make merit. Receiving offerings is, therefore, central to life as a monastic. As Jansen puts it, "For the monks, accepting offerings was not merely a privilege, it was a duty" (Jansen 2018, p. 119). This obligation to receive gifts is at the center of the relationship between monastics and laity across the Buddhist world, and Tibet was no exception. Disrupting that relationship would go against established precedent and ran the real risk of alienating lay supporters. Monastic authorities, therefore, may have been deeply reluctant to forbid their monks from receiving meat donated by lay patrons.

At the same time as monastic authorities may have been concerned about alienating supporters by restricting meat donations, however, some guideline authors also seem to have been concerned that consuming large amounts of meat, especially on public occasions, may have been viewed negatively by the public. Such concerns are in line with the role of monastic guidelines more generally, which are often self-consciously written at least in part out of concern for how the broader public viewed the institution. As Berthe Jansen explains, "The reasoning often given for creating certain rules is that if the monks do not behave properly the lay-people would lose faith in the community of monks and thereby in the Sangha, one of the three Jewels" (Jansen 2014, p. 140). Banning slaughterhouses within sight of a monastery, therefore, or restricting the excessive consumption of meat at festivals, gatherings, or other

[28] Despite the lack of a formal rule mandating it, social pressure means that most monks and nuns at Larung Gar are vegetarian (at least in public).

public events, can easily be interpreted as having more to do with public perception than ideas about what diet is appropriate for monks. The authors who wrote these rules, it seems, were at least partly concerned with what community members might think of monastics consuming large quantities of meat.

The end result is that, at least for those guideline authors who chose to deal with it at all, meat eating was at the center of a complex web of tensions. Perhaps for this reason, the rules about meat eating found in monastic guidelines are often written in such a way that individual monastics can get around them if they so choose. Restricting meat at festivals does not impact a monk or nun's daily diet and banning slaughterhouses makes meat more difficult to acquire but does not actually restrict its consumption. When Terdak Lingpa suggests that meat should not be the "main basis" for a monk's diet, he is clearly allowing individuals to decide for themselves what that means. And as we have seen at monasteries in contemporary Tibet, bans on meat eating within a monastery are often interpreted in such a way that monks continue to eat it in private, if not in public or in communal settings. While some monastic constitutions certainly do restrict meat in one way or another, therefore, they do so using language that is interpretable, leaving the final decision about whether or not to eat meat—and if so, how much—up to the individual monk or nun.

That said, I do not want to conclude with the suggestion that the restrictions on meat eating found in these texts are meaningless, or only for show. By saying anything about meat at all, these texts preserve and perpetuate a vision in which vegetarianism is seen as a monastic ideal. Individuals might have been able to continue eating meat if they so chose, but they did so in an environment where meat eating carried negative overtones. Many of the contemporary Karma Kagyü monks that I spoke with, for instance, openly acknowledged that eating meat was less than ideal. They may have interpreted the seventeenth Karmapa's command to only formally ban meat in communal settings, but they also understood that while eating meat in private may adhere to the letter of the law, this did not make it fully acceptable. When the authors of monastic constitutions created vague or interpretable rules about meat, therefore, they were acknowledging the perceived difficulty of such a diet, while simultaneously maintaining an attitude that saw vegetarianism as the ideal. Drawing on this ideal, a minority of monks and nuns made the difficult choice to give up meat, often connecting this diet directly to their monastic identity. Monastic guidelines such as those discussed in this paper, therefore, both reflect and perpetuate a model in which vegetarianism is seen as an ideal diet for monastics, while simultaneously acknowledging and accommodating the reality that most monks and nuns could not be expected to fully adopt such a diet.

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