

ONE

THE FIRST DIFFUSION OF BUDDHISM IN TIBET

1 The beginnings

The dates of the first penetration of Buddhism into Tibet, and of the commencement of large-scale conversion, have already been discussed many times, as have the accompanying events. Of course there is no problem for the Tibetans themselves. For them only the traditional account is valid, and it is believed as an act of faith. According to this traditional account, Buddhism was introduced into Tibet during the lifetime of *Srong btsan sgam po*, who died in 649, and is held by all schools to be the founder of the Tibetan royal dynasty. Occasional voices, admittedly, go back in time beyond this legend. With the aim of giving their native country a stronger claim to religious pre-eminence, they assert that there was a first encounter with the Buddhist teachings during the time of *Lha tho tho ri*, a distant ancestor of *Srong btsan sgam po*. At that period Buddhist scriptures and symbols fell from the sky for the first time. Other commentators, wishing to give a rational foundation to the legend, point to the arrival of certain religious teachers from Central Asia and from India at that time. In any case, the adoption and first diffusion of Buddhism is attributed to *Srong btsan sgam po*.¹ His conversion was said to result from the influence of his two wives, a Nepalese princess and a Chinese princess. While there are doubts, in my opinion well-founded,² concerning the first marriage, the second marriage is confirmed by the chronicles. Whatever the truth may have been, the Chinese wife (*rgya bza'*) was said to have brought with her the image of *Śākyamuni* known as the *Jo bo* and to have installed it in the temple of *Ra mo che*³ which she founded. To the Nepalese wife, on the other hand, is attributed the merit of having brought in her dowry the image of *Mi bskyod rdo rje* and of having erected the temple of *'Phrul snang*.

Certainly one cannot deny the possibility of an earlier, sporadic penetration of Buddhist teachings into Tibet by various routes, from Central Asia, from China or from Nepal, before the reign of *Srong btsan sgam po*. However, the question of the 'prehistory' of Tibetan Buddhism

needs to be understood correctly. The orthodox tradition cannot be taken as literally true. There can be no question of a conversion of King *Srong btsan sgam po*, or of an extensive diffusion of the faith carried out by him. Even the edicts of the later kings *Khri srong lde brtsan* and *Khri lde srong btsan*, as preserved in the history of *dPa'o gtsug lag* (provided always that we are not dealing here with later interpolations), speak of King *Srong btsan sgam po* only in very obscure terms. They confine themselves to attributing to him, in the first edict, the foundation of the temple of *'Phrul snang*, without mentioning the Nepalese princess, while the Chinese princess is mentioned as founding the *Ra mo che* temple. The second edict ascribes to *Srong btsan sgam po* the second temple of *Pe har* in *Ra sa*.⁴ Certainly, in view of the links between Tibet and China, the existence of cult centres on a small scale is perhaps already possible at that time. The Tibetans would have tolerated them with that respect, mixed with fear of invisible, mysterious powers of whatever kind they might be, which is natural to them. However, the chronicles do not appear to offer proof of a real conversion of King *Srong btsan sgam po* to Buddhism, or even of his profession of faith in it or active support for it, such as the orthodox tradition maintains. Events of this kind first happen in the time of *Khri srong lde brtsan* (756-97?), well after the period of *Srong btsan sgam po*, and culminate in the founding of the monastery of *bSam yas*.

At the same time, one can hardly imagine that king *Khri srong lde brtsan*'s pro-Buddhist policy was the result of a spur-of-the-moment decision. It must have been the fruit of a gradual process of maturation. Despite the uncertain and contradictory character of our sources, the assumption of earlier occasional infiltrations of Buddhist elements into Tibet is an obvious one to make. We are perhaps concerned here more with Chinese and Central Asian influences than with those from India. Such influences must have become steadily stronger after the arrival of Princess Wen-ch'eng (Tibetan *Kong chu*, *Kong jo*). The fact also cannot be ignored that *Khri srong lde brtsan* was not the first Tibetan king to show an interest in Buddhism. His father, King *Khri lde gtsug brtsan* (704-55), had already made efforts in this direction, as *Khri lde srong btsan*'s edict at Karchung reports, but he was frustrated through the forceful and decisive opposition of some ministers. The hostility of these ministers towards Buddhism persisted during the time of *Khri lde gtsug brtsan*. In addition, even after the acceptance of Buddhism, there are signs of indecision between the Chinese and Indian traditions. This indecision can only be explained on the assumption that two currents of thought had already come into conflict, one proposing adherence to China and the other inclining towards Indian Buddhism. Two personalities played an outstanding role at this point in time; *gSal snang* of *sBa*, and a Chinese, called *Sang*

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shi in the chronicles, who according to the tradition had been a playing-companion of the young *Khri srong lde brtsan*.⁵ In this case too we have in the sources both the echo of real events and, simultaneously, a fantastic overgrowth of elements from the cycles of legends which later grew up about these characters. These legends originated in particular families or at particular religious centres, with the aim of authenticating their various interests or claims, or of glorifying personalities connected with them. Cycles of this type include that concerning *sBa gSal snang* (which stands at the centre of a famous work, the first part of the *sBa bzhad*⁶), and the cycles of *Sang shi*, Padmasambhava and Vairocana. Fragments and reworkings of this literary genre are preserved in later writings; they comprise a mixture of historical and religious elements, of folk history and family chronicles. All the same this literature gives us an idea of the extremely complex situation in Tibet at that period, and of the opposing forces which were at work.

Given these political and cultural relations with China, some social strata were disposed to a close collaboration with Chinese culture. Thus there came about the adoption of some characteristic motives from Chinese Buddhist hagiography. For example, the golden statue of Sakyamuni brought to Tibet in the dowry of *Srong btsan sgam po*'s Chinese wife recalls the golden statue which according to some Chinese traditions was the first sign of Buddhism in China. Again, the episode concerning the monk *Hwa shang*, who left behind one of his shoes when forced to leave Lhasa by anti-Buddhist ministers, reminds one of the shoe which was found in the empty tomb of Bodhidharma. Another factor which needs to be taken into consideration is the rivalry which existed between the families who had the duty of supplying from among their numbers the ministers (*zhang, zhang blon, blon chen, blon; zhang* are the ministers belonging to families from which the kings customarily chose their wives, such as *Tshes spong, sNa nam, mChims, 'Bro*). These families were to have a decisive role throughout the whole of the dynastic period of Tibetan history, as the effective directors of policy. The kings themselves possessed relatively limited authority. Their office was surrounded by religious prestige, but in practice the priestly class of *Bon*, and the aristocracy, hindered their exercise of sovereignty. The great families from which the *blon chen* were descended, and the families of the queen mother's clan (often the family of the queen and that of the *blon chen* were one and the same), made their influence felt in all directions. All this harmed the king's authority critically. *Srong btsan sgam po*'s father and grandfather had broken with this tradition, but the leading families had not however given up their privileges. The long-lasting and deep opposition between the king and his followers on the one side, and his opponents

on the other, divided Tibet into two parts, one faithful to the king and the court, and the other preoccupied with keeping their personal privileges. One or another of these great alliances alternated in controlling the country.

The inner struggles can be deduced from the large number of kings and princes assassinated by their own mothers or step-mothers. *Khri srong lde brtsan* himself expressed his inclination to Buddhism from an early age, which doubtless indicates that he was supported by a powerful group working in this direction, that of the *Mang* and the *'Bal*. The first assault by this pro-Buddhist party was unsuccessful. The opposing group, headed by *Ma zhang Khrom pa skyes*, temporarily seized the upper hand. The families favouring the adoption of Buddhism then resorted to violence to secure the success of their policy, and the leaders of the opposing party were exiled or removed (*Ma zhang Khrom pa skyes* was murdered). Even this, however, did not bring victory. Tibet was struck by grave natural disasters, which one of the aristocratic factions, incited by the *Bon po*, used for its own purposes. The *Bon po* saw their privileges threatened, and hoped to win all with the aid of the group of nobles who supported them. Thus they sought to make the introduction of the new religion responsible for all the misfortunes. The renowned Indian religious teacher Santaraksita, who had just arrived in Tibet, had to leave the country, and it was several years before he could return again, and before the king was able to publish his edict and the foundation of the monastery of *bSam yas* could take place (775).⁷ We possess only scanty documentary reports and brief descriptions of all these events, although there are numerous legendary accounts from later periods, adhering more or less closely to the real events. It is clear anyway that the conflict between the opposing groups of forces must have been very violent. Other powers were certainly at work in addition to the two parties in direct contest. China had watched the rise of Tibetan power with anxiety, seeing in it a threat to her own expansion into Central Asia. She could scarcely remain indifferent to the events in Tibet. China sent a series of missionaries to Tibet, who were probably not exclusively concerned with matters of religion. So it came about that Tibet in the second half of the seventh century, after having conquered extensive territories in Central Asia, began to succumb more and more to the enchantment of Chinese culture. Members of the Tibetan aristocracy went to China to study, and there became acquainted with new, more sophisticated ways of living, with more appropriate administrative techniques and political institutions, and with a maturity of thought which had previously been inaccessible to them.⁸ Thus there took place in Tibet at this time a phenomenon analogous to what was happening simultaneously in Japan.

2 Co-existence and conflict among the various tendencies at the time of the first introduction of Buddhism into Tibet

To the complexity of the political background described above must be added far-reaching conflicts among the supporters of Buddhism themselves. They agreed in demanding official recognition for the Buddhist teachings, but not on the form of Buddhism which was to be adopted. From the very beginning two tendencies were clear, one favouring Indian Buddhism, the other Chinese. We will first give an overview of the historical events, and then present the ideas which lay beneath them.

gSal snang of *sBa* (it may be presumed that this is the same person who in the following period adopted the religious name *Ye shes dbang po*) went to India and Nepal, and arranged for an invitation to be issued to Santaraksita. *Sang shi* on the other hand, who was the author of translations from the Chinese, was sent to China (on one occasion in company with *gSal snang*, though this was after the first arrival of Santaraksita). Santaraksita had no success at first and therefore advised that Padmasambhava should be sent for as the only person who would be able to overcome the demons hostile to Buddhism.

The details given seem to indicate the existence of two opposed groups, each wishing to gain pre-eminence for its own teachings. In this contest even suicide and murders carried out for religious motives were not unusual.⁹ China supported her official missionary, the *Hwa shang*, who attempted to introduce the school of Ch'an,¹⁰ not without a degree of success according to some reports. Santaraksita's second visit, and the coming of Padmasambhava, seem to show that success was not denied to the pro-Indian group either (the group of *Ye shes dbang po*). Admittedly the sources disagree concerning both the mission attributed to Padmasambhava and his stay in Tibet. If we follow some accounts, he would seem to have stayed in Tibet until the consecration of the monastery of *bSam yas*, while according to others he would have left the country before this, after overcoming the demons. According to this latter version the building of the monastery of *bSam yas* was supervised by Santaraksita, and after his death he was replaced as abbot by *gSal snang* (*Ye shes dbang po*). *Ye shes dbang po* occupied this post, however, for only a short time, and was succeeded by *dPal dbyangs*.¹¹

Ye shes dbang po had evidently gone too far in his demands. He had claimed for the abbot of *bSam yas*, and so, indirectly, for the religious community, a position superior not only to that of the aristocracy but also to that of the ministers. As the advocate of the Indian school, he aroused the opposition of the pro-Chinese group, who favoured Ch'an. The opposition against *Ye shes dbang po* was again led by a represen-

tative of the aristocracy, *Myang Ting nge 'dzin*.¹² It can be presumed that he was moved to act not only by the resentment which he shared with other high dignitaries at the pretensions of the religious leader, but also by his inclination to the Ch'an sect.¹³ There were probably connections between the revolt of *Myang Ting nge 'dzin*, the more or less forcible banishment of *Ye shes dbang po*,¹⁴ the naming of *dPal dbyangs* in *Ye shes dbang po*'s place, and the sudden rise to prominence of the *Hwa shang* Mahayana, who defended the Ch'an tradition and challenged the school of Santaraksita to battle. Nor can one neglect the fact that *Myang Ting nge 'dzin*, whom King *Khri srong lde brtsan* had chosen as the guardian of *Khri lde srong brtsan*, continued for a long time after to exercise a considerable influence on the political and religious affairs of Tibet, and that the *rDzogs chen* school regard him as one of their patriarchs.

Ye shes dbang po fought back, giving a response which suggests too the general arousal of tempers. He followed the counsel which Santaraksita had given him before his death, and called Kamalasila from India.¹⁵ However, even the subsequent council at *bSam yas* (792-4), in which according to the Tibetan sources the *Hwa shang* was defeated, could not bring the strife to an end. It seems that Kamalasila was murdered.¹⁶ Vairocana, a follower of Padmasambhava, whose teachings were related to those of the Indian Siddha schools, was banished. These events once more show the turbulent history of the beginnings of Buddhism in Tibet. It was not a question of a conversion to a new doctrine brought about by purely spiritual factors. Everywhere there were also political motives involved, which had also economic implications, in view of the donations to the monasteries. Such conflicts between particular material interests went hand in hand with conflicts of a doctrinal nature. In short, the beginnings of Tibetan Buddhism did not follow the straight-line path which the orthodox tradition describes. Only a systematic examination of the history and origins of the *rDzogs chen* will enable a judgment to be made upon how far the tradition regarding these events must be subject to revision.

It can also be inferred from the sources that Padmasambhava played a smaller role than that ascribed to him by later tradition. As already mentioned, he had little or no part in the construction of *bSam yas* according to some sources. Other reports admittedly maintain that he was involved in the building of this monastery, but they speak of him variously as staying in Tibet for some months or for many years. They agree only in connecting his departure with threats or attacks against him. In short, everything in the tradition concerning Padmasambhava seems contradictory or obscure. A legendary halo soon grew up about his personality as well, a cycle of stories which

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came to include also King *Khri srong lde brtsan* and the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet in general. Some parts of this cycle were added only much later, perhaps in the fourteenth century, together with embellishments, chants of praise and so on. All this provided the basis for well-known works such as the *Pad ma thang yig*, *bKa' thang sde lnga* and other *gter ma* (cf. p.38).

It was only after the second diffusion of the Buddhist law that the figure of Padmasambhava the miracle-worker grew to gigantic proportions, and that he was spoken about as if he was a second Buddha, along with extravagant exaggerations of all kinds. This provoked the attacks of the *dGe lugs pa* sect. In the earlier literature the references to him, as mentioned above, are extremely modest. The *sBa bzhad*¹⁷ says of Padmasambhava that he was recommended by Santaraksita as a great exorcist who would be able to overcome the local demonic opponents of Buddhism. These details attest that even then, in the Tibetan environment, suppositions and elements could crystallize about his person which were suitable for the foundations of an epic literary cycle on themes of religion and exorcism.

However that may be, Tibet opened its doors to new forms of thought and life. Behind this there stood significant missionary activity from both India and China, and also the Tibetan conquests in Central Asia, which led to Tibetans living together with peoples of a considerable level of culture. As a result a steady expansion of Buddhism began to take place. Of course this process must be understood correctly. There can be no question here of an all-embracing penetration which encompassed the entire population. Rural and nomadic groups are, as is well-known, the most resistant and conservative in matters of religion. The missionaries who came from India, China and Central Asia (including the Tantric masters) were for the most part highly educated men, thinkers, dialecticians, grammarians.

It could be objected that we only know these elements, since the literary sources say nothing about what was happening in the lower levels of the population. There is no doubt that the original interest in Buddhism lay with the upper, the more educated classes, both for the reasons mentioned, and in view of the difficulty of an adequate and generally accessible understanding of the doctrines of Buddhism. The rest of the population remained faithful to their rites of conjuration, their ceremonies and their exorcists. The impetus for the whole movement came from above, and the re-education due to the new religion brought about a significant raising of the cultural level of the new converts.

The scriptures introduced in the early days can be classified into two groups. In the first there are the texts translated by specially chosen and appointed persons (*lotsava*), working in collaboration with

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Chinese, Indians and Central Asians, and which were intended for the education of the monks after the foundation of the various religious communities. Second, there were general compendia intended for the conversion of the public at large, such as the *dGe bcu'i mdo*, *rDo rje gcod pa*, *Sa lu'i ljang pa*, books which were it seems introduced by *Sang shi*,¹⁸ and other short summaries of the teachings similar to those cited in the edicts of *Khri srong lde brtsan*.¹⁹ According to these edicts, in the version cited in No.85²⁰ (*ja*, pp.108b, 110a), it appears that Buddhism at the time of its first diffusion was restricted to the essential doctrines: veneration of the Buddha, of Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas and Sravakas;²¹ rebirth in the hells or into unfavourable destinies for those who do not honour the Three Jewels (the Buddha, his Law, the monastic community); the doctrine of karma; the doctrine of the twofold accumulation of merit (virtue and knowledge); the practice of the ten moral commandments; the Four Truths; the law of moral causation (*pratityasamutpada*); special emphasis on the teachings of Nagarjuna. A true picture of the Buddhist literature accessible to the Tibetan community can be drawn from the catalogues of the royal libraries—which admittedly date from various times and, it must be accepted, are not free from later alterations. They include even works on logic. These catalogues also reveal a gradual decrease of works translated from the Chinese.

3 Ordination of monks, foundation of monasteries, donations to monasteries

Within Indian Mahayana Buddhism speculative thought and ritual had already become indissolubly linked, and thus it came about that the ritual side of Mahayana Buddhism began to prevail in Tibet, thanks also to the tendencies to magic already present within Indian ritual. In a society already very receptive to such things, this led to the wide diffusion of writings of an exorcistic nature, although according to one source (included in No.85, *ja*, p.105) there was at the beginning a tendency to translate Chinese works of a different kind, and to show some mistrust towards the Tantras, especially those whose liturgy prescribed sexual acts and the use of alcoholic drinks.

The religious orders now began to be introduced, and, perhaps in 779, the first monastic ordinations were celebrated. This made it necessary to form religious communities on a large scale, and to found monasteries as cult centres, schools of religious education, and centres for the translation of the Buddhist works which were to be made available to the new adepts. These monasteries represented a new factor in the political structure of Tibet. Until then the political

organization of the country had been primarily military in character. The state was responsible for defence and offensive action, and all subjects were liable without exception for taxation, for military service and for labour obligations, in accordance with their various qualifications and abilities. There now arose, however, an entirely new institution, in the form of the monastery, which developed outside the state structure. It was provided with special donations by the king.

King *Khri srong lde brtsan* made 150 families, along with their estates and property, responsible for supporting the temple of *bSam yas* and the performance of the prescribed rituals. A further hundred families were responsible for the maintenance of the monastery as such. The produce of the estates and pastoral land had to provide everything necessary: 75 measures (*khal*) of barley annually (according to other sources monthly) for the abbot, who had also to receive 1,500 ounces of butter, a horse, paper, ink and salt. The monks devoted to meditation, the *sgom chen*, were entitled to 55 measures of barley and 800 ounces of butter, the Indian masters (*acarya*) living in the monastery to 55 measures of rice and 100 measures of butter, those not obliged to live permanently in the monastery (*bandhya*) to 800 measures of barley, and to paper and ink, the pupils to 25 measures of barley and pieces of cloth.²²

Thus it can be seen that the monastery formed a self-governing economic unit. Its spiritual organization also became steadily clearer. At its head stood the *chos ring lugs*,²³ representative and guardian of the Buddha's Law, who was chosen by the king and exercised the function of abbot (*mkhan po*). He was given quite substantial powers. The creation of these spiritual dignitaries provoked ever more bitter conflicts between the court, which immoderately favoured the religious community now coming into being, and the traditional political organization.

The same sources report on a branch establishment of the monastery of *bSam yas*. This was *mChims phug*,²⁴ 'the cave of mChims', which was reserved for the *sgom chen*, the followers of the ascetic schools. A college and seminary (*chos grwa*) was also formed to educate the newly converted further and to introduce them to the study of the sacred texts. Also associated with the monastic community were monks and ascetics without special duties (*rang ga ma*).

The *Pad ma thang yig* (No.3) demonstrates the co-existence of monasticism and Tantric tendencies. Different rules applied to the followers of the two streams. The non-Tantric monks had to be vegetarians, to live in the monastery, to abstain from alcoholic drinks and to follow the rites prescribed in the Sutras.²⁵ The others did not have to observe these precepts; their ceremonial was centred about the *mandala*; they lived in the meditation-cells or *sgrub khang*. The

precept of chastity applied to both groups of monks.²⁶

Numerous documents confirm in detail the growth of a new juridical person, the monastery, which possessed estates and moveable goods. In addition it possessed a number of servants of the religious community, *lha 'bangs* (called later, and up to our own day, *lha bran*); these are mentioned not as individual persons but as heads of families (*khyim pa*). As a result we can no longer establish the exact number of persons dependent upon the monastery.

These particulars emerge clearly from the documents found in Turkestan.²⁷ In Central Asia at the time of Tibetan domination the monasteries possessed property and servants, they carried out business transactions, and so on. Particularly noticeable for their activity are the *bandhe* (called *bandhya* in the charters), monks not directly linked to a monastery, forerunners of the later wandering lamas of the *rNying ma pa* sect.

The example set by the king must have been extensively imitated. The principle of virtuous action, continually inculcated in the sacred writings, places the virtue of generosity, of munificence, in the foreground as the first of the perfections (*phar phyin*, Skt. *paramita*). Practised with understanding and piety, it is said to lead gradually to the level of Bodhisattva, or to entry into one of the paradises. It promotes and reinforces the positive factors in the process of maturation of karma. The figure of the donor (*sbyin bdag*, Skt. *danapati*) acquires a more and more definite outline in Tibet too. Donations to the Samgha, the Community; the erection of consecrated buildings; contributions to each of the three receptacles (*riten*) or supports of the sacred (*sku, gsung, thugs* = body, speech, mind) in the form of donations of images, copies of books, and temples—all these bring about an accumulation of merit indispensable for the attainment of deliverance. Deliverance is the result of two inseparable factors; the method used, the practice (*thabs*, Skt. *upaya*) and 'higher cognition' (*shes rab*, Skt. *prajna*). The attainment of Buddhahood is the most difficult of all; less hard to attain is the state of Bodhisattva, or of exaltation into a paradise.

The means to attain these latter aims (to be discussed later in more detail) represent the easier way, a way of gradual purification and preparation for that radiant clarity which shines out during the transition from the temporal plane to the timeless plane of *nirvana*. The means (*thabs*) is the practice of the six perfections, of which generosity is the first. It is not the sublime sacrifices of the Buddha which are in question here, such as when in his past lives he was Prince Visvantara (the subject of a sacred drama of Indian origin which regularly moves spectators to tears in Tibet) or Ksantivadin. It is rather a matter of generosity towards the Buddhist community, a practice more easily accessible to ordinary men. When the Tibetan

makes a donation, his generosity represents an easy way of acquiring merits.

When the followers of the Chinese Ch'an school also began to spread in Tibet and to raise their influential voice in the person of the several *Hwa shang*, the reaction of the Indian religious teachers working in Tibet, and of their followers, was inspired not only by doctrinal reasons but also by practical considerations. If Enlightenment could be brought about through a sudden, momentaneous *ictus*, if it could be born from a sudden act of deliverance in which the Buddha-nature of each individual was revealed, then practice (*thabs*) lost its value. The world, and everything achieved in the world, including those acts intended to bring about a gradual accumulation of merit, became of no significance. Such an attitude had serious consequences; one could arrive from these premises at an individualistic position which threatened the existence of the Samgha at the root (though in time the followers of Ch'an organized themselves in monasteries too, so as to derive a prosperous revenue from the generosity of those sympathizing with them and their path). In any case the monastic rules (*'dul ba*, Skt. *vinaya*) first reached Tibet only at a time when many of these precepts were becoming meaningless in India itself. For example, the rule of monastic poverty (renunciation of material possessions) had already lost its incontestable validity. The growth of the monastic institution led to contact with the world becoming ever closer; the monastery became, as a result of the donations it received, an economic entity which could supervise its property adequately and guard its own interests.

It is forbidden for the monk of the Small Vehicle to possess gold or silver, but for the monk who is a Bodhisattva (*byang chub sems dpa'*), that is who has renounced *nirvana*, it is no sin, for he is striving for the good of his fellow men. (No. 77, 4a.)

Tibet had at the beginning an economy closed in on itself, hunting, pastoralism and agriculture, which could develop only slowly through a system of irrigation which was perfected with difficulty. The conquests in Central Asia, and the wars against China, extended not only the political and cultural horizons, but also the economic horizon. The penetration of Tibet into Central Asia, which owed its prosperity principally to trade, awoke new economic interests and brought about new social orientations.

The monastery did not only own property; it was also involved in trade. The *bandhe* occupied themselves with business and commercial relations.²⁸ Beginning with the foundation of the monastery of *bSam yas*, and continuing during the reign of King *Ral pa can*, a steady growth of donations can be seen; the number and wealth of the

monasteries constantly increased. Thus there grew up within Tibetan society a new power, which opposed the old feudal families ever more strongly. The persecution of the Buddhist community which was unleashed by King *Glang dar ma* (838-42) arose not merely from religious motives. Just as in China, there were many important interests at play here. The attitude of *Glang dar ma* was doubtless in part formed by the concern he must have felt at the growing economic power of the monasteries, at their privileges and their arrogance. The steady extension of the religious community brought the existence of the state into serious danger. In addition there was the monasteries' freedom from taxation, the continual increase of their property through the assignment to them of estates and pastures, and the growing proportion of the population working for them in agriculture or as herdsmen, and therefore exempted from military obligation and compulsory labour. Also, donations did not only go towards the building of a temple; in addition they had to support the monastic community belonging to the temple, so as to secure for all time the performance of the ceremonies directed by the donor or testator in accordance with his will. This development deprived the state of considerable resources in both men and revenue, and this too at precisely the time when the threat from China was steadily growing as the Tibetans lost their Central Asian territories. The story of *Glang dar ma's* opposition to Buddhism, which the orthodox tradition explains as the result of a demon having taken possession of the king, thus had a very real political and economic foundation.

4 The Indian and Chinese currents

The Indians who came to the Land of Snow did not all belong to the same school, and they did not all teach the same things. There were already profound differences between Santaraksita and Padmasambhava. The former was a great dialectician, though certainly as was appropriate for every Mahayana follower he was experienced in Tantric practice, if not to such a degree as to be a match for an exorcist. Padmasambhava was in the first place an exorcist, and after him other followers of the Siddha tradition also came to Tibet. The school of the Siddha, the 'Perfected Ones', was then at its apogee in India; the miraculous powers its followers boasted brought them disciples in Tibet too. The difference between the Siddha tradition and the Ch'an school lay not so much in their respective doctrinal positions as in the characteristic emphasis placed by the Siddha on the practices of yoga and magic. There were no insurmountable contradictions between their theoretical assumptions. Santaraksita

and Kamalasila, on the other hand, began from doctrines as fundamentally opposed to those of the Siddha as they were to the teachings of Ch'an.

The decisive difference here lay in the fact that Santaraksita considered the achievement of Buddhahood to be the end-result of a long drawn-out process, which necessarily went through different stages before the conclusion was reached, while the Chinese school of *Hwa shang* preached the uselessness of 'means', and therefore of actions such as donations and so on, which are obligatory for the school founded upon the Prajnaparamita teachings²⁹ (of which more will be said later).

Some Mahayana schools had affirmed that the Buddha and all living beings were identical in essence.³⁰ Our essence, they held, is luminous spirit, defiled by transitory impurities. These impurities, which have arisen from a primeval impurity existing *ab initio* (comparable to the *avidya* of the Saivite schools), represent an original, congenital ignorance which increases further through our successive lives. If, then, in the depths of our being, this light of consciousness, which is identical to absolute being, shines, what need is there (the school of the *Hwa shang* asks) for such an enormous expenditure of effort? If our nature is pure in essence, then it will be defiled by any concept, good or bad. A white cloud will obscure the sun as much as a black one. Thus progressive purification is unnecessary; the infinitely long career of the Bodhisattva can be dispensed with. A spontaneous, direct awareness of our essential purity, of the light which we are, is enough. A re-cognition, an *anagnosis*, of our innermost being will suffice to eradicate all that is not luminous, all deception, ignorance and error. This overturning of the planes of existence does not result from the performance of any routine. It is rather the gift of an instantaneous flash of insight.

These are the principal characteristics of the two points of view, those of Kamalasila and of the *Hwa shang*, which clashed during the Council of *bSam yas*, called by King *Khri srong lde brtsan* in order to decide which of these points of view, the Chinese or the Indian, was correct.

It is of course scarcely to be supposed that the king and his ministers were able to understand the subtleties of these speculations in detail. At that time few Tibetans indeed would have been able to grasp the nuances of these doctrinal positions. According to the Chinese tradition, the king would seem to have decided in favour of the Chinese.³¹ However, there are contradictions between the reports given in Tibetan and Chinese sources. We are led to distrust the Tibetan tradition more than the Chinese since the Tibetan reports originate from a relatively recent period, and were evidently first compiled when Buddhism in Tibet had already taken on the form it

was to preserve in its essentials to the present day. In addition, *Khri srong lde brtsan*'s declaration that the teachings of Nagarjuna were to be followed is not enough to characterize his attitude unambiguously. Nagarjuna's ideas form a cornerstone of the Mahayana edifice, and no explicit inference can therefore be drawn from this declaration of the king.

From the time of *Ral pa can* (*Khri gtsug lde brtsan*, 815-38) onwards a significant decrease in the followers of Ch'an can be detected. In the catalogues of books in the royal libraries, books on Ch'an become ever rarer. The Indian school has visibly gained the upper hand; in this the influx of new teachers must also have helped. This does not mean however that the defenders of the Ch'an school have vanished completely.³² In addition to the religious teachers living both in the houses of the translators and in the monasteries, there had also come to Tibet representatives of the Siddha school, which had, as already mentioned, points of contact with Ch'an, at least at the level of theory.³³ The rapid way of salvation ascribed to the Siddha, accompanied with miracles, and not far distant from magic, must have exerted a significant attraction upon less educated people and the broad masses of the populace. In short, it seems that Tibetan Buddhism, which was certainly far from homogeneous from its outset, already by the time of King *Glang dar ma* carried within it the seeds which in the further course of history would produce the profusion of doctrines later to be found.

Within the *Jo nang pa* and *rDzogs chen* sects a significant part of the heritage of the *Hwa shang*'s ideas, combined with those of the Siddha, was able to come to maturity, be consolidated, and then be transmitted on in further adaptations.

Myang Ting nge 'dzin, who has already been mentioned, was counted as one of the patriarchs of this movement³⁴ and is recognized by *rNying ma pa* monks to this day as one of their religious teachers. The *rNying ma pa* consider King *Khri srong lde brtsan* to be one of their protectors and patrons. Some books (*gter ma*) of this school are composed in the form of responses which Padmasambhava gave to the questions of King *Khri srong lde brtsan* on the occasion of a great ceremony at *bSam yas*.

The close relationship which existed between the *rDzogs chen* sect and the teachings of the Ch'an school is confirmed by a significant fragment preserved in the *bKa' thang sde lnga* (No.110). Among the several Ch'an teachers here mentioned, some are also known from the Tun-Huang documents.³⁵ *Hwa shang* is given as the seventh patriarch of the school, the first being Bodhidharma. This document, like the Chinese sources, has the disputation of *bSam yas* result in the victory of the *Hwa shang*. The *rNying ma pa* also seem to have continued certain

aspects of the Ch'an teachings in their doctrines, thanks to one of the first Tibetan monks to be ordained (*sad mi*), *Nam mkha' snying po* from *gNubs*,³⁶ who is known to have been a Ch'an teacher.

One must guard against oversimplifying forms of religious experience and doctrinal statements. They do not develop in straight lines, least of all in times of considerable social upheaval, and of contacts with other cultures on many levels. The Buddhism entering Tibet came not only from India (by which is to be understood not only India proper, but also its border regions Nepal and Kashmir) but also from present-day Afghanistan and Gilgit, from the cities along the caravan routes of Central Asia (then known as the Silk Routes), and from China. Buddhism has never refused to accept, rework and transform the ideas of other peoples. In the territories bordering on Tibet there existed numerous religious forms in a picturesque juxtaposition which favoured exchange and reciprocal borrowings. The Chinese translators of Nestorian and Manichaean texts borrowed technical expressions from Taoist and Buddhist terminology, and indeed they borrowed more than just terminology. Vajrayana (gnostic) Buddhism developed hand in hand with Saivism. It is probable that in these ways, through the mediation of Buddhists influenced by other streams of thought, or for that matter directly, ideas foreign to Buddhism could be introduced within it, and gradually be merged into a developing doctrinal structure.

In any case Buddhism must have already, from its first entry into Tibet, undergone much modification and weakening. It cannot be denied that the local cults and beliefs persisted to a large degree, and that there were powerful centres of *Bon* resistance throughout the country.

Equally, it is certain that the Buddhist communities were forced to adopt some of the ancient rituals, which were indigenous and deep-rooted, and therefore ineradicable; even if these were furnished with new forms, in a similar way to the old gods of the country who were incorporated into the Buddhist Olympus after their conversion by Padmasambhava (cf. p. 164). Similarly *Khri srong lde brtsan's* inscription mentions *gyung drung*, the svastika of *Bon*, and *gnam chos*, the law of heaven, characteristic concepts of the *Bon* religion. Local demons came to be accepted as Buddhist divinities who acted as avengers of broken vows. In the peace treaties too, for example in that between *Ral pa can* and China, the rituals which accompanied the concluding of the treaty and guaranteed its endurance were performed with animal sacrifices, and in an unmistakable context of *Bon*.³⁷