

Pattern Recognition: Tracking the Spread of the Incarnation Institution through Time and across Tibetan Territory

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Tithin the limits of my sources, I will outline here the spread of incarnation lineages across time and throughout Tibetan territory. The cultural institution of children being understood as rebirths (*yang srid*, but more commonly *tulku*, *sprul sku*) of important Buddhist teachers allowed for a concentration of charismatic, economic, and social power that had dramatic consequences for Tibetan society. While scholars have treated the origins of the first and most important of these lineages (the Karmapa, Dalai, and Pañchen Lamas), no one has attempted to write a general history of the growth of the institution. I have compiled a list of nearly 500 incarnation series for which I have determined the rough start date as well as the location of the seat of the incarnation. I also have information on the location of roughly an additional 1000 incarnations series for which the start date is not known. I use this data to trace the growth of the institution and its spread throughout Tibet. This has been a daunting task for one person to undertake, even with the help of research assistants, but the initial results are quite compelling.

Most publications about reincarnate lama lineages have been focused on a few key figures in Central Tibet, while reincarnation lineages from Eastern Tibet, the details of which I will discuss at the end of this article, have received less scholarly attention until fairly recently. In contrast to this pattern, the greatest concentration of reincarnate lineages is found in Amdo (with over 400 named lineages out of a total of more than 1000 throughout Tibet), while even Kham (with some 374 lineages) has over twice the number of Central Tibet (with 150 lineages). Mapping these lineages give us some sense of the regional spread of these incarnation lineages, but the only way to assess their development over time is if a start date for a lineage can be determined, and this is necessarily a smaller number of cases, as shown in Figure 1. As for the cumulative totals of named, unnamed,

and undatable lineages, I will discuss what they indicate at the end of this essay.

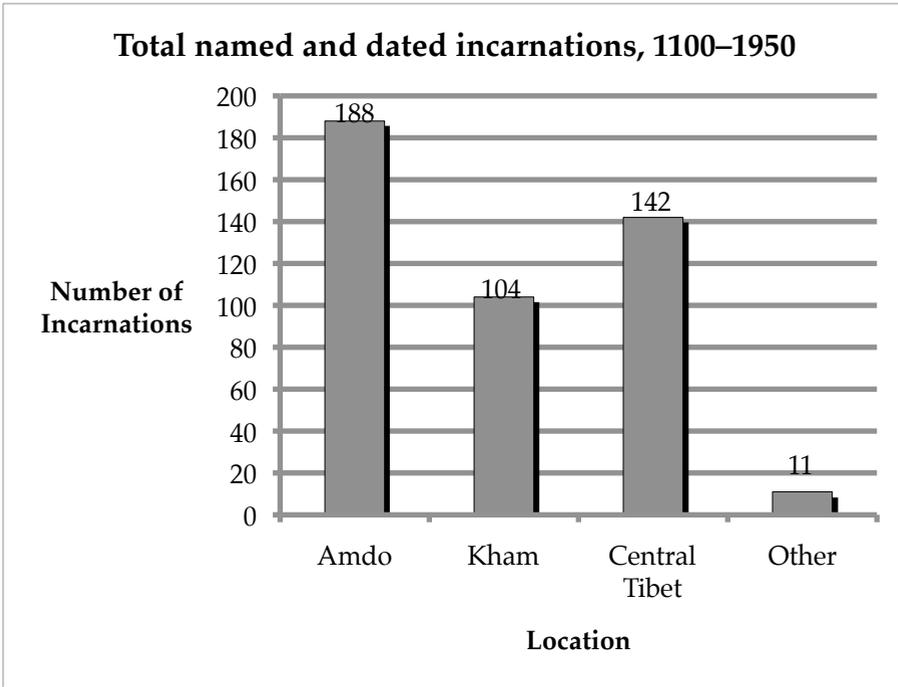


Figure 1.

While the institution of reincarnate lama clearly developed in Central Tibet, especially from the thirteenth century, it saw its greatest flourishing in Amdo, from the late seventeenth century, as shown in Figure 2. The rise and fall in particular religious traditions or regions at different times will be discussed below. It is worth noting not just Central Tibet's *early* leadership in this field, but also its steady and almost continuous decline starting already in the seventeenth century, when Central Tibet was otherwise thought to be at its pinnacle of intellectual and cultural development. Amdo's meteoric rise in new incarnations in the seventeenth century really alters the way that we can understand the spread of this institution beyond the confines of Central Tibet. The fact that the people of Amdo embraced this institution so readily and allowed it to flourish indicates both a wealth of economic resources as well as a level of devotion unprecedented elsewhere. My main explanation for this trend is that there was a more atomized quality to Amdo society, in which each community seemed able and willing to support its own

reincarnate lama(s). But, this was only an option because of what must have been a real economic wealth in this region, since the foundation of each incarnation series depended upon generous donations to support the education, upkeep of staff and structures, and (sometimes substantial) material upkeep of these lamas. The erratic growth and decline in the rate of new incarnation recognition in Kham is more difficult to understand and may simply reflect the lack of detailed information on the dates that most of the incarnation lineages of Kham started, though I do have one theory to propose, as follows.

When one compares Figures 2 & 3, it is quite obvious that the incredible growth in Amdo was closely linked to the rise of the Geluk tradition and its spread there. On the other hand, possibly part of the explanation for the relatively slow rate of growth in Kham might be due to the relative strength of the Kagyü and Nyingma traditions in this region. Both of these traditions are marked especially by devotion to charismatic practitioners, which is more difficult to reproduce over a series of rebirths, in contrast to the more academic scholar that the Geluk educational system was so successful at generating with some consistency.

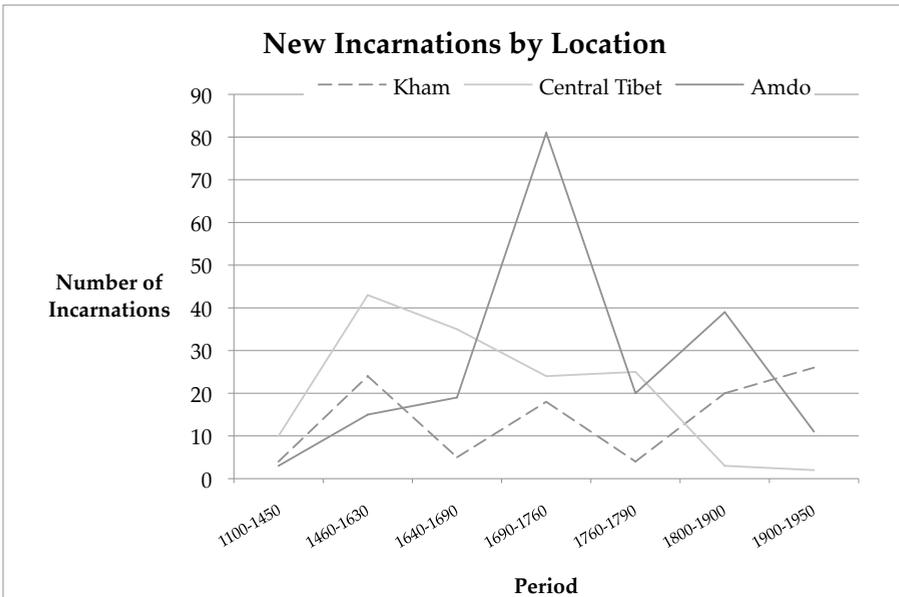


Figure 2.

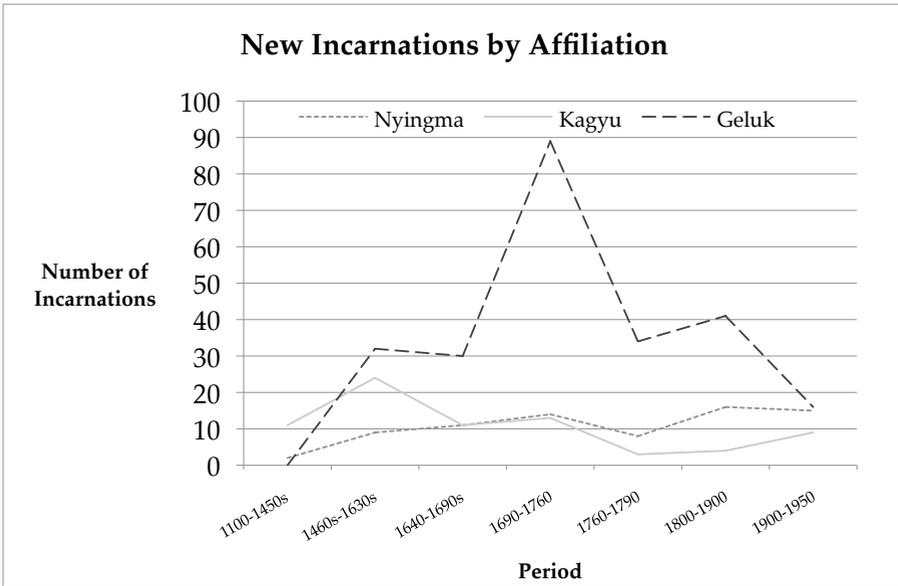


Figure 3.

The coincident spike in both Amdo and Geluk incarnation recognition in the eighteenth century is the most important finding of this study, as it indicates a phenomenon that has gone completely unnoticed in our field. This finding is clearly connected with so much else that we need to understand to make sense of modern Tibetan history. The main driver of this innovation may simply have been the vast expansion of massive Tibetan Buddhist institutions in the east, which outstripped the growth of such institutions in Central Tibet by the eighteenth century. Accompanying this growth, there was a shift of cultural innovation to the east, with figures like Sumpa Khenpo and the Tsenpo Qutughtu writing world geographies and the Changkya and Thuken incarnations writing influential doxographies, the latter of which included references to Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, and Christianity.¹ Other Amdo scholars, among them the Akya Qutughtu (who served as a secretary to Changkya Rölpai Dorjé in Beijing), introduced Johannes Kepler's model of planetary motion to the Amdo Tibetan monastic establishment, and further translations of Kepler's work (from the Chinese) followed.² Another innovation included the consolidation of the diverse teaching faculties in Lhasa (religious philosophy, tantra, and medicine) within the context of

¹ Yongdan 2013; Kapstein 2012; Tuttle forthcoming; Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, and Jackson, 2009.

² Yongdan 2013; Yongdan 2011.

single massive Gelukpa monasteries, which also sometimes included specialized faculties for teaching religious dance as well as specific tantric traditions, such as that of the Hevajra tantra or the Kalachakra tantra, with its complicated mathematical traditions. Later, the development of Gelukpa teaching institutions seemed to inspire a response from other Buddhist traditions such as the Nyingma and Kagyü, which developed formal teaching institutions (called *shedra*) in Kham that followed their own set of texts leading to formal degrees.

As is obvious from figure 4, the overall rate of new incarnation lineage recognition steadily increased from the twelfth century through the seventeenth century, and then declined until it saw a small rally in the early twentieth century. The most significant change in the whole history of this incarnation (up to 1950) occurred in the seventeenth century: the first period in Tibetan history that saw an average of nearly one new incarnation lineage established each year—a dramatic increase (quadrupled) from previous centuries, as I will detail below.

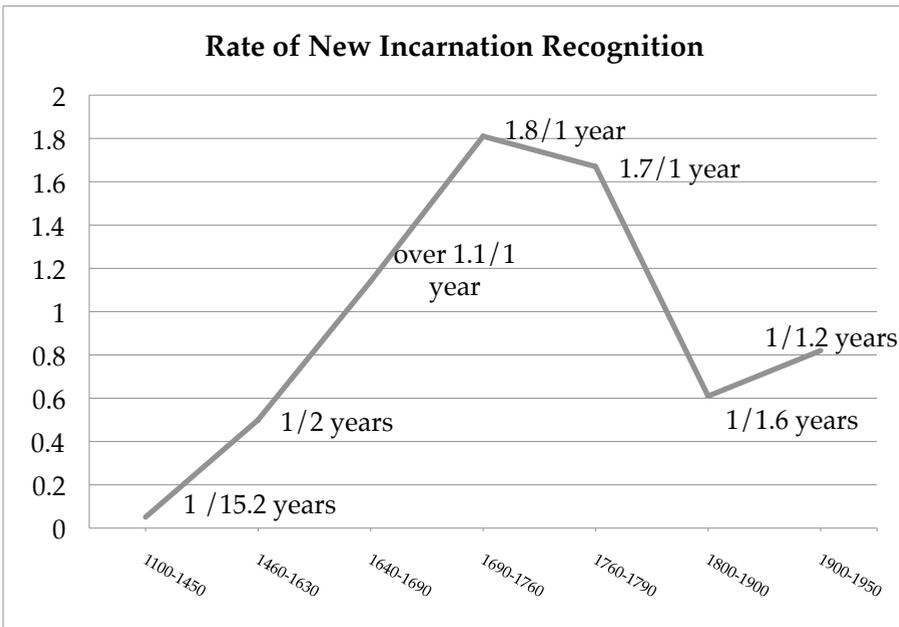


Figure 4.

The correlation between the rise in the rate of Geluk incarnations and that of Amdo incarnations mentioned above is confirmed in figure 4.

Mapping out the patterns of new reincarnation lines helps trace the spread of one of the most important institutions in Tibetan history. Since this institution was generally an expensive one to support, these trends probably also reveal patterns of wealth distribution, something that is generally very difficult to assess in Tibetan history given the nature of our sources. For example, one can hypothesize that Amdo may have been home to more incarnations because it had so few noble families to support, relative to both Central Tibetan and Kham. In fact, by the twentieth century, the only Tibetan noble families I know of in Amdo were those of Rebgong and Choné, and both of these families had incarnation lineages within them, to help shore up a system of joint political and religious rule.

A study of this topic also tells us something of the historic basis for the current significance of incarnations. The Tibetan institution of incarnation was not a case of a few isolated or exceptional figures, which is the impression one might get by comparisons of the Dalai Lama to the Pope. However, in Tibetan regions there were over fifteen hundred of these miraculous figures. It was something more akin to the saints in the Catholic tradition, with all the saints being alive at the same time and recognized as such from birth. In other words, I do not think there is another religious tradition like this in the world. As much as I try not to contribute to the idea of Tibet as an “unique” place in the world, I do think Tibetan Buddhism, as an institutional religion with such a large body of reincarnate figures is exceptional in world religions, since each of these figures is understood to be miraculous in their ability to choose their rebirth and so forth.

1. Methodology and Sources

Here I discuss my methodology for collecting the data examined here. I amassed data on the names, locations and dates (if possible) of as many incarnation series as I could find through the fall of 2012, and as new sources became available I asked my research assistant Tsehua jia (Tshe dpal rgyal) to continue adding data. Because I was especially focused on the datable origins of incarnation lineages, I typically count the start date from the recognition of the second reincarnation (*yangsi*, which could be translated as “recurrent existence”) in any series, as this usually marks the date of the start of the lineage. This is because what most commonly happened with the recognition of an incarnation series was that upon the death of a prominent and charismatic man (with few exceptions they were men), his followers would find his reincarnation. Thus, the series usually

cannot be said to have properly started until this recognition took place. One exception would be the rare cases in which the first in a lineage is recognized as an emanation (*tulku*, and not *yangsi* in this case) in his lifetime, as with the 1539 enthronement of the first Simkhang Gongma incarnation, Sonam Drakpa (1478–1554). Other exceptions include that of the third Dalai Lama, since the title of Dalai Lama only dates to 1578, from his meeting with the Mongol Altan Khan, who gave him the title.

In general, when I did not have other information, I assumed that the start date of an incarnation series usually took place in the first decade of the life of the person described as the second incarnation. But sometimes the recognition of the second incarnation in a series would come much later than might have been normally expected; once again, the case of the Dalai Lamas serves as an example. The Drukchen or Gyalwang Drukpa lineage traces its origins back to a figure that died in 1211, but the first person to be recognized as a reincarnation in the line (the second in the lineage) was not born until 1428. At other times, conflicts over whom the correct incarnation was led to shorter, but significant, delays. For instance, the second Jamyang Shepa was not born until seven years after the first had died, and he was not formally recognized until 17 years after the death of his predecessor. But in general, after one figure died, another person born within a few years would be recognized as the reincarnation within a few years of their birth, and most of my start dates are based on this assumption. In any case, since the periodization that I have generated for the shifts in incarnation recognition range across centuries or several decades at a minimum, the exact start date is less essential than getting a general sense of the patterns of recognition across time.

Nevertheless, before I get into the details, I do have a few caveats. First, this is very much a work in progress and hard data is very difficult to generate on a large scale. Second, I am certain I have made mistakes in assigning various historic figures to certain traditions and periods, but I hope that the large number of data points will make these errors less relevant to the patterns I describe here. Finally, the sources I have are much richer for Amdo, which therefore favors the Geluk and Nyingma traditions that are strong there. Still, I have little reason to doubt the overall patterns, though I would welcome additional research, especially into Kham and Central Tibet, that might add to or alter the dataset or to my interpretations. I chose to use the modern divisions of Tibet (Central Tibet, Kham, and Amdo) simply as an expedient. Even though such terms were not used consistently over the centuries, they are well recognized now and the

contemporary sources I mostly used to generate this data often utilized these rubrics as well.³

As for my sources, the data I have compiled here comes mainly from ten published works (two of which have three volumes), as well as surveys of all available online resources (as of 2012), such as Dan Martin's parsing of the early nineteenth-century list of incarnations made for the Qing amban of Central Tibet, the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, the Treasury of Lives, and various Wikipedia collections (in German and English, such as www.rigpawiki.org).⁴ The strong representation of Amdo materials is found in recent publications from the People's Republic of China. Two Chinese language books (Pu 1990; Nian and Bai 1993) produced by scholars who read Tibetan historical sources and interviewed local people in Tibetan provided the original impetus to this work.⁵ These latter two works relied heavily on systematic fieldwork conducted in the 1950s as part of China's efforts to understand the local context of areas newly brought under Communist control. These investigation reports (*diaocha ji*) have never been published, but they were apparently consulted in the late 1980s as researchers attempted to update and summarize the status and history of all Tibetan monasteries in the areas covered (Qinghai and Gansu for the 1990 volume, Qinghai only for the 1993 volume). Additional materials, mostly part of the cultural and historical materials (*wenshi ziliao/rig gnas lo rgyus*) offices of various prefectures, have added to this

³ A source as late as 1698 (Desi Sangyé Gyatso's *Golden Beryl*; Sde srid Sang rgyas rgya mtsho, *Dga' ldan chos 'byung beedurya ser po (Yellow Beryl, the Religious History of the Ganden[pa])*. Ziling: Krung go bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1989 [1698].) does not use these standard three divisions to organize his distribution of Geluk monasteries across the Tibetan Plateau. By the eighteenth century, however, these geographic terms seem to have stabilized somewhat into the meanings we understand today.

⁴ Bärlocher 1982; Pu 1990; Nian and Bai 1993; Yan & Quedan [Chos ldan] 1993; Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi and Gannan Zangzu zizhizhou weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 1991–95; Zhongguo Zangxue yanjiu zhongxin 1995; Tianzhu Zangzu zixixian weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 2000; Bstan 'dzin 2000; Rdo rje rin chen, Klu tshang, Blo bzang lhun grub rdo rje, et al. 2009; Farber 2005.

⁵ I want to thank the late Gene Smith for launching this database and the work of Yudru Tsomu and Cameron Warner under Gene's guidance. The list of monastery names they started and Karl Ryavec's encouragement over the years led me to compile this database, with significant help from research assistants in later years, especially Tshuejia/ Tshe dpal rgyal. I am grateful to them all. The monastery data can now be found on a variety of websites, in various forms, most notably: <http://tinyurl.com/THLmap> & <http://worldmap.harvard.edu/maps/tibet>. A helpful list of incarnation data, though not identical to my own work, can be found at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center: <http://www.tbrc.org/#!/persons/tulkus>.

picture by filling in gaps in our knowledge of monasteries in southern Gansu (Tib. Kan lho) and Ngawa (Ch. Aba) prefectures. The three-volume Gansu survey is the only one of these sources to come out in a bilingual edition, though the earlier volumes at least include the name of the monasteries in Tibetan. Additional materials on Gansu monasteries and their inhabitants were published in Chinese—with many Tibetan proper names given in Tibetan—in 2000 (for Pari (Dpa' ris) county) and in Tibetan in 2009 (for all of Tibetan Buddhist areas of Gansu). Thus, coverage for Amdo is both comprehensive—including parts of Amdo in Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan provinces—and multilingual.

Kham is also fairly well represented in the sources, with the Qinghai volumes covering Yushu (Yul shul) prefecture and a three-volume Tibetan-language monastery survey covering Kardze prefecture (1995). Unfortunately, significant parts of Kham in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Yunnan are not covered by any of these sources, so this no doubt contributes to some underrepresentation of the number of Kham incarnations. On the other hand, many more Khampas than Amdowas escaped into exile in the 1950s, and they are well represented, along with Central Tibetans, by two works dealing with exiled lamas (Bärlocher 1982; Farber 2005) as well as Wikipedia entries on popular figures with followers in the West. Finally, the incarnations of Central Tibet were recorded in the first systematic survey of incarnation lineages, dating from the early nineteenth century, commissioned by a Qing amban. This list, compiled in 1816 and updated in 1820, includes 124 Central Tibetan incarnation lineages (and about seven Khampa and 32 Amdowa lineages).⁶ Considering all these sources together, we really have a very impressive body of knowledge about the incarnation lineages of Tibet, especially from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and these modern sources often trace the successive reincarnations back through the centuries.

In any case, the core of this article will explore the changes over time measured mainly against religious traditions (Geluk, Kadam, Kagyü, Nyingma, etc.) and locations of each tulku lineage.

⁶ Dan Martin's Romanized version of this list was originally included on the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library site but was lost when the site was redesigned as the Tibetan and Himalayan Library. His work was based on the reproduction of the original list found in Mi 'gyur rdo rje, Ma grong 1991 in the section entitled, "'bod dang / bar khams / rgya sog bcas kyi bla sprul mams kyi skye phreng deb gzhung,'" 281–369.

2. *Periodization of Major Shifts in Rate of Recognition or Location*

1) The first temporal division I observed in the data was a period of very slow growth from around 1100 to the 1450s.⁷ For this period of 350 years, we only have records of eighteen incarnation lineages, which yield an average rate of only one new incarnation every nineteen years.

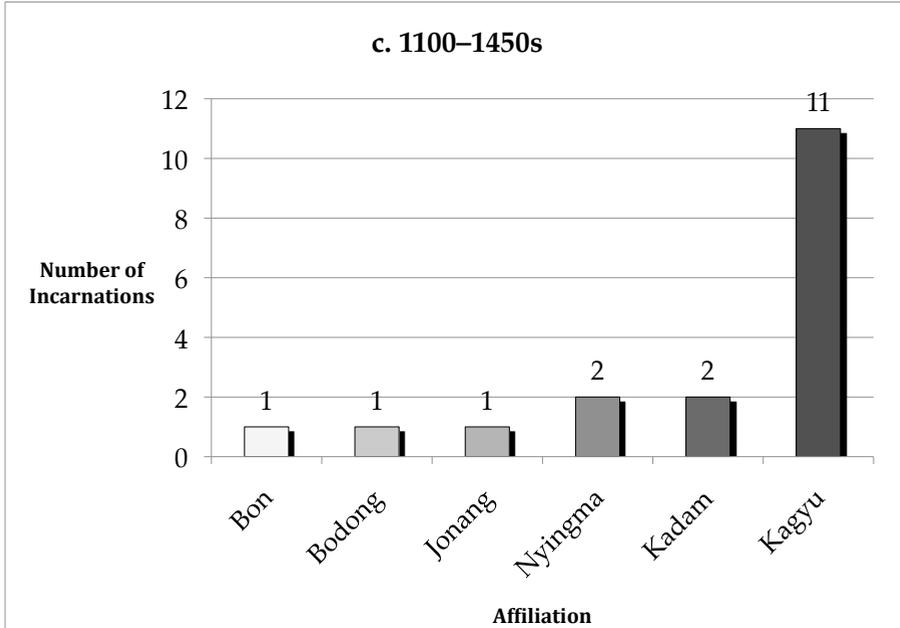


Figure 5.

Even if we skip the outlying earliest incarnation (around 1100) and only calculate from the second earliest incarnation (around 1200), the rate is still only about 1 new incarnation every thirteen years. Not surprisingly, given the fame of several of the earliest and most enduring incarnation lineages, the Kagyü tradition dominates this early period, with nearly two-thirds of the lineages (eleven as compared to the combined total of the other seven across the other traditions).

Three other interesting aspects of the early incarnation lines were their diversity, durability and the relatively frequent occurrence of female incarnations. There were six traditions (Bön, Bodong, Jonang,

⁷ Van der Kuijp (2013) was essential for providing data on the earliest incarnation series.

Nyingma, Kadam, and Kagyü) represented in these earliest years, a variety that would never be repeated. In Central Tibet, only about half of those recognized seemed to have lasted past a generation, and most of these were Kagyü. These included the Black and Red Hat Karmapas, as well as the Drukchen/Gyalwa Drukpa, Garchen, Taisitu and Samding Dorjé Phakmo (in the Bodong tradition) incarnations. Also in Central Tibet, there were proportionally more female incarnations (three of ten), though only one endured to the present (the Samding Dorjé Phakmo lineage). In Eastern Tibet, early historic records are scarce, so it is only by persisting that incarnations were remembered at all, and those that are recorded endured for fourteen to eighteen generations.

In this early period, Central Tibet led in the production of new incarnations series, with more than the other two regions combined. The trend of Central Tibetan dominance lasted some 600 years, until about the year 1700. Given Kham's closer relations with Central Tibet, it is not surprising that its status as the second most productive region for new incarnations lines lasted until around the 1640s, as I will describe below.

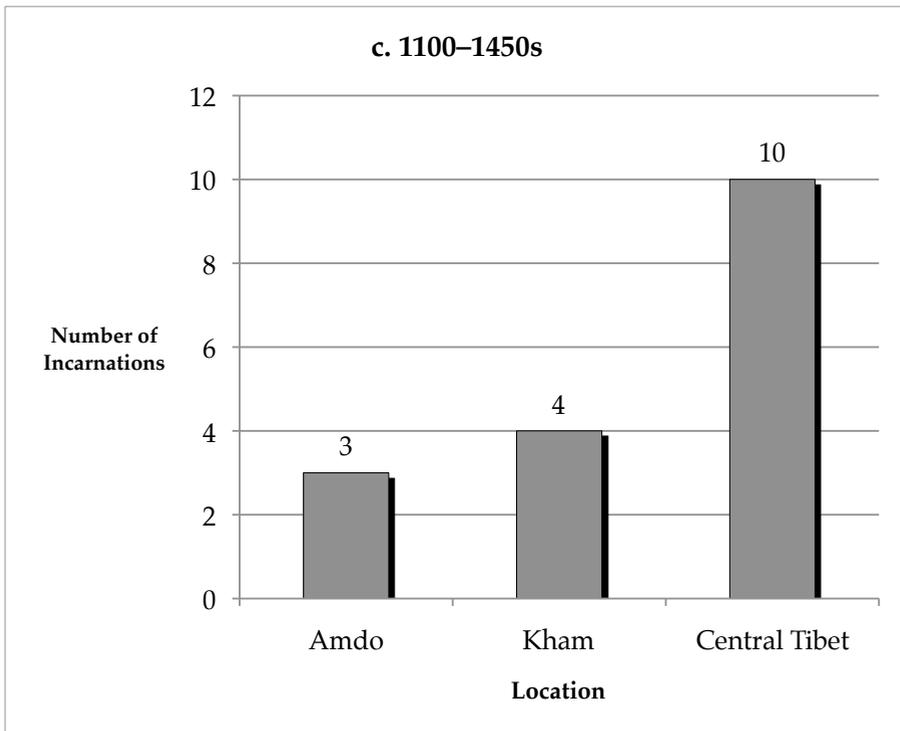


Figure 6.

2) The second period was distinguished by a dramatic increase in recognition of new incarnations series, closely associated with the advent of the Geluk tradition. From the 1460s to the 1630s, there were 85 new incarnation lineages recognized, yielding a rate of one new series every two years. Given the rise of the Gandenpa (later Geluk) tradition and its equally dramatic leadership in the number of new incarnations in this period (with thirty-two new lineages), the rise of this new order was the cause of the veritable explosion of this institutional innovation. The growing competition between the Kagyü and Geluk traditions and their supporters correlates with the introduction of new incarnation lines in this period.⁸ Tucci (2013) and Wylie (2013) have discussed the warfare and monastery building (and destruction or forced conversions) that accompanied the rising conflict between the Geluk and Kagyü traditions and their political supporters.

Similarly, we can see the results of a rising “competition” in the number of new incarnations. This is not surprising given the economic basis of this institution. Starting a new incarnation lineage often meant securing the economic support of donors such that the lineage would have an estate, one or more residences, and other resources needed to support the education and prestige of each new generation. Thus, tracking new incarnations may be used to give us an indication of the relative strength and popularity of particular traditions. While the Kagyü tradition also demonstrated dramatic growth in this period, with twenty-four new incarnation lines (including one female one)—more than four times the rate of the earlier period (shifting from one new lineage every thirty-one years to one every seven years)—they could not keep up with the pace of Geluk growth (one new lineage every five years). We might even see in these trends a predictive indication of future Geluk success in this struggle. For instance, from the 1460s to the 1520s, the Geluk had over three times as many new incarnations lines as the Kagyü tradition (thirteen versus four), despite the close relations of the Kagyü tradition with the Rinpung rulers of Central Tibet.

Another interesting trend in this period was the narrowing of the range of traditions that recognized new incarnations, relative to the previous period. While there are some eleven incarnations for which I could not identify an affiliated tradition, the remaining eleven new incarnations for this period were limited to those of the Jonang (with two) and the Nyingma (with nine) traditions. In the case of the

⁸ Of course, the sources recording new incarnations series may have been lost or destroyed following the defeat of the Kagyü and their supporters in 1642 and subsequent forced conversions of monasteries and monks.

Nyingma tradition, their first seven new incarnations were recognized (in Central Tibet) between the 1460s and the 1560s, and the last two were recognized (in Eastern Tibet) in the last fifteen years of the period, so there was a distinct half-century in which no new Nyingma incarnations were found. Given the close correspondence between the end of finding new Nyingma incarnations in Central Tibet and the rise of the Kagyü-affiliated Tsang-based regime of Karma Tseten and his heirs (1565–1642), who vied for power with the heirs of the previous Phakmodru regime based in the Lhasa valley, the increasingly militarized conflict between Ü and Tsang may have led to a polarization of the political and economic leaders (who could support new incarnations) along the lines of either the Geluk or Kagyü traditions. This theory is supported by the fact that new Nyingma incarnations were not recognized again in Central Tibet until the 1640s, when this conflict had been decided in favor of the Geluk (led at the time by the Fifth Dalai Lama, who was a strong supporter of the Nyingma tradition).

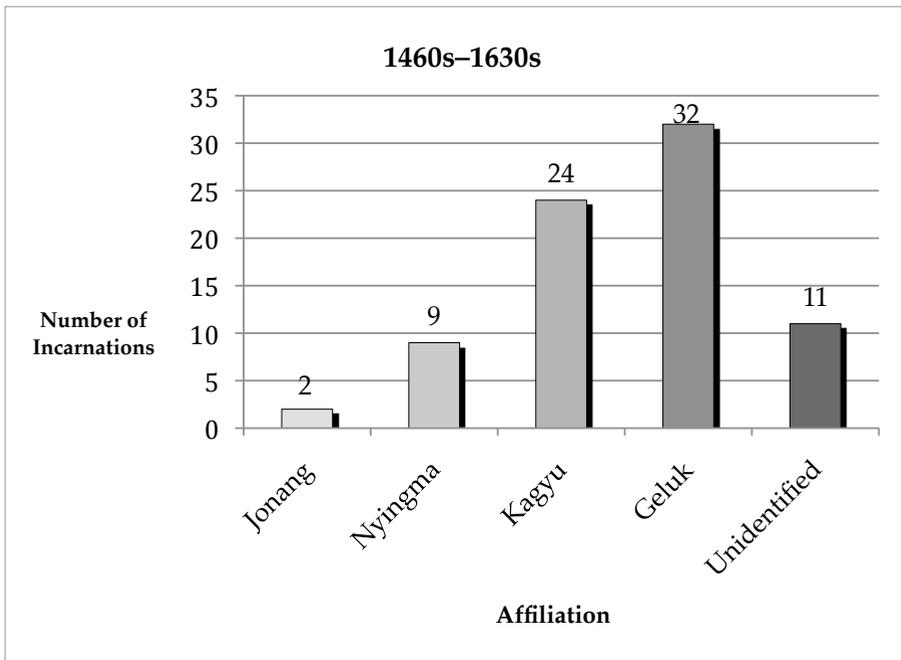


Figure 7.

Finally, in terms of regional growth, Central Tibet remained the leading region with forty-three new lineages, but Kham’s number (24) grew to over 30% of the new incarnations for the first time. In

fact, this period marked the zenith of incarnation lineage growth in Kham until the first half of the twentieth century. Although I have made no special effort to survey the growth of incarnations outside the current borders of the People's Republic of China, this period also marks the start of slow but steady growth of incarnation series in Bhutan. As for the three major regional divisions of Tibet, Amdo was the slowest to develop new incarnations in this period, both in absolute terms and in the relative rate of increase. But this was the last period in which Amdo was to fall in third place relative to Central Tibet and Kham.

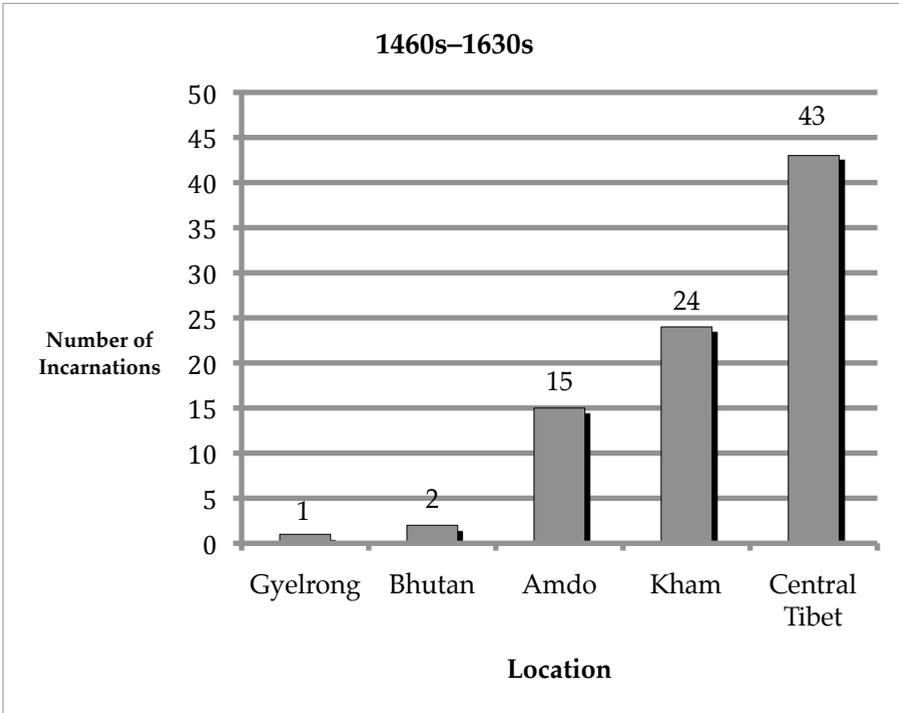


Figure 8.

3) The third period that was suggested by the data lasted from 1640 to 1690 and was marked by another dramatic uptick in incarnation series; doubling the rate of the previous period to over one new series being recognized each year. Given the 1642 success of the Geluk in the struggle against their rivals, it is not surprising that thirty new Geluk incarnation lineages were the majority of the fifty-seven new lines in the subsequent fifty years. Nor is the growth of Nyingma tulku lineages especially surprising since the fifth Dalai

Lama was such an avid supporter of this tradition. However, the continued increase in the rate (1/4.5 years instead of the previous rate of 1/7 years) of the recognition of Kagyü incarnation lineages suggests that things were not as bleak for the Kagyü tradition as we are usually led to believe by the sources. And most of this growth took place in Central Tibet, contrary to what one might have expected in this period.

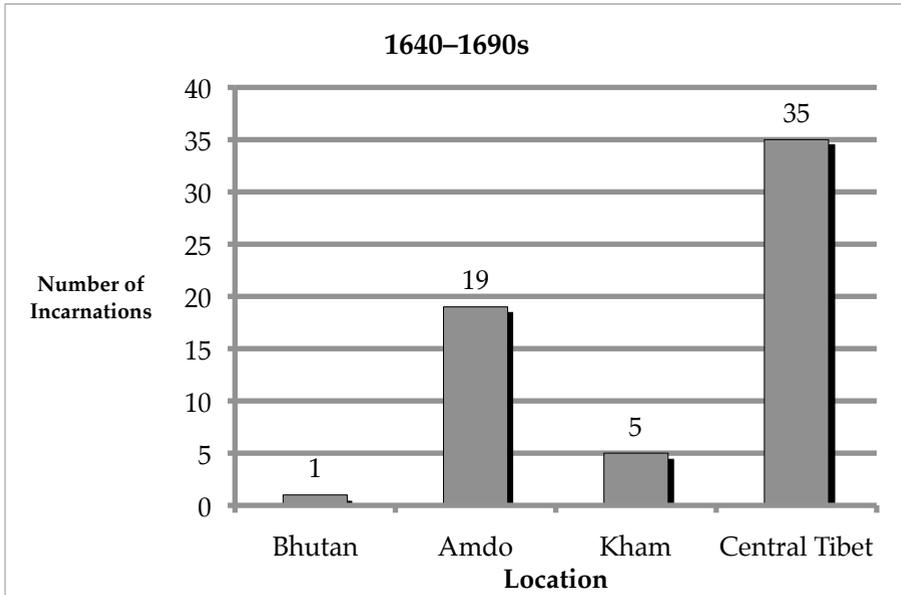


Figure 9.

In fact, probably the most dramatic finding for this period is the drop off in the recognition of incarnation lines in Kham (down to one every ten years, versus one every seven years in the previous period). Compared to the rate observed for the period in general (one every other year), this marks Kham as real anomaly in this period. I wonder whether the Qoshot Mongols' wars against the kings of Beri and Jang Satam (based in Lijiang) might have been more devastating to this region than previously understood.⁹ Or were the exactions of the Qoshot Mongol rulers, who controlled eastern Kham until the 1720s, so severe that they limited the resources necessary to recognize new incarnation lines? Until someone more knowledgeable about Kham history explores these questions, we can only speculate about this unusual development. In any case, this slowing growth in Kham

⁹ Schwieger 1999.

meant that Amdo ranked second for the first time in history, with almost one third of new incarnations. This growth was almost exclusively that of new Amdo Geluk incarnations (only one Nyingma), marking a trend that would accelerate dramatically in the next period.

4) The fourth period lasted for some seventy years (c. 1690–c.1760) and was characterized by a near doubling of the rate of increase and a dramatic shift of new incarnations to eastern Tibet, Amdo in particular. This period also marks the zenith of Geluk new incarnations, with an average of well over one new lineage recognized per year.

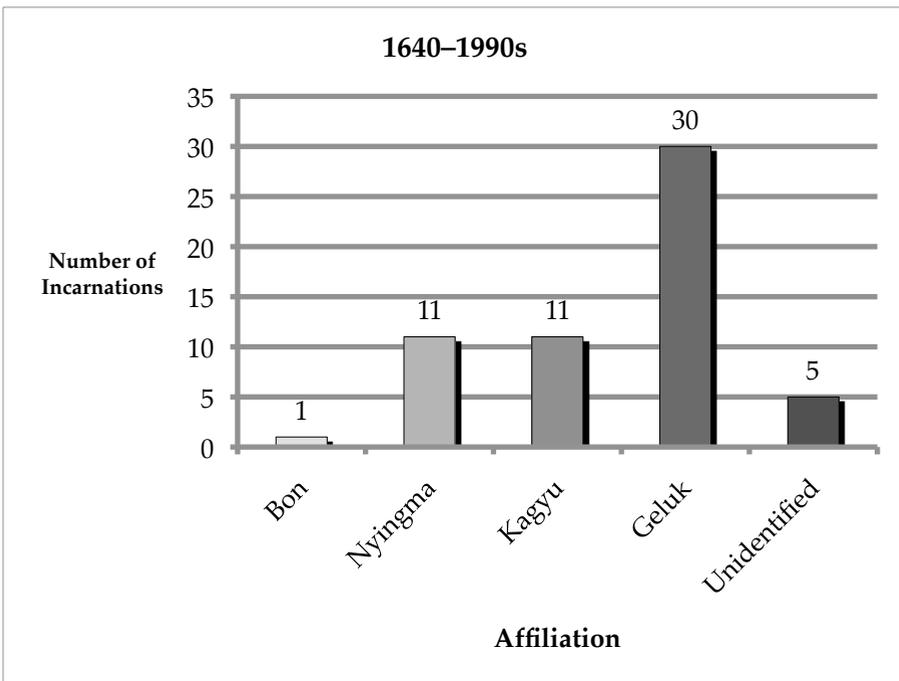


Figure 10.

Overall, with a total of 127 new incarnations in this period, the rate nearly doubled to almost two new incarnations each year. With only one quarter of new tulku lineages (twenty-four versus eastern Tibet's ninety-nine), this was the first time Central Tibetan's share had dropped below half of the total. Specifically, the period was marked by an unprecedented increase in Geluk incarnations, especially in Amdo (more than 60% of the total for this period) and a decrease in

Kagyü and Nyingma incarnations in Central Tibet. While the total rate of Kagyü and Nyingma new incarnations remained about the same as the previous period, the location of the majority of new lines shifted away from Central Tibet (ten) to eastern Tibet (sixteen).

I surmise that this shift was linked to the end of the fifth Dalai Lama’s reign and the polarization of traditions, especially in Ü, after the reign of terror visited on non-Geluk traditions in the brief period of Dzungar Mongol rule (1717–20). While the fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682, his death was kept hidden, and respect (for the Nyingma tradition at least) endured as long as Desi Sanggyé Gyatso ruled in his stead, effectively until his own death in 1705. This supposition that the hardening of sectarian boundaries may account for these changes is further supported by the fact that of the six new Nyingma or Kagyü incarnations in Central Tibet after the death of the fifth Dalai Lama was revealed, the majority of those I could locate took place distant from Lhasa, mostly in Tsang (Riwoché, Gyantsé, Rinpung) and only around the time that Pholhané came to power in 1728. Pholhané, who hailed from Tsang, was well-known as a supporter of the Nyingma tradition.

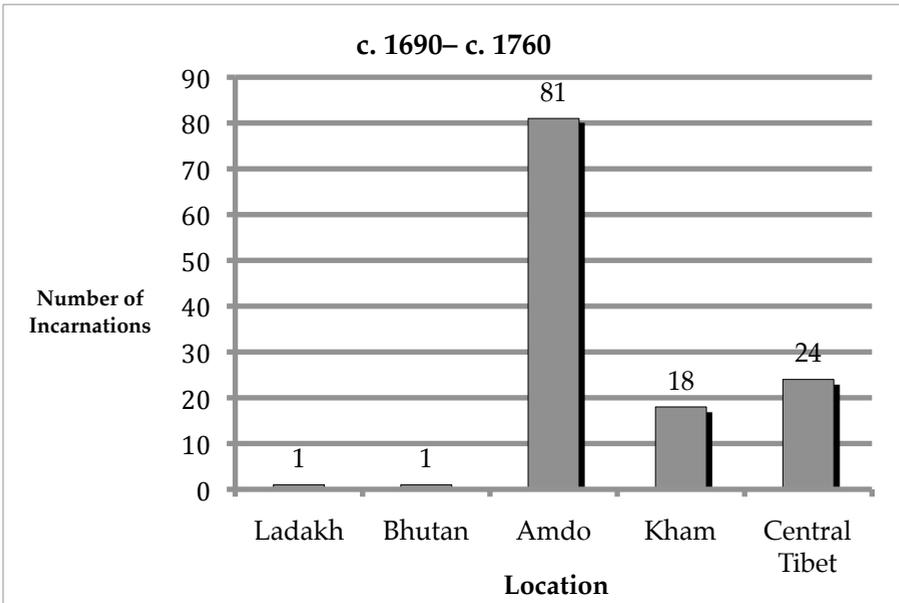


Figure 11.

While one might be tempted to explain the overall drop in the rate of new incarnations in Central Tibet by the frequent conflict (both external invasions and civil war), Amdo was also subject to

devastating disturbances in this period, yet new incarnations grew there at a rate never before seen anywhere in Tibet. For instance, the Qoshot Mongol overlords of Amdo were involved in fending off Dzungar troops in 1717, they participated in a major campaign to drive the Dzungars from Central Tibet in 1720, and then were involved in internal power struggles for control of Amdo until 1724. When full scale fighting with Qing China broke out in 1724, many of Amdo's most prominent Geluk monasteries were destroyed. Yet growth in the number of new incarnations reached dramatic new levels despite this turmoil.

This again has to be seen in contrast with Kham, which despite remaining largely undisturbed by invasions or civil war saw only very limited growth in this period (at a rate of one new incarnation every four years). I must remind the reader that all these figures are based on datable incarnation series, and given the destruction visited on Kham in the early twentieth century, this decline may simply reflect an ignorance of the starting dates of numerous Kham incarnations. After all, the number of Kham incarnations for which we cannot estimate the starting date of the series outstrips all other regions (270 versus 240 for Amdo and only eight for Central Tibet). Nevertheless, given the relative decline versus earlier and later periods, this pattern still seems significant.

Looking ahead, while this period saw the highest overall growth of new incarnations in Tibetan history, the overall rate did not drop much until the advent of the nineteenth century. Thus, the next periodization scheme is not based on dramatic shifts in the rates of new incarnations as in earlier divisions, but instead on the shift back to Central Tibet as the locus of new incarnations.

5) The fifth period from the 1760s–1790s was characterized by a return to Central Tibetan dominance of new incarnation lines and a steep decrease in the rate of new lines being recognized in Kham. The new recognition of Khampa incarnation was nearly cut in half from the rate of 1/4 years in the previous period to 1/7.5 years in this period. Amdo saw a small decline in the rate of new incarnations.

By contrast, Central Tibet again regained the lead in the recognition of new incarnation series (25 total). This was exactly half of the 50 new incarnations in this 30-year period. Across all of Tibet, this period yielded an overall average of 1.7 new incarnations per year showing only a very slight decline from the previous period. This return to new incarnations being recognized in Central Tibet seems to correspond to a return to lama leadership in Central Tibet. There was a rise in new recognitions after the reincarnate lama regents were given authority to rule Central Tibet in 1757 (starting

with the Demo Rinpoché).¹⁰ One wonders whether these new incarnations might reflect the same sort of reward for support that was evident among noble families after the political shifts that brought the fifth Dalai Lama to power, but in this case, it may be that key lamas along with their staff and supporters were given this enduring privilege of reincarnating, analogous the right to pass on noble prerogatives through a bloodline.¹¹

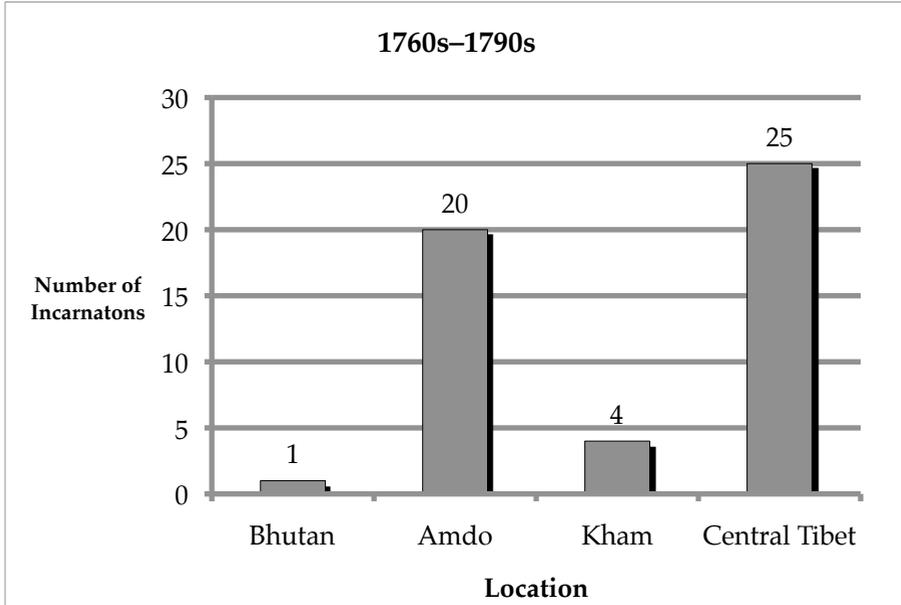


Figure 12.

Or maybe it was just the relative flourishing of religious diversity in an atmosphere no longer ruled by civil officials (as Pholhané and his son had governed from 1728–50). After all, it does not seem that all the incarnations of Central Tibet in this period were Geluk. Based on the names of some of these figures, maybe as many as four were Nyingma and one may have been Sakya, since his incarnation was associated with Nalendra. Likewise, in Amdo, new Nyingma incarnations (four) were almost as common as Geluk (six). For this reason, this period can be described as the start of the steady increase in the rate of new Nyingma incarnation series relative to the other traditions.

¹⁰ See Petech 1988.

¹¹ Petech 2013; Goldstein 2013.

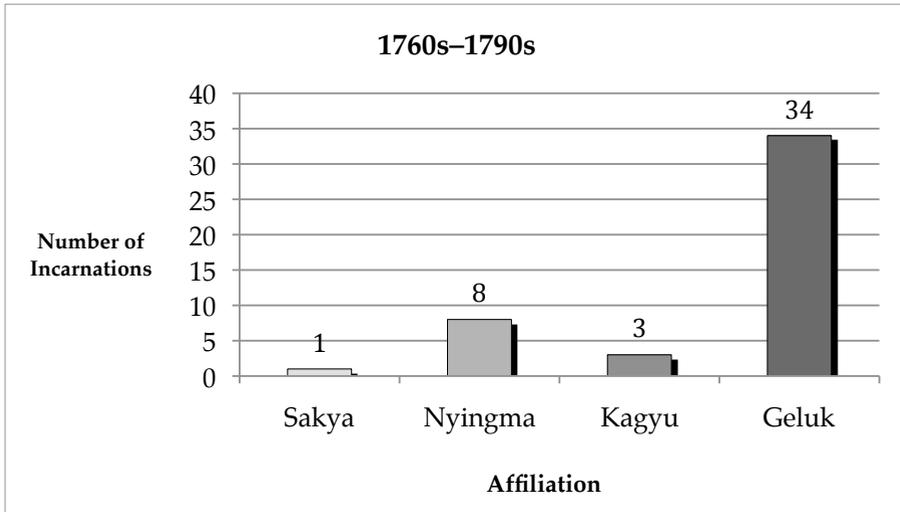


Figure 13.

6) The sixth distinct period corresponds closely with the nineteenth century, a period marked by a dramatic decrease in new incarnation lineages throughout Tibet, but especially in Central Tibet. Over this 100-year period, there were only 61 new incarnations, slowing the rate to only one incarnation every 1.6 years, or a third less than during the previous century. Amdo returned to the lead in the number of new incarnations, with around 60% of newly recognized lineages (39 versus 23 in all other regions). Meanwhile, Kham and Central Tibet switched roles, with Central Tibet seeing almost no new incarnations (three) versus Kham's 20 new tulku lines (a third of new incarnations). In terms of affiliation, the Geluk maintained the lead they had held since the tradition was established. But for the first time, new Nyingma lineages made up a significant portion (33%) of new incarnations.

Once again, the overall slowing in the rate of growth is not easily explained by politics. The areas that experienced the greatest social and political turmoil (Kham from the violent consolidation under Gönpo Namgyel and Amdo from the late nineteenth-century Muslim rebellions) still experienced the most growth. That said, from all the available evidence, Tibetan trade was booming, especially on the eastern edges of Tibet, so there were plenty of resources to support new incarnation lineages.¹² At the same time, there was a lot of

¹² Wim van Spengen 2013; Makley 2007, 70–71. Makley also cites a Chinese source, which said that “in the early twentieth century the wealthiest trulkus could have

religious innovation on-going in Eastern Tibet, especially Kham, so one would expect that this would lead to an increase in reincarnations as the leaders of the new schools (*shedra*) and other charismatic lamas passed away.

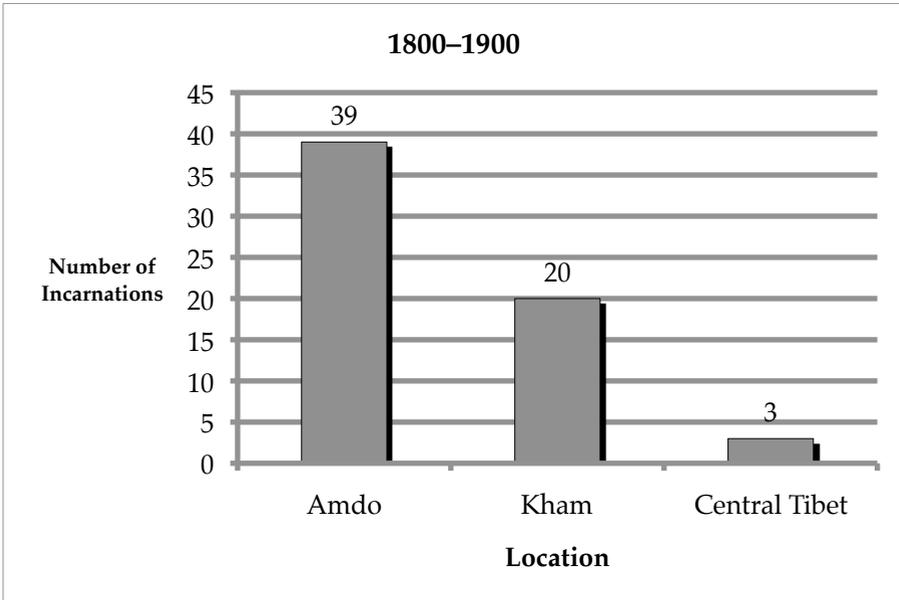


Figure 14.

This trend was in evidence both in Amdo with Shabkar and in Kham with figures like Dodrupchen and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (1820–92), who was understood to be the incarnation of the eighteenth century Jikmé Lingpa and who reincarnated into multiple recognized lineages after his death:

1. a body incarnation: Dzongsar Monastery's Jamyang Chökyi Wangpo (1894–1909);
2. an activity emanation: Kathok Monastery's Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö (1893–1959);
3. a speech emanation: Palpung Monastery's Karma Khyentsé (1896–1945);
4. an activity emanation: Dzokchen Monastery's Guru Tsewang (1897–?);

capital of up to a million *baiyang* (Yuan Shikai silver dollars) in addition to owning herds and farmland (Zhang Guangda 1993a)." Makley 2007, 297n26.

5. and later, a mind incarnation: Shechen Monastery's Dilgo Khyentsé (1910–91).

In other words, this initial new incarnation line (Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo) accounted for one quarter of all the new tulku lineages in Kham during the nineteenth century.

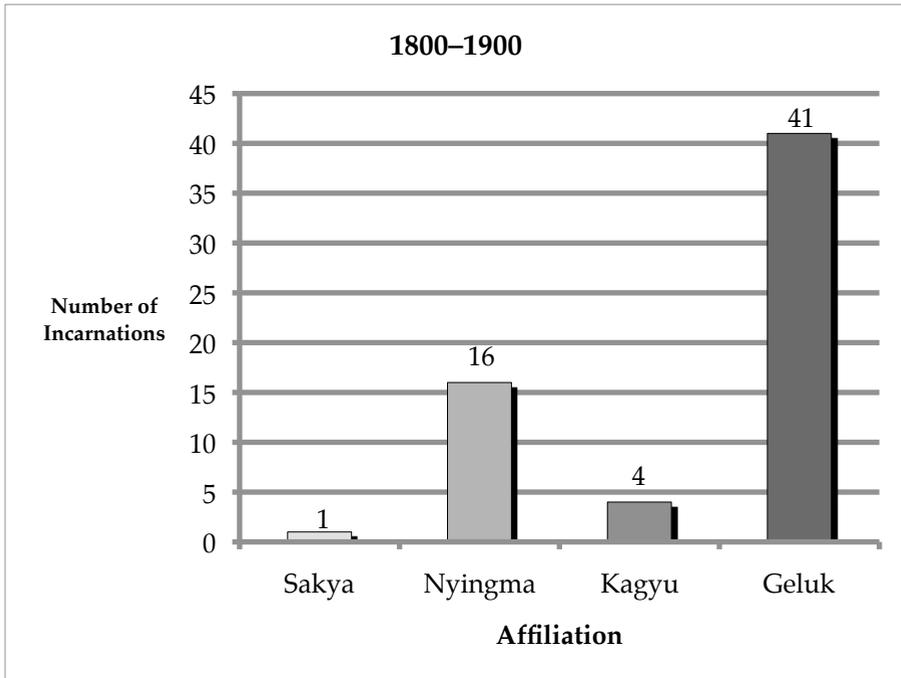


Figure 15.

7) The seventh and final period under consideration here is the first half of the twentieth century. These 50 years saw the advent of 41 new incarnation series, so the rate of recognition increased again slightly, to one every 1.2 years. This period saw much more even distribution between the four main traditions. Regionally, the earlier trend of increasing growth in Kham accelerated to generate over 50% of new incarnations in this period. This is all the more remarkable given the tremendous death and destruction visited on eastern parts of Kham during this period, especially by Zhao Erfang and again later by a host of warlords during the Republican Chinese period.

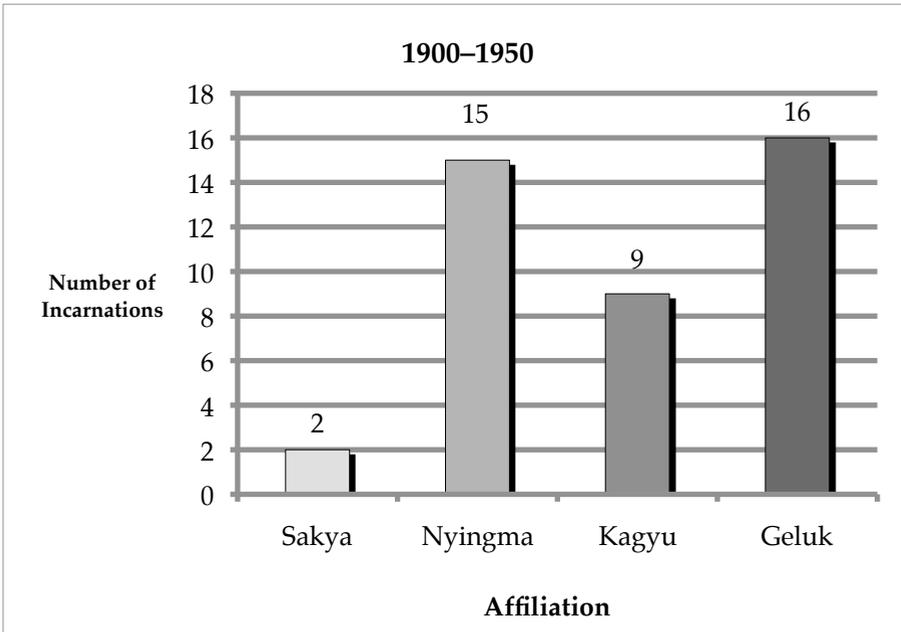


Figure 16.

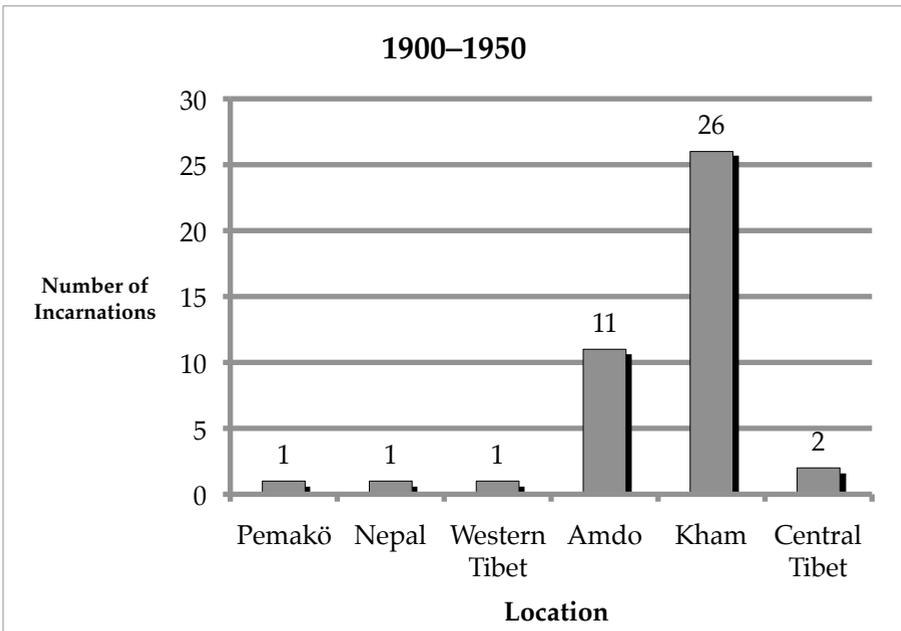


Figure 17.

Outside of Kham, Amdo was once again the only region that saw significant, if much slowed, growth. I suspect the destruction of so many of northeast Amdo's Tibetan Buddhist establishments in the Muslim rebellions of the previous century had a significant impact in this case. The distribution of other new incarnations across the Tibetan plateau is also remarkable at this time, with new lineages in western Tibet, Pemakö, and Nepal.

3. *The Patterns of Change across Tradition, Time, and Territory*

If we step back from the details of each period and try to look at the cumulative totals for each tradition and region, as well as rates of change over time for the whole Tibetan Plateau, we can discern patterns that were not necessarily obvious in any individual period.

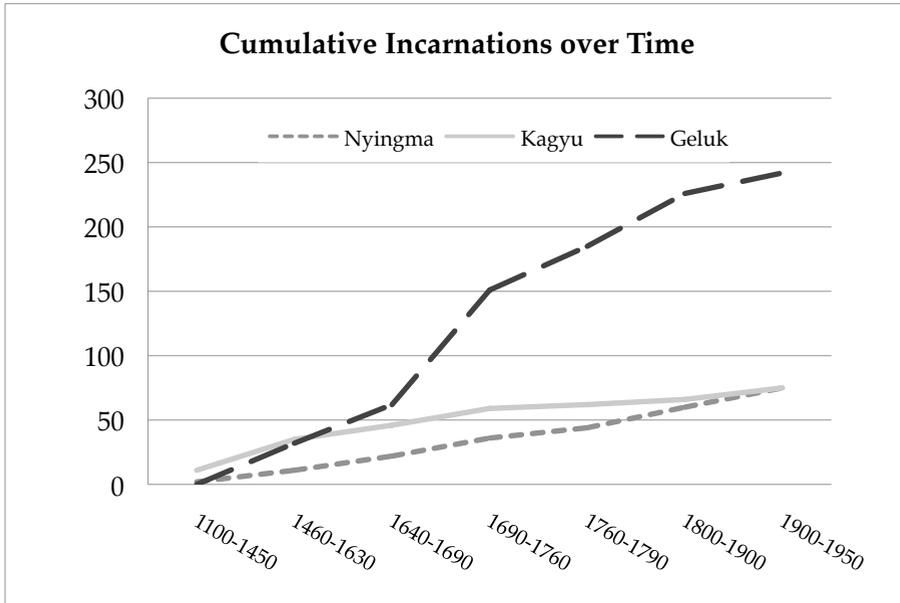


Figure 18.

For instance, when we look at cumulative totals of all the dateable incarnation series by tradition, we see that the Nyingma and Kagyü traditions are exactly evenly matched, with each at 75 incarnation lines. But if we compare this with cumulative totals for each tradition, regardless of whether or not we know their start dates, the Kagyü tradition (149 lines) is significantly better represented than the Nyingma (105 lines), as shown in Figure 20. So what we seem to have

is a better record of Nyingma incarnations' starting dates, which may reflect their relatively greater presence in Amdo (and the more detailed publications about this region).

That said, the abundance of Amdo sources has not resolved all outstanding questions about the origin dates of incarnation lineages, as shown in Figure 19.

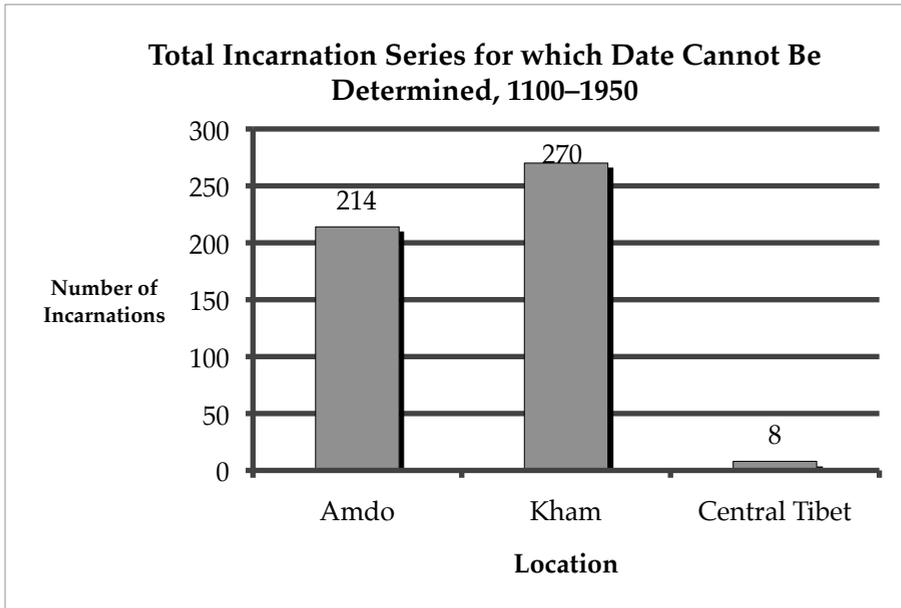


Figure 19.

I suspect there are other problems with our sources. On the one hand, our ignorance of many of the Kagyü tradition's tulku lineages start dates is no doubt due to the limited sources on Kham incarnations. On the other hand, I would also guess that the fact that we *are* able to date almost all the Central Tibetan tulku lines is an indication that we do not have sufficient information from that region to be certain that we have data on all the minor incarnations from there. Following the pattern in the two other major areas of Tibet, it would seem that we should have records of additional minor incarnation series about which we knew only the most basic information (where they were based, etc).

In any case, the most impressive finding of these cumulative comparisons is the stunning number of Geluk incarnation series, with far more than all the other traditions combined (702 versus 470; see figure 20).

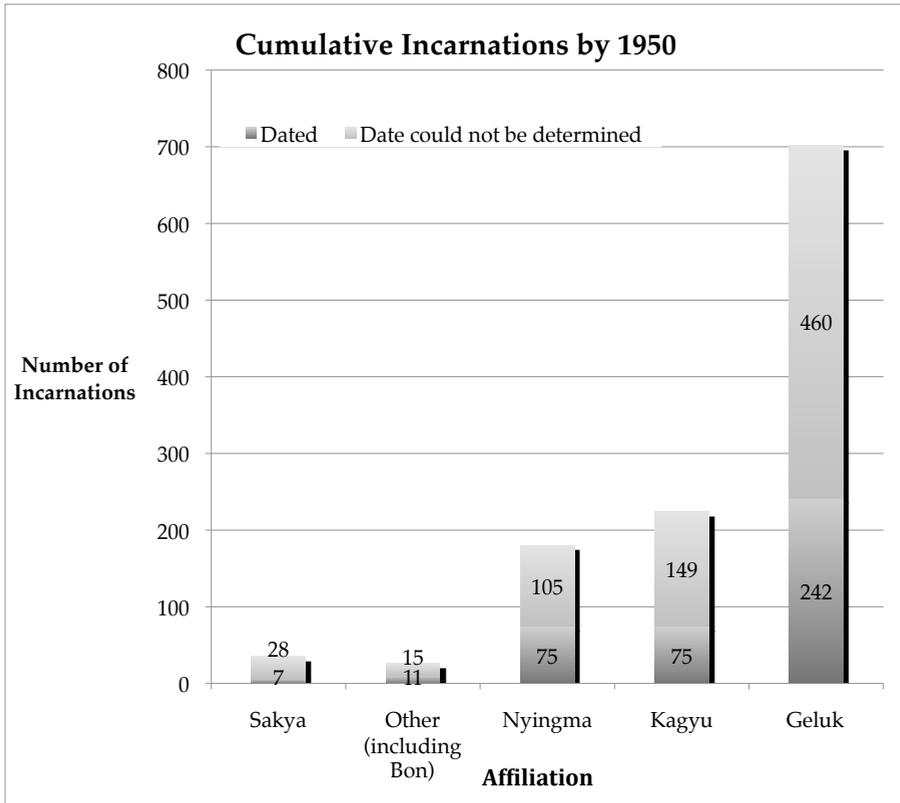


Figure 20.

While this is not entirely surprising, given the dominance of the Geluk tradition both politically and in terms of numbers of monasteries and resources since the 1640s, this disproportionate growth of Geluk incarnations has not been noticed or studied. When we attend to only the most charismatic and scholarly tulkus (as is mostly the case in this volume as well) rather than the larger trends or less prominent tulku lineages, we miss a key part of Tibetan society and religion that has scarcely been documented. Martin Mills' important work on a monastery and its main incarnation in Ladakh reveals something of what can be gained by this sort of attention to out of the way places and less well known people. And as he demonstrated in his study, insights gained from these localities can help us understand better-known religious figures in Tibetan history.¹³

¹³ Mills 2003.

When we consider the regional distribution, as shown in Figure 21, we can again see an opportunity to explore a new direction in future studies.

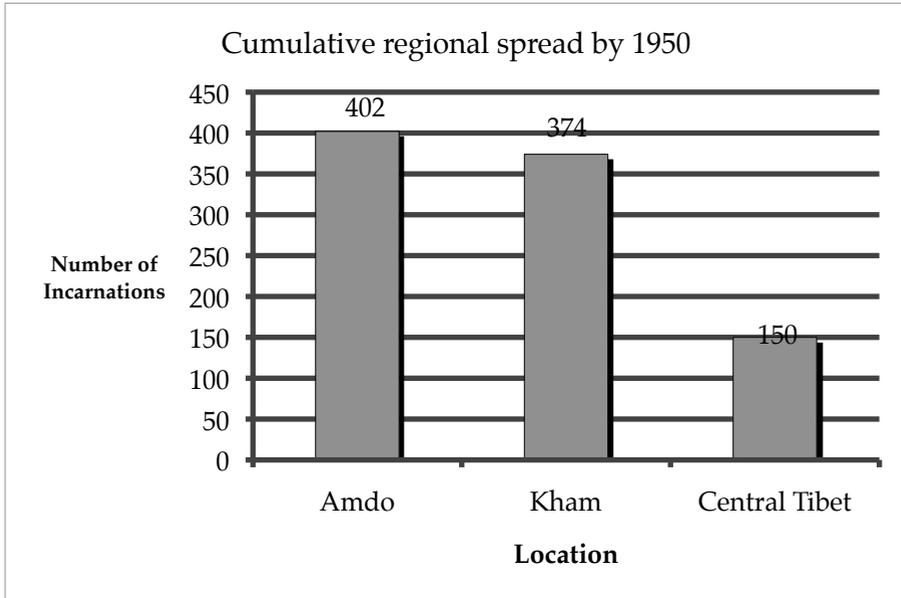


Figure 21.

So far, a great deal of the published work on reincarnate lamas has been devoted to those from Central Tibet (most of the Karmapa, Dalai and Pañchen Lamas).¹⁴ In contrast, attention to the history of

¹⁴ Not all the lamas in these three main lineages were born in Central Tibet (e.g. the 10th Karmapa from Golok, 6th Dalai Lama from Tawang, and the 10th Pañchen Lama and 14th Dalai Lama, both from Amdo). On the Karmapas: Richardson 1958–59; Douglas and White 1976, Dus gsum mkhyen pa, et al. 2012; Debreczeny, et al. 2012. On the Dalai Lamas: Bell 1987; Kutchner 1979; Aris 1989; Ya 1991; Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho 1999; Brauen, et. al. 2005; Ngawang Lhundrup Dargyé and Wickham-Smith 2011. On the Pañchen Lamas, see Schmidt 1961; Loo 1970; Ya 1991, Jagou 2011. For other reincarnate lamas from Central Tibet, see Gyatso 1998; Diemberger 2007. Although the pattern is largely the same for all the late twentieth-century modern, western-influenced autobiographies of lamas who have taught in the West, I am not considering those here. A list of these, with summaries, can be found here: <http://www.tibetanculture.weai.columbia.edu/tibetan-biographies/>. There have also been a number of recent devotional publications on Nyingma masters that include attention to reincarnate lamas, such as 'Jam dbyangs rdo rje [Smyo shul Mkhan po] and Richard Barron (2005), but only Thondup (1996) includes dated historical detail. Relatively few scholarly monographs have been written about any reincarnate lamas, as detailed below.

reincarnate lamas from eastern Tibet has mostly not made it much beyond the dissertation phase.¹⁵ With the exception of the Changkya incarnations and Labrang monastery's incarnations, there have been almost no published monographic studies of reincarnated lamas outside of Central Tibet.¹⁶ Thus, the level of publication on lamas from each of these regions is inversely proportionate to the cumulative numbers of incarnate lama lineages in each region. Central Tibet had the fewest (150), while Kham (374) and Amdo (402) each have more than double that number.¹⁷ Of course, one explanation for this attention to Central Tibet lamas may be precisely that the presence of such prominent leading lamas in Central Tibet constrained the development of other incarnate lama lineages in this region.

I do not expect that this short article will generate a flood of new data collection or analysis from other scholars addressing the same sorts of issues, especially since this sort of analysis is so rare in Tibetan studies. However, I do hope that those who know of relevant details or sets of data will offer corrective criticism or contributions to this topic (especially adding information about Kham, which may be under-represented here). I am quite aware that I have missed or failed to note important incarnation lines. I have been repeatedly humbled by the sheer volume of the data that is available and just as often had a feeling of futility in trying to assess it all. But as I hope

¹⁵ Gene Smith's early work, some of which was collected in Smith 2001, was exceptional for attending to figures from Eastern Tibet. Amdo and Kham have also fared well among recent doctoral students, though none of this work has been published in book form yet. For Amdo, see: Wang 1996; Karsten 1996; Maher 2003; Illich 2006; Jacoby 2007 (revised version under contract); Gayley 2009; Willock 2011, Sullivan 2013. For Kham, see: Gardner 2006, which covers 'Jam mgon Kong sprul (1813–99), on whom, see also the translated biography: Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas and Richard Barron 2003; Ronis 2009; Schapiro 2012. For translated biographies of Amdo lamas, see Shabkar 1994; Ngawang Lhundrup Dargyé; Simon Wickham-Smith, trans. 2011.

¹⁶ Berger 2003; Nietupski 2009, 181-214; Neitupski 2011; Bogin 2005 (revised version under contract); for Kham: Sagaster 1967; Schwieger 1989.

¹⁷ The problem with Kham sources is that the origins of relatively few (107) of these lineages can be easily dated, but recent work (in 2016) by my research assistant Sonam Tsering turned up an additional 70 names of incarnation lineages in the Dkar mdzes region of Kham in a survey of the prefectures' monasteries (Krung-go'i Bod kyi shes rig zhib 'jug lte gnas kyi chos lugs lo rgyus zhib 'jug so'o, et al. 1995). This confirmed my earlier suspicion that if we had better sources on the parts of Kham that are part of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Kham might actually turn out to be the most prolific region for incarnation lineages. Since this new information came in after this paper had been copy-edited for final publication, I have not added the additional 70 Kham incarnation lines to the bar graph in figure 19 (or elsewhere in this paper).

this article (and certainly this special issue) demonstrates, understanding reincarnation lines is of crucial importance, both for explaining Tibet's past, but also for making sense of Tibet's present and future.

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Recounting the Fifth Dalai Lama's Rebirth Lineage

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Faced with something immensely large or unknown, of which we still do not know enough or of which we shall never know, the author proposes a list as a specimen, example, or indication, leaving the reader to imagine the rest.

—Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*²

Incarnation lineages naming the past lives of eminent lamas have circulated since the twelfth century, that is, roughly around the same time that the practice of identifying reincarnating Tibetan lamas, or tulkus (*sprul sku*), began.³ From the twelfth through eighteenth centuries it appears that incarnation or rebirth lineages (*sku phreng*, *'khrungs rabs*, etc.) of eminent lamas rarely exceeded twenty members as presented in such sources as their auto/biographies, supplication prayers, and portraits; Dölpopa Sherab Gyeltsen (Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, 1292–1361), one such exception, had thirty-two. Among other eminent lamas who traced their previous lives to the distant Indic past, the lineages of Nyangrel Nyima Özer (Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, 1124–1192) had up

¹ I thank the organizers and participants of the USF Symposium on The Tulku Institution in Tibetan Buddhism, where this paper originated, along with those of the Harvard Buddhist Studies Forum—especially José Cabezon, Jake Dalton, Michael Sheehy, and Nicole Willock for the feedback and resources they shared. I am further indebted to Tony K. Stewart, Anand Taneja, Bryan Lowe, Dianna Bell, and Rae Erin Dachille for comments on drafted materials. I thank the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange for their generous support during the final stages of revision. Finally, I am very grateful to Gedun Rabsal and Wen-shing Chou for reinvigorating this essay with keen-eyed responses to my newer translations and research questions.

² Eco 2009, 49.

³ In addition to early Bka' gdams pa examples noted by Leonard van der Kuijp, José Cabezon has found anecdotes of Bka' brgyud and Zhi byed identifications from roughly the same period, reportedly from the first half of the twelfth century. Cabezon has further traced the earliest datable incarnation lineage yet found to an autobiographical work of the Bka' brgyud master Nyag se Rin chen rgyal mtshan (1141–1201). van der Kuijp 2005, 28–29; Cabezon 2017, 4–6, 14–16.

to seventeen; those of Pañchen Lobzang Pelden Yeshé (Pañ chen Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes, 1738–1780), up to twenty including his emanational source Amitābha; that of the Zhamar (Zhwa dmar) tulku lineage, ten as recorded in the fifteenth-century *Blue Annals*, adding up to sixteen by the end of the eighteenth century.⁴ By comparison the fully elaborated rebirth lineage of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–1682) identified seventy-eight members near the end of his lifetime (Appendix A, middle and right columns). What could explain such an extraordinarily abundant lineage? And, as Umberto Eco encourages us to ask, what does it invite us to imagine?

In this article I argue that lengthy rebirth lineages of the Fifth Dalai Lama articulated and promoted two complementary projects of the Ganden Podrang (Dga' ldan pho brang) court. One was an aesthetic associated with the phrase *sizhi püntsok* (*srid zhi'i phun tshogs*), which may be translated as “existence and peace replete” or “all the marvels of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.” This aesthetic of abundance embraced and celebrated material wealth, variety, numerousness, and a vision of inclusiveness as the ethos of the court. It also supported a second project: a fresh paradigm of kingly rule and legitimacy based on embodied qualities expressed through the Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage. While they strove to refashion religio-political discourses and practices in the seventeenth century and beyond, these projects had their limits amidst bitter sectarian and regional conflicts. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Great Fifth's rebirth lineages extended well beyond his court, impacting the subsequent formation of Gelukpa incarnation lineages across Asia.

I begin by analyzing two large lineages, a lineage of fifty-eight members painted in the Red Palace of the Potala as well as a lineage of seventy-eight members produced through a supplication prayer, thangka paintings (*thang ka*), and biographical writing. Completed near the end of the Fifth Dalai Lama's life, these were preceded by several earlier, shorter rebirth lineages. I sort out and compare these various versions in order to uncover the process of expanding his rebirth lineage and the implications for Tibetan kingship that they entailed. Next, I explore how the multisensory environments of rebirth lineage productions—poetry, painting, and recitation—cultivated a paradigm of Buddhist kingship through the aesthetics of abundance and the dynamics of prayer. Finally, I consider the impact of the Fifth Dalai Lama's rebirth lineages and circle back to the questions of listmaking and numerality.

⁴ Hirshberg 2016, 55–84; Cabezón 2017, 16; 'Gos Lo tsā ba 1979 (1949), 520–32, 540–45, 546–552.

The court of the “Great Fifth”—as Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso widely became known—is credited not only with unifying Tibet politically, but with making a lasting impact on major aspects of Tibetan religious and cultural traditions. Their grand achievements include the architecture and art of the Potala Palace along with substantial expansion of the Jokhang Temple complex in Lhasa; the institution of major annual festivals, especially focused on Lunar New Year; and the compilation and dissemination of systematic writings in the recognized “fields of learning” (*rig gnas*, Skt. *vidyāsthāna*): Buddhist doctrine, ritual, and history, as well as other fields such as poetics, medicine, and astrology. The literary and artistic production of the Fifth Dalai Lama's rebirth lineages must thus be understood as one particular area among an array of culture-making projects.⁵ Although it is well beyond the scope of this essay to analyze the full range of the Ganden Podrang's activities, in future publications I intend to address further aspects of cultural production by the Fifth Dalai's court.

1. Wondrous Plenitude

“Existence and Peace Replete” (*srid zhi'i phun tshogs*) is the resplendent name that was bestowed on the main assembly hall of the Red Palace in the Potala, which was completed in 1694 and also called the western grand hall (*tshoms chen nub*) to distinguish it from the eastern grand hall (*tshoms chen shar*) of the White Palace completed in 1648.⁶ Anyone who has entered this space is immediately struck by its imposing scale and majestic grandeur. With eight tall pillars and thirty-six shorter pillars, it has an estimated area of 370 square meters, and a height exceeding six meters (Fig. 1).⁷

⁵ For an excellent overview of the Fifth Dalai Lama and previous scholarship on his history and cultural achievements, see Schaeffer 2005, especially 280n1.

⁶ Some recent publications also refer to the eastern grand hall in the White Palace by the name *srid zhi'i phun tshogs*, but it is unclear to me when or how this latter usage began to circulate. Materials attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama that I have read simply refer to it as the “grand hall” (*tshoms chen*), the “grand hall of Potala Palace,” (*pho brang po ta la'i tshoms chen*), or some variant thereof. In Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's supplement to the Fifth's autobiography, we find multiple references to the Red Palace's grand hall with this particular name, e.g. “the new grand hall Existence and Peace Replete” (*tshoms chen gsar pa srid zhi'i phun tshogs*). In any case, I would concur that many visual elements I associate with the aesthetic of *srid zhi'i phun tshogs* are also found in the White Palace's grand hall, albeit in earlier stylistic forms. Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 6, 135b3=270.3.

⁷ Phun tshogs tshe brtan 2000, 263. For additional images of this hall see Jiang Huaiying 1996, vol. 2, Pls. 146–165; Phun tshogs tshe brtan 2000, 84–102.

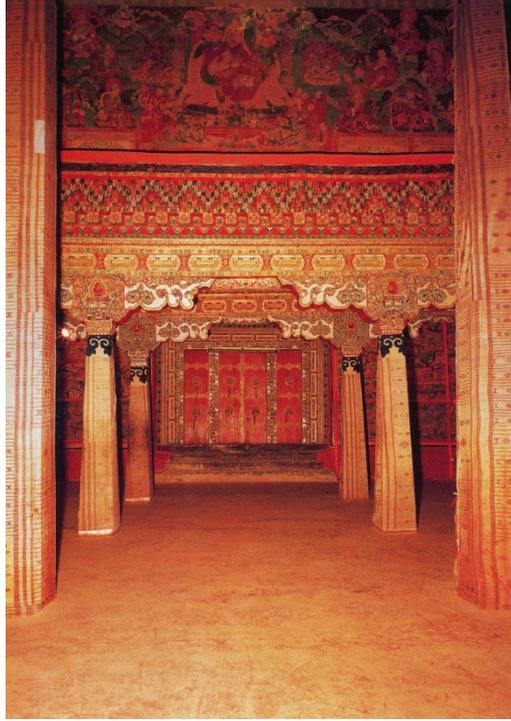


Fig. 1. “Existence and Peace Replete” grand hall, Red Palace, Potala, Lhasa, completed 1694.
(After Phuntsok Namgyal 2002, 124. By permission of Homa & Sekey Books, www.homabooks.com)

The wall painting program features Dalai Lama rebirth lineage portraits and narrative scenes from the Great Fifth’s life. While the paintings have undergone restoration—as have the paintings in the Eastern Great Hall—elements of the original design may still be discerned in consultation with textual sources.

On the ground level are portraits of principal lineage figures (Fig. 2) accompanied by smaller figures and narrative scenes of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s life, which also serve as visual transitions between the iconic figures (Figs. 1, 3). It begins on the north side of the west wall with the buddha Ödzé Yeshétok (‘Od mdzad ye shes tog, Skt. *Prabhākarajñānaketu), in whose presence the bodhisattva Chenrezik (Spyan ras gzigs, Skt. Avalokiteśvara) is said to have generated the aspiration for supreme awakening 991 eons (*skal pa*, Skt. *kalpa*) ago.⁸ According to the catalog of the Great Fifth’s funerary *stūpa* and other contents of the Red Palace by Desi Sanggyé Gyatso (Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653–1705), the remaining procession of figures as the viewer circumambulates clockwise around the hall are the

⁸ Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 4, 14a2=31.2.

buddha Öpakmé (Skt. Amitābha) followed by Chenrezik on the north wall; the Tibetan imperial kings Songtsen Gampo and Trisong Detsen (Fig. 2), along with the Indic king Könchok Bang (Dkon mchog 'bangs) on the east wall; the Indic prince Depa Tenpa (Dad pa brtan pa) and the Nyingma (Rnying ma) treasure revealer Nyangrel Nyima Özer on the south wall; and the First Dalai Lama Gendün Drub (Dge 'dun grub) on the west wall.⁹ Apart from the two buddhas who are biographically linked with Chenrezik, the remaining figures are all members of the Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage, that is, his emanational source (Chenrezik) and preincarnations. The lineage portraits are larger than life, with seated figures at a height of 1.5 meters and the



Fig. 2. Emperor Trisong Detsen, from a series of Fifth Dalai Lama rebirth lineage wall paintings. "Existence and Peace Replete" grand hall, Red Palace, Potala, Lhasa, 1690–1694. (After Henss 2014, vol. 1, fig. 161. Photo 1981 by permission of author.)

⁹ As most of the assembly hall was not accessible for study at the time research was conducted, I was able to make only limited observations at considerable distance from the wall paintings. The description in Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's catalog of the Fifth Dalai Lama's funerary *stūpa* is partly reproduced in Phun tshogs tshe brtan's book on Potala murals, and generally agrees with a modern Tibetan-language guide to the Potala; it differs somewhat from Samten Karmay's description of the principal figures based on observations made in 1995. The iconic portrait of Dad pa brtan pa appears to have been replaced by one of 'Brom ston. Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Sole Ornament*, vol. 1, 285a3–285b5=579.3–580.5; Phun tshogs tshe brtan 2000, 263–271; Karmay 2005, vol. 2, 109–118; Ljongs rig dngos do dam u yon lhan khang 2007 (1987), 54–55.

standing Chenrezik at a height of two meters.¹⁰ The Desi's catalog continues by listing fifty-seven members of the Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage painted on the walls above the balustrade (*seng g.yab*), beginning with the Fifth Dalai Lama (Fig. 1).¹¹ Except for Chenrezik, all of the Dalai Lama rebirth lineage members portrayed on the main walls reappear as portrait subjects on the walls above the balustrade, as documented in the left column of Appendix A. This brings the total number of Dalai Lama rebirth lineage members portrayed in the grand hall to fifty-eight.



Fig. 3. The Fifth Dalai Lama meets the Shunzhi emperor. Detail of wall paintings.
 "Existence and Peace Replete" grand hall, Red Palace, Potala, Lhasa, 1690–1694.

(After Phuntsok Namgyal 2002, 125. By permission of Homa & Sekey Books, www.homabooks.com)

¹⁰ Measurements are provided for all current lineage portraits except that of the First Dalai Lama. Jiang Huaiying et al. 1996, vol. 2, 536–37.

¹¹ Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Sole Ornament*, vol. 1, 285b5–286b4=580.5–582.4.

If the titular phrase “existence and peace replete” signified the wondrous plenitude of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, then the Red Palace's grand hall simulated that glorious reality in three-dimensional space, and asserted that the Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage was integral to its expression. From all sides and from above, the viewer's gaze was returned by enlightened beings in their buddha and bodhisattva forms, powerful kings and noble princes, venerated and charismatic scholars and adepts. The New Menri (*sman ris gsar pa*) style pioneered by Tsangpa Chöying Gyatso (Gtsang pa Chos dbyings rgya mtsho) was well suited to depicting the array of cosmic and worldly beings in myriad settings, with its vivid use of color, lively postures and facial expressions, dynamically flowing robes, and finely detailed ornamentation (Figs. 2, 3).¹² The aesthetic of extravagant adornment extended to—and was intensified by—other surfaces and objects such as the carved and brightly painted pillar brackets, frames, and balustrade; richly brocaded hangings; the draped and cushioned high throne; and other furnishings that were in use by the Ganden Podrang court (Fig. 1). Populated by the Ganden Podrang court and its visitors, resounding with ritual instruments and human voices, the multisensory effect would have been complete. We might echo a line from the Fifth Dalai Lama's Sukhāvati prayer that asks, after describing its array of wonders, “Is everything in existence and peace replete heaped in a mass in this place?”¹³

Amidst this overwhelming environment several themes emerge in the key of abundance. First, material wealth is celebrated through the radical ornateness of the grand hall itself, where hardly a surface is left unembellished from its finely carved and painted architectural details to the gold-embroidered brocades. It is further mirrored in the wall paintings, with their unabashed depiction of the riches of cosmic buddhas and bodhisattvas along with that of earthly kings through details such as the layering of intricately patterned robes and the jewelled garlands and pendants bedecking the palaces of Amitābha, eleven-headed Chenrezik, and the Shunzhi emperor alike (Figs. 2, 3). Prosperity, the space suggests, is not to be abandoned along with *samsāra* but enjoyed and shared even by those who have reached the summit of spiritual practice. Second, the aesthetic of “existence and peace replete” entails salutary and delightful variety, expressed

¹² Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Fine Silken Dress*, 286. The 1648 wall paintings in the White Palace's grand hall—executed under the chief artistry of Gtsang pa Chos dbyings rgya mtsho—exhibit greater dynamism, whimsy, and subtlety than their 1694 Red Palace counterparts. Nevertheless, the Red Palace wall paintings retain basic elements of the New Sman ris style.

¹³ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991–95, *Collected Works*, vol. 16, 192a1=389.1.

through the different bodies inhabited by Chenrezik through time and space as the Dalai Lama lineage, the alternating of built and natural environments (Figs. 2, 3), along with the diverse appearances and activities of all sorts of beings in worlds both earthly and celestial. Third, the quality of sheer numerousness is striking: buildings and landscapes teem with people, the sheer number of scenes defy mental grasp, while the fifty-eight portraits of Dalai Lama lineage figures—six of them repeated—permeate one's awareness from every angle.¹⁴ It was not expected that any viewer could identify and name all fifty-eight iterations, or even that she could see all of them clearly. Rather, what mattered was the recognition that these portraits were all precious bodies of Chenrezik *qua* Dalai Lamas, and that there were so very many of them, more than most people could name or imagine.¹⁵

A lineage of fifty-eight figures might seem like plenty to accomplish the Ganden Podrang court's vision of abundance, filling as enormous a space as the Red Palace's grand hall. More than a decade earlier, however, an even larger lineage had already been conceived and executed in poetic prayer and in painting. *Yangchen's Lute* (Dbyangs can rgyud mang ma), a lengthy supplication prayer to the Dalai Lama lineage, is preserved in the Fifth Dalai Lama's extensive catalog of "support" objects instantiating liberated body, speech, and mind (*sku gsung thugs rten*).¹⁶ According to the colophon, it was composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama and scribed by Targyépa Lobzang Wangpo (Mthar rgyas pa Blo bzang dbang po). Although the text itself lacks a title in the catalog, Desi Sanggyé Gyatso's biographical supplement to the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography and diaries, *Fine Silken Dress* (Du kū la'i gos bzang), briefly mentions an extensive supplication prayer to the Dalai Lama lineage, titled *Yangchen's Lute* and composed by the Great Fifth himself.¹⁷ "Yangchen's lute" are the opening words of the text in question, in honor of the goddess of music, poetry, and learning, also known by her Sanskrit name Sarasvatī. The main text is composed entirely in verse. After the Fifth Dalai Lama, who is treated as the first lineage member, each member of the rebirth lineage is marked in the text

¹⁴ Phun tshogs tshe brtan assesses the number of wall painting sections at a total of 2,251. Phun tshogs tshe brtan 2000, 263.

¹⁵ My analysis about recognizing the group as a whole rather than each and every single individual is inspired by the argument Rob Linrothe has made about the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas*—another large group—painted on the colossal Mañjuśrī's *dhotī* in the Alchi Sumtsek. However, the emphasis on numerousness is my own. Linrothe 2001.

¹⁶ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 99b–107b=200–216.

¹⁷ Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 4, 136b2=278.2.

with a numerical annotation (Appendix A, middle column). Each figure is supplicated with a single stanza except for the Great Fifth and Chenrezik, who are each praised and supplicated with multiple stanzas. Including the versified conclusion there are a total of ninety-six stanzas; together with the prose colophon and embedded notes, the text runs a length of eight and a half folios with six lines per side.

Yangchen's Lute was produced in coordination with a set of sixty-five thangka scroll paintings illustrating the Fifth Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage, called *Array of Avadānas* (Rtogs brjod kyi zhing bkod). The thangkas were sponsored by Desi Sanggyé Gyatso. Work on this large-scale visual production, which began in the Iron-Monkey year of 1680, was completed the following year. The text of *Yangchen's Lute* was likely completed shortly before or in concert with the painting work; the colophon states that it was recited while seed syllables were being written on the backs of the paintings as part of the consecration ritual.¹⁸

Although the thangkas themselves are not known to be extant, a number of details are known, including the identity of the head painter, Gönpö Tsering from Mentang (Sman thang nas Mgon po tshe ring)—that is, as a painter of the New Menri style.¹⁹ The Desi describes in sumptuous detail the materials he sponsored for making these lineage thangkas in full color, including “cotton cloth as thin as an eggshell” as the support for the painted area; approximately an ounce of “cold gold” (*grang gser*), along with colors “in abundance” such as azurite, malachite, orpiment, and indigo pigments; green “old *khati* (*kha thi*)” silk brocade for the fabric border (*gong gsham*)—ranked first among textiles in the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, likely in part for its antique status;²⁰ red and yellow *khati* for the narrow borders (*'ja'*) framing the painting; embroidered Chinese *dingpön* (*ding phon*) satin for the brocade patch (*mthongs 'jug*) on the central thangka in the set; “Mongolian satin” with phoenix and dragon figures on a red background of dragons and clouds for the brocade patches on the remaining thangkas; and not one but two layers of dust covers (*zhal khebs*) made of two different kinds of silk.²¹ All told, the Desi reports, the value of the materials for the sixty-five thangkas was 464.625 *sang* (*srang*) of silver (approaching ten pounds

¹⁸ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 107b1=216.1.

¹⁹ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 107b2=216.2.

²⁰ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 3, 241.

²¹ For identifying Tibetan textile terms, I have relied on Joachim Karsten's unpublished work on the subject. Karsten n.d.

in weight); the expenses for labor and offerings associated with its production totaled 854.665 *sang* of silver (nearly eighteen pounds).²²

While the Desi does not comment on the composition of the painted designs, we may infer from comparable productions that most scrolls would have consisted of central figures accompanied by smaller figures, sites, and/or narrative scenes associated with them. According to the colophon of *Yangchen's Lute*, two scribes wrote inscriptions on the *thangkas* for each of the central figures, presumably the verse supplications themselves.²³ The earliest extant *thangkas* depicting the Fifth Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage likely date to the late seventeenth century; this set originally consisted of nineteen *thangkas*, but only seven are extant and are divided among various collections.²⁴ A later lineage *thangka* design that may have been based on, or borrowed elements from, *Array of Avadānas* was made for the Seventh Dalai Lama in thirteen block-prints at the Narthang Monastery Printing House. A complete set of painted copies in the gold *thangka* style (*gser thang*) is held in the collection of Tibet House New Delhi.²⁵ In this design the Seventh Dalai Lama serves as the central figure of the set, while other lineage members are depicted in three-quarter profile facing the center.

Returning to our *thangka* set in question, *Array of Avadānas*, given its name it may have included more detailed narrative scenes as observable in numerous *avadāna* *thangka* designs.²⁶ With seventy-eight lineage members appearing on sixty-five *thangkas*, some *thangkas* would have featured more than one lineage figure. By way of comparison, another later set of seven Dalai Lama lineage *thangkas*—ending with the Ninth Dalai Lama—groups together up to four lineage members in a single composition.²⁷ Apart from the central *thangka* where the Fifth Dalai Lama's portrait is dominant, the compositional strategy of each of the remaining *thangkas* is relatively decentralized; moreover, the lineage members are not

²² Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 4, 201a1–201b3=407.1–408.3.

²³ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 107b3–107b4=216.3–216.4.

²⁴ Henss 2005, 264. For example, an image of 'Brom ston from this set may be viewed as HAR item no. 85968 at: <http://www.himalayanart.org/items/85968> (last accessed January 20, 2017).

²⁵ Images of the complete Tibet House New Delhi set may be viewed at: <http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=686> (last accessed December 30, 2016).

²⁶ For studies of *avadāna thang ka* paintings see Lin 2011.

²⁷ For a detailed analysis of this set see Sørensen 2005b, 242–57. Images of the complete set may also be viewed as HAR items no. 65850–65856 at: <http://www.himalayanart.org/pages/dalaiset7/index.html> (last accessed January 20, 2017).

grouped in strict chronological order. When mounted for display, the sixty-five *thangkas* of *Array of Avadānas* must have made for an impressive sight; to fit them consecutively in a single space would have required a grand assembly hall such as those of the White or Red Palaces of the Potala, or the main assembly hall of Drepung Monastery. We may conclude that the *thangkas* would have shared the aesthetic values of wealth, variety, and numerousness found in the Red Palace's grand hall, as well as the New Menri style of the wall paintings.

2. Expanding the Rebirth Lineage

It is uncertain how widely the supplication prayer *Yangchen's Lute* was known and recited, or with what frequency and duration the *Array of Avadānas* was displayed. Nevertheless, the extensive lineage developed through these productions was more widely circulated through the Desi's biographical supplement to *Fine Silken Dress*, where all seventy-eight members of the lineage appear in his prose account (Appendix A, right column). There they are not numbered and do not always appear in the same sequence as in *Yangchen's Lute*. Moreover, while the lives of most are narrated through plots ranging from a few lines to several pages each, some—particularly the lesser-known kings of the imperial period—are merely mentioned by name.²⁸

The relationship between lineage members in *Yangchen's Lute* and corresponding narratives in the Desi's supplement to *Fine Silken Dress* can be illustrated with the following example from *Yangchen's Lute*, numbered fifth in the lineage:

Born the son of Legkyé, *paṇḍita* in the ocean of Vedas,
 He saw that saṃsāric existence was like a pit of fire,
 vowed pure conduct before Lodrö Jikmé, and
 took up the path of liberation: supplications to Selwa!²⁹

The stanza offers certain details about the protagonist Selwa (Gsal ba), such as his father's name (Legs skyes) and brahmanical status

²⁸ This has led to different enumerations of the Fifth Dalai Lama's lineage in the Desi's biographical supplement, with Ahmad listing fifty-nine in his table of contents and Ishihama listing sixty-seven (in all cases I have included the Fifth Dalai Lama as part of the count). Sørensen also provides alternate lists of the Fifth Dalai Lama's lineage. Ahmad 1999, vii–x; Ishihama 1992, 238–41; Ishihama 2015, 182–87; Sørensen 2005a, 58; Sørensen 2005b, 247–48.

²⁹ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 101a3–101a4=203.3–203.4.

along with the bare bones of a plot, but is too attenuated to convey much information on its own. It does not, for example, communicate that Selwa lived in the city of Kapilavastu, or that he went to a lake full of geese there and was told by them to seek out the brahmin monk Lodrö Jikmé (Blo gros 'jigs med), or how, after ordaining as a monk with him, Selwa practiced diligently for fifty-five years. It does assume a learned, courtly audience familiar with Indic references and with a classical poetic style dependent on metaphor, simile, and other recognized figures of speech. In these respects it resembles condensed poetic accounts of the buddha Śākyamuni's lives that were also produced by the Fifth Dalai Lama's court to accompany large-scale painting sets.³⁰

The plot details are provided in the fourth volume of the Desi's supplement to *Fine Silken Dress*, which was completed after *Yangchen's Lute*. In this regard, the section of the Desi's supplement treating previous lives of the Fifth Dalai Lama may be regarded as an explanatory commentary to the condensed verses of *Yangchen's Lute*. While the sources for these narratives predate both texts—a point I will return to below—*Yangchen's Lute* may in fact serve as the textual authority that preceded and determined the lineage of the Fifth Dalai Lama's incarnations that appears in *Fine Silken Dress*. This would be consistent with Vostrikov's observation that lineage supplication prayers ('*khrungs rabs gsol 'debs*) are the genre through which incarnation lineages are compiled, and thus "serve as official acts specifying the previous incarnations of a person."³¹ Given the ritual use of supplication prayer in liturgical recitation, one may surmise how this genre would be considered authoritative. While differing biographical accounts could vary in their mentions and omissions of previous lives, a supplication prayer adopted for liturgical use would be repeated, memorized, and internalized. Through this process, it would become the standard with which its performer would compare other sources.

The Ganden Podrang's vision of "existence and peace replete"—accomplished through the Fifth Dalai Lama's extraordinarily large rebirth lineage productions—was elaborated late in his court's reign; he was already ill in 1680 when work on *Array of Avadānas* began, and passed away long before Desi Sanggyé Gyatso completed construction of the Red Palace and the writing of his biographical supplement. Before the activities of the Desi, the Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage was much shorter. The 1494 biography of Gendün Drub—posthumously recognized as the First Dalai Lama—by Pañchen

³⁰ Lin 2011, 37–50.

³¹ Vostrikov 1936, 97.

Yeshé Tsemo (Paṅ chen Ye shes rtse mo, b. 1433) mentioned only four lineage members: his emanational source Chenrezik, Songtsen Gampo, Dromtön Gyalwé Jungné ('Brom ston Rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas)—chief disciple of Atiśa and founding figure of the Kadampa (Bka' gdams pa) tradition—and Gendün Drub himself. How the lineage expanded to such massive numbers in the Fifth Dalai Lama's lifetime, thus lending itself to the aesthetics of abundance explored above, is investigated in the remainder of this section. As I will suggest, it also supplied elements for a fresh paradigm of kingship as understood through embodied lives.

As is well known, multiple lineage supplication prayers for the same tulku could be composed, and these could also vary in the number of lineage members invoked. Such was the case for the Fifth Dalai Lama. The Desi classifies *Yangchen's Lute* as the large or secret version of the lineage, but also mentions two other rebirth lineage supplication prayers attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama: a short or outer version called "Lobzang the Victor" and a middle-length or inner version called "Compassion for the World." These short and middle-length versions are said to name only sixteen members of the rebirth lineage.³² These two lineage lists may have been very similar to, if not the same as, the list in another prominent text in the Fifth Dalai Lama's collected works, thirteen folios in length and briefly titled *Clear Mirror* (Gsal ba'i me long).³³

Clear Mirror was written to accompany a set of thangkas of the Great Fifth's rebirth lineage, called *Rebirth Lineage Array* ('Khrungs rabs kyi zhing bkod). It contains a list of sixteen lineage members plus the Fifth Dalai Lama himself as the seventeenth; while they are not numbered, individual members are marked by annotations embedded in the text. Comparison with rebirth lineage members mentioned in the Great Fifth's 1646 biography of the Third Dalai Lama indicates that most of the list in *Clear Mirror* had already been established by that date (Table 1). As Ishihama has noted, paintings of the Dalai Lama rebirth lineage were also appearing in prominent places within the first decade of the Ganden Podrang government, from 1642 to 1651.³⁴ While the colophon to *Clear Mirror* does not provide a date, it states that the text was composed by the Fifth Dalai

³² *Blo bzang rgyal ba ma* and 'Gro la rjes rtse ma. I have not located works with these titles in the Fifth Dalai Lama's collected works. According to the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography and diaries, late in 1665 he gave oral transmission for *Blo bzang rgyal ba ma*. Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, Vol. 4, 136b1–136b2=278.1–278.2; Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 2, 12.

³³ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Clear Mirror*, 1a–13a=577–601.

³⁴ Ishihama 1993, 48–49.

Biography of First Dalai Lama, 1494	Biography of Third Dalai Lama, 1646 ^a	<i>Clear Mirror</i> , 1649?
		[DL5] Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso
Chenrezik	Chenrezik	Chenrezik
		Jikten Wangchuk
		Könchok Bang
	Nyatri Tsenpo	
	Lha Totori Nyanshal	
Songtsen Gampo	Songtsen Gampo	Songtsen Gampo
	Trisong Detsen	Trisong Detsen
		Tri Relpachen
Dromtön	Dromtön	Dromtön
	Khaché Gönpa	Khaché Gönpawa
	Sachen Künga Nyingpo	Sachen Künga Nyingpo
	Zhang Drowé Gönpo	Zhang Drowé Gönpo
	Ngadak Nyang Nyima Özer	Ngadak Nyang
	Lhajé Gewabum	Lhajé Gewabum
[DL1] Gendün Drub		[DL1] Gendün Drub
		[DL2] Gendün Gyatso
		[DL3] Sönam Gyatso
		[DL4] Dechen Chögyal

Table 1. Expansion of the Dalai Lama Rebirth Lineage, 1494–1649?
(for Wylie transliteration see Appendix A)

Lama at the request of “Püsang, the temple caretaker and madman.”³⁶ I tentatively propose a date of 1649 based on a similar reference to rebirth lineage thangkas that were made at the request of “Püsang the madman” in the corresponding year in the Fifth Dalai Lama’s autobiography.³⁷

³⁵ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Chariot for an Ocean of Feats*, 2b6–4a3=34.6–37.3.

³⁶ *spus srang pa dkon gnyer smyon pas bskul ba’i ngor/_za hor gyi ban dhes pho brang chen po po ta lar sbyar ba’i yi ge pa ni ngag dbang dge legs so//*. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Clear Mirror*, 13a6=601.6. On the usage of “madman” and related terms for Buddhist masters, see Larsson 2012, 6–22.

³⁷ *spus srang smyon pas bskul nas ’khrungs rabs bris thang bri ba’i zhing bkod*. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 1, 301. A previous attempt by Lange to date this text to 1673–1676, while much later in his lifetime, would still place it before the completion of both *Yangchen’s Lute* and the Desi’s supplement to *Du kü la’i gos bzang*. While I am not fully clear on Lange’s argument, it seems that she is comparing *Clear Mirror* with a text dated to 1673 that similarly uses the epithet *Za hor gyi ban dhe* and the Potala as the named location, and further that she is citing another text scribed by Dpal grong sngags rams pa Ngag dbang dge legs dated to 1676. However, as early as 1644 colophons scribed by Ngag dbang

Comparing the earlier list of seventeen in *Clear Mirror* with the list of seventy-eight in *Yangchen's Lute* (Table 2), it is clear that most of the expansion was effected by adding preincarnations from the Indic world (lineage nos. 3–36) and from Tibetan imperial succession (lineage nos. 37–48, 50–58). Addressing each member of the lineage is well beyond the scope of this article; in the remainder of this section I limit myself to a few remarks on the source of the Indic preincarnations, and how they contributed to the Dalai Lama lineage. The colophon to *Yangchen's Lute* states that its stories are from the *Book of Kadam* (Bka' gdams glegs bam), supplemented by various other sources. The *Book of Kadam* was compiled in 1302 as a collection of religious instructions, dialogues, stories, rituals, and prophecies attributed to the Indian master Atiśa and his chief disciple, the Tibetan layman Dromtön Gyalwé Jungné. It became a foundational text for the Gelukpa, and as mentioned earlier, Dromtön had already been identified as a previous birth of the Dalai Lamas by the end of the fifteenth century.³⁸

<i>Clear Mirror</i>	<i>Yangchen's Lute</i>	Sources and/or identifications
[1.] Fifth Dalai Lama	[1.] Fifth Dalai Lama	
[2.] Chenrezik	2. Chenrezik	
[3.] Jikten Wangchuk	3. Jikten Wangchuk	<i>Mañi Kabum</i> : preincarnation of Songtsen Gampo
	4. *Nangwa	"Teachings for Ngok," <i>Book of Kadam</i>
	5. Selwa	
	6. Chakmé	
	7. Küntuga	
	8. Lhakyé	
[4.] Könchok Bang	9. Könchok Bang	
	10. Depa Tenpa	
	11. *Pelzang	
	12. Depa Rابتu Tenpa	13. Rebirth in China; sole rebirth outside Indic world in "Teachings for Ngok"
	13. Lodrö Pel	
	14-25. Gadzin, up through Gendün Pel	"Teachings for Khu," <i>Book of Kadam</i> , all located in the Indic world
	26-36. Rāja to Kyabjin	

dge legs used the epithet *Za hor gyi bande*, and references to *pho brang chen po po ta la* were appearing in the Fifth Dalai Lama's collected works by 1649. I am grateful to Nicole Willock for her assistance with translating the German; all errors remain my own. Lange 1969, 212–14; cf. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Collected Works*, vol. 25, 1a6=7.6; Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Collected Works*, vol. 22, 86a–87a=359–61.

³⁸ For English-language studies and partial translations, see Ehrhard 2002, Miller 2004, Jinpa 2008.

	37-48. Nyatri Tsenpo to Dertrin Tsen	Tibetan imperial lineage
	49. Midak Tsuklakdzin	King of Zahor in Padmasambhava's time
	50-53. Sajö Drapung Tsen to Namri Songtsen	Tibetan imperial lineage
[5.] Songtsen Gampo	54. Songtsen Gampo	
	55. Düsong Marjé	
	56. Tridé Tsukten	
[6.] Trisong Detsen	57. Trisong Detsen	
[7.] Tri Relpachen	58. Ngadak Tri Rel	
	59. Chögyel Gewapel	
[9.] Khaché Gönpawa	60. Khedrub Gönpa	Kashmiri Buddhist master
[8.] Dromtön Gyalwa	61. Dromtön Jé	Chief disciple of Atíśa
[10.] Sachen Künga Nyingpo	62. Künga Nyingpo	Sakya founding figure
[11.] Zhang Drowé Gönpa	63. Yudrak Drowé Gönpa	Lama Zhang, founder of Tselpa Kagyü
	64. Ya Zangpa	Yazang Kagyü master (1169-1233)
[12.] Ngadak Nyang	65. [Nyangrel] Nyima Özer	Nyingma treasure revealer
	66. Guru Chöwang	Nyingma treasure revealer
	67. Sumtön Yeshé Zung	Teacher transmitting medical tantras (<i>rgyud bzhi</i>) (12th c.)
	68. Pakchen Chökyi Gyelpo	Nephew of Sakya Paṇḍita, named spiritual leader of Tibet by Khubilai Khan
[13.] Lhajé Gewabum	69. Gewabum	Restored dikes of Lhasa to prevent flooding
	70. Padmavajra	Nepalese <i>paṇḍita</i>
[14.] [DL1] Gendün Drub	71. [DL1] Gendün Drub	Considered one of Tsongkhapa's seven principal disciples
	72. Lodrö Gyeltsen Pel	Reincarnation of Sachen Künga Nyingpo (no. 62)
	73. Khyenrab Chökyi Jé	Sakya lama, Zhalu tradition
[15.] [DL2] Gendün Gyatso	74. [DL2] Gendün Gyatso	Served as abbot of Tashilhünpo, Drepung, and Sera
	75. Terchen Pema Wang	Nyingma treasure revealer Ngari Pañchen
	76. Chögyel Wangpödé	Predicted reincarnation of Trisong Detsen (no. 57)
[16.] [DL3] Sönam Gyatso	77. [DL3] Sönam Gyatso	Full title including "Dalai Lama" given by Altan Khan, Tümed Mongol
[17.] [DL4] Dechen Chögyal	78. [DL4] Yönten Gyatso	Altan Khan's great-grandson born in Mongolia

Table 2. Expansion and Textual Sources of Yangchen's Lute (for Wylie transliteration see Appendix A)

The *Book of Kadam* is indeed the main source for lineage reconstruction in the section of *Yangchen's Lute* dealing with previous existences from the Indic world, which draws from the latter part of the *Book of Kadam*, known as the "Son Teachings" (*Bu chos*). The "Son Teachings" are further divided into teachings for the two disciples of Dromtön: Ngok Legpé Sherab (Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab) and Khutön Tsöndrū Yungdrung (Khu ston Brtson 'grus g.yung drung). The sections are simply referred to as "Teachings for Ngok" (*Rngog chos*) and "Teachings for Khu" (*Khu chos*). The "Teachings for Ngok" contain a sequence of twenty chapters in which Atiśa recounts previous lives of Dromtön at Ngok's request, styled after the *jātaka* and *avadāna* genres.³⁹ These twenty lives are replicated in sequence in *Yangchen's Lute*, as lineage numbers four through ten and twelve through twenty-five. The two additional lineage members can be accounted for as plots of earlier lives embedded within chapters of "Teachings for Ngok." In the chapter on Selwa (lineage no. 5) the protagonist relates a prediction from a previous life as Nangwa (Nang ba, lineage no. 4): he is hanging around the town gate when Siddhārtha Gautama happens to pass by. Prince Siddhārtha tells him not to stand there idly and waste this human life. He further predicts that Nangwa will be reborn as a brahman youth named Selwa who will act wisely in accordance with karma, undertake meditative practices, and work for the welfare of sentient beings.⁴⁰

Similarly, in the *Book of Kadam* chapter on Depa Rabtu Tenpa (Dad pa rab tu brtan pa, lineage no. 12), an embedded tale of one of his previous existences as the king Pelzang (Dpal bzang, lineage no. 11) is narrated, this time in verse. Pelzang had two ministers: Pel (Dpal), Minister of the Exterior, and Peldrub (Dpal grub), Minister of the Interior. Being childless, the king and queen treated the ministers like sons and bestowed political authority upon them. Pel was jealous of Peldrub's inside position that made him privy to confidential information (*snying gtam*), and plotted to usurp power. Sensing that all was not well, the king made offerings to the Three Jewels, constantly keeping wholesome thoughts in mind. Before long, the jealous minister Pel died. The king gave much wealth to Peldrub and passed away soon after. The story concludes:

³⁹ I have not found sources among canonical *jātaka* and *avadāna* literature, nor from *sūtra* literature, from which the names or plots are copied. Nevertheless, perhaps it should not be surprising if the compilers of the *Book of Kadam*—or the oral sources that preceded them—were sufficiently familiar with the conventions of the *jātaka* and *avadāna* genres to deliver narratives in their style.

⁴⁰ Jo bo rje dpal ldan A ti sha, *Kadam Son Teachings*, 4–5.

Peldrub assumed royal duties,
 Venerated the Three Jewels for the king's sake,
 Was loving to his subjects, protected the commoners,
 And was praised and honored by all.⁴¹

The decision to extract these two full-fledged lineage members and compose separate narratives for them is telling. The story of Nangwa links the Fifth Dalai Lama to the time, place, and person of Śākyamuni. While the inclusion of other preincarnation narratives from the *Book of Kadam* maps his lives across various kingdoms of the Indic world at unknown points from the distant past, this one locates him as a special individual who—however fleeting his encounter with the latest buddha of our eon—was singled out by him for a prediction of his future demonstration of good Buddhist deeds.

As for King Pelzang and his ministers, the extraction of their narrative takes on heightened significance in light of events at the Fifth Dalai Lama's court around the period when *Yangchen's Lute* and *Array of Avadānas* were completed. The Desi quotes the entire embedded story from the *Book of Kadam* in his supplement to *Fine Silken Dress*, in the fourth volume, which was completed in 1682.⁴² Given the Desi's status as the favorite and the heart-disciple of the Great Fifth, the "confidential information" (*snying gtam*) enjoyed by the virtuous interior minister and jealously coveted by the evil exterior minister may also be understood as the "heart advice" passed on from lama to disciple. Both the troubles among the king's ministers and the king's death shortly after the determination of his successor parallel the events of this period. Sanggyé Gyatso had been appointed in the position of Desi (regent) in 1679, in the wake of scandal surrounding the previous regent and monk, Lobzang Tutob (Blo bzang mthu stobs), who stepped down in 1676 after it came out that he was keeping an aristocratic woman as a mistress.⁴³ The Fifth Dalai Lama would pass away in 1682, although the Desi would keep this secret until after the Red Palace was completed in 1694.

As is well known, events would not conclude as happily for the Desi as they would for his mythological double, the interior minister Peldrub.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the effort to identify Nangwa and King

⁴¹ Jo bo rje dpal ldan A ti sha, *Kadam Son Teachings*, 307.

⁴² Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, Vol. 4, 46b5–47a3=96.5–97.3.

⁴³ Richardson 1980, 339–40.

⁴⁴ Despite the narrative parallels before the Sde srid's fall from power, Dpal grub does not appear in the rebirth lineage of the Sde srid. This may be due to its potentially controversial content, and/or the fact that it was an embedded narrative in the Dad pa rab tu brtan pa episode of *Bka' gdams legs bam*; there is no

Pelzang as distinct members of the Fifth Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage highlights three important aspects of his court's project to reshape his personhood near the end of his life. The first was to convey the temporal continuity of his successive lives. While great leaps in time from one lineage member to the next were evident in earlier, shorter lists, efforts to lengthen the list in *Yangchen's Lute* filled in the gaps between his lives in the distant Indic past and his earliest rebirths in Tibet. The second was to emphasize the Dalai Lama's participation in Indic culture and society through these additional previous lives, thereby making it a noticeably more significant dimension of his personal history. In particular, the story of Nangwa anchored the Dalai Lamas' rebirth lineage in the historical and auspicious time and place of Śākyamuni. The third aspect of their project was to affirm parallels between the distant Indic past and their present moment in late seventeenth-century Tibet. Through stories like that of King Pelzang and his minister, details of past lives became grippingly immediate, replaying through concerns about leadership transitions within the Ganden Podrang government. These three aspects extended beyond efforts to emphasize the Fifth Dalai Lama's cosmic origin as Avalokiteśvara, his link to the Tibetan imperial past, or his place in the line of Tibetan rebirths predicted to Könchok Bang (lineage no. 9), points that have been previously documented.⁴⁵ They constituted elements of an alternative paradigm of kingship that was based on the embodied qualities of personhood, as exemplified through a multiplicity of incarnations. Past lives could be called upon to interpret and refashion the religio-political dynamics of the present. In the following section, I explore further implications of this paradigm for Tibet under the Ganden Podrang.

3. A Kingship of Embodied Lives

The aesthetics of "existence and peace replete" apparent in the grand hall of the Potala's Red Palace, and in the lineage of *Array of Avadānas*, recur in other texts attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama, where they further build this paradigm of embodied qualities. Here it

corresponding rebirth lineage member for the Sde srid from the embedded Snang ba narrative, either. Instead the Sde srid's lineage contains the king Zla ba dbang po (Skt. Sucandra) that bears no relation to Snang ba other than being contemporaneous with him; this king was the one who requested the buddha Śākyamuni to teach the Kālacakra Tantra at Śrī Dhānyakaṭaka. *The Collected Works of Liturgy of the Gnas-chuñ Rdo-rje-sgra-deyañs-gliñ Monastery*, 3b2-3b3=6.2-6.3; Ishihama 1992, 238; Ishihama 2015, 182.

⁴⁵ Ishihama 1993; Karmay 2007, 132.

appears at the close of an undated prayer of supplication and aspiration directed toward the Dalai Lama rebirth lineage:

I supplicate the illusory incarnations of the white lotus holder
 who manifested as earthly lords in the noble land of India
 and the snowy land of Tibet, such as Könchok Bang,
 Songtsen, Lhé Metok, Relpachen, and Gewapel. | 11 | |

I supplicate those who manifested as excellent preceptors:
 Gyalwé Jungné, the greatly kind Sakyapa,
 Yudrak Zhangtön, Nyimé Özer,
 and the life-trunk of weal and joy in Tibet, Gewabum. | 12 | |

I supplicate those who performed the play of emanation,
 who became fields of merit by dint of
 erudition and adeptness at the crown of the ethical Saṅgha to
 place the assembly of disciples in the ocean of wisdom—
 scripture and realization. | 13 | |

I supplicate Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso,
 a firefly trailing the stratum of sun and moon
 who is graciously accepted by the excellent ones who have
 come before
 by being overrated on the activation of his good propensities.
 | 14 | |

By the virtue of this prayer may the welfare of Dharma and
 beings always prevail!
 From the golden hands of merit of myself and others
 may hundreds of thousands of silver coins—existence and
 peace replete—
 unceasingly stream until buddhahood is attained! | 15 | |

This prayer of supplication and aspiration was composed by
 the venerable monk of Zahor upon the request of the ruler
 from Dakpo Bhrum; the scribe was Nesarpa Jamyang.⁴⁶

Well-educated reciters, auditors, and readers would recognize the image of golden hands from narratives such as the forty-fourth episode of the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine of Bodhisattva Stories* (Byang chub sems pa'i rtogs brjod dpag bsam 'khri shing, Skt. Bodhisattvāvadāna-kalpalatā). In a previous life the buddha Śākyamuni was born as

⁴⁶ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Collected Works*, vol. 15, 107b1–b6=430.1–430.6.

Hiraṇyapāṇi or “Golden Hands” (Gser gyi lag pa), from whose hands gold marvelously appeared. Furthermore, every morning a hundred thousand silver coins issued forth from each of his hands, thus making him a wish-fulfilling tree of riches.⁴⁷ This image of endless riches serves as a metaphor for *sizhi püntsok*, “existence and peace replete” or “all the marvels of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.” It is what an advanced bodhisattva has the capability and compassion to provide to everyone, granting worldly delights as well as the ultimate bliss of liberation.

Framed within the dedication of merit at the end of this supplication prayer, the allusion opens up an even more amazing possibility. Just as Śākyamuni provided all this in the past, so now the reciter imagines “myself and others” doing the same. The final verse reminds us that rebirth stories inspire people to emulate spiritually liberated beings, such as those in the Dalai Lama lineage who are praised as earthly rulers, teachers, and adepts (stanzas 1–3). As author, the Fifth Dalai Lama's humble self-positioning in relation to his predecessors (stanza 4) helps his audience conceive that while their karmic state may be modest at the present moment, one day they too may become wish-fulfilling trees lavishing all the marvels of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

If the bodhisattva's hands grant the silver coins, the bodhisattva himself is the treasury of *sizhi püntsok*. The latter is the very image we find in the opening stanza of another text attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama, a condensed verse adaptation of the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine* written to accompany wall paintings in the main assembly hall of Drepung (“Bras spungs”) Monastery completed in 1654:

Treasury of all that's good in existence and peace,
lavishing weal and joy, king of wish-fulfilling gems,
famed as Śuddhodana's son with a white parasol,
circling up to the peak of existence: homage to him!⁴⁸

The person of the buddha Śākyamuni—here called by the epithet Śuddhodana's son—is the “treasury” (*mdzod*) of “all that's good in existence and peace” (*srid dang zhi ba'i dge legs kun*), a variant expression of *sizhi püntsok*. That person is hardly limited to the physical frame of Siddhārtha Gautama; he is the person of countless lifetimes, who has cycled through various lives on his bodhisattva path “up to the peak of existence.” All along the way he is a “king of

⁴⁷ Kṣemendra (Dge ba'i dbang po) 2004, 226; Kṣemendra 1989 (1959), 278.

⁴⁸ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Collected Works*, vol. 16, 65b2=136.2.

wish-fulfilling gems," one who bears the "white parasol" of kingship while "lavishing weal and joy" for all.

As *Yangchen's Lute* tells us, the person of the Fifth Dalai Lama is another such treasury of wondrous plenitude:

Supplications to enter the ocean of majestic wisdom
on the ferry to awakening by receiving wholesome impressions:
flowing speech singing the song of Yangchen's lute,
a mind that's mastered the ten fields of learning.⁴⁹

As one might expect in a Tibetan literary work composed in the classical style (*snyan ngag*, Skt. *kāvya*), it begins by invoking Yangchen (Skt. Sarasvatī), Indic goddess of wisdom and learning, of eloquence and euphony in speech, poetry, and music. The title *Yangchen's Lute*, then, both refers to the opening words of the prayer while also calling attention to the aesthetic qualities of the text.⁵⁰ While Sarasvatī is known as both goddess and river in India, the water imagery here recalls verses of praise Tibetans have attributed to Kālidāsa and preserved in the Tengyur. There she is instead compared to an ocean that washes away torment with powerful waves of compassion, an ocean that is the source of the wish-granting jewel, fulfilling hopes and coming to the aid of deluded and bewildered beings.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The block-print contains a number of orthographical errors; corrections are suggested in cited passages of this text. Here read 'jug for 'drug with Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009, vol. 21, 125. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 99b4=200.4.

⁵⁰ Given the highly developed state of monastic and aristocratic education in this period, a significant number of people at the Fifth Dalai Lama's court and beyond were more than sufficiently educated to have appreciated—or critiqued—the literary qualities and content of the lineage prayer, *Yangchen's Lute*, as well as the aesthetic qualities of the paintings under discussion. Several individuals involved in these rebirth lineage projects were among the educated élite, beginning with the Sde srid as patron of *Array of Avadānas*, along with the three proofreaders of its inscriptions, which were apparently based on the verses of *Yangchen's Lute*. The proofreaders were eminent scholars who played central roles in the court's textual projects: 'Dar pa Lo chen Ngag dbang phun tshogs lhun grub was the leading Tibetan scholar of Sanskrit at court, Rnam gling Paṅ chen Dkon mchog chos grags was vital to the transmission of grammatical and literary arts, and Pha bong kha pa 'Jam dbyangs grags pa was considered the Great Fifth's most important scribe. He was a learned monk and Rdzogs chen adept who edited the third and final volume of his diaries; he also worked with Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho to build the Red Palace of the Potala. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 107b1–107b2=216.1–216.2; TBRC P2947, P2382, P2277; Karmay 1988, 8.

⁵¹ Nag mo'i khol [Kālidāsa], *Praise of Sarasvatī*, 345a2–345a3=689.2–689.3. An early translation was prepared by F. W. Thomas based on a different exemplar (Thomas 1903). The Fifth Dalai Lama's work alludes to Kālidāsa and Sarasvatī

In the mannered style of classical Tibetan poetry, Yangchen and her lute (*rgyud mang*, Skt. *vīṇā*) suggest further metaphorical congruence. Whose speech also sings the flowing song of her lute, and who else is being supplicated? The answer is hidden in the text: it is the Fifth Dalai Lama, whose name—Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso, “Master of Speech, Excellent-Minded Ocean”—is integrated into the stanza’s imagery.⁵² By embedding his name, the verse draws the supplicant, listener, or reader into the imaginative and relational world of the prayer, where the supplicant is ferried to the far shore of liberative awakening through the compassionate aid of the Dalai Lama. In this world, the person of the Dalai Lama is dispersive and comprises a complete sensory environment: he is the ocean under one’s feet, the song in one’s ear, the wisdom imprinting one’s mind. He is also the implied boat-captain guiding one across *saṃsāra*, a metaphorical role for buddhas and bodhisattvas that is widespread in canonical and post-canonical sources. Like the buddha, the Fifth Dalai Lama is a “treasury of all that’s good in existence and peace.”⁵³

The potential of such imagery-laden language is more than figurative in Tibetan and Buddhist contexts. In addition to appearing in the illusory human forms most commonly identified as tulkus or emanational bodies (*sprul sku*, Skt. *nirmāṇakāya*), an awakened being such as Chenrezik is considered capable of manifesting his or her presence in myriad other forms. In narratives of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*—an important Sanskrit source on Chenrezik for Tibetan Buddhists—the bodhisattva emanates in the form of rays of multicolored light, a bee whose buzzing is the sound of homage to the Three Refuges, a disembodied voice granting the six-syllable mantra, the burning wick of a lamp that warns the seafarer Siṃhala he has landed on an island of *rākṣasī* demonesses, and then the horse that safely carries him home. Moreover, each pore of Chenrezik’s body is described as containing world systems unto themselves populated by buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other beings, to be marveled at by the spiritual aspirant Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin who travels through them.⁵⁴ The *Maṇi Kabum* (Maṇi bka’ ’bum)—a key Tibetan text that emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—

several stanzas later. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen’s Lute*, 100a2–100a3=201.2–201.3.

⁵² Given syntactical differences between Tibetan and English, it was beyond my abilities to retain the same sequence in translation.

⁵³ Similar imagery is invoked in the full title of the catalog to the Fifth Dalai Lama’s funerary *stūpa* as well as the Red Palace of the Potala in which it is housed: it is a “boat for crossing the ocean to the island of liberation, a treasury of blessings” (*thar gling rgya mtshor bgrod pa’i gru rdzings byin rlabs kyi bang mdzod*). Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Sole Ornament*.

⁵⁴ Studholme 2002, 131–54; Lienhard 1993.

expands this vision by narrating how Chenrezik radiated light from his body, creating many world systems containing emanational bodies of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In each world system with its southern continent of Jambudvīpa there is also a Land of Snows, a Tibet with its own Chenrezik who appears as the emperor Songtsen Gampo.⁵⁵

The opening stanza of *Yangchen's Lute* refracts these cosmological visions from the distant past by singing of Chenrezik's continued appearance for Tibetans. Like the Indic spiritual aspirant of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, the supplicant of *Yangchen's Lute* can encounter Chenrezik through limitless media, of which his bodily manifestation as the Dalai Lama is only one. These include the words of *Yangchen's Lute* itself—attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama—as well as its imagined oceanic realm that conduces to liberation by surrounding and engaging with one's senses, like the worlds within Chenrezik's pores. As the *Maṇi Kabum* affirms, Tibet itself is one such liberative realm that not only contains a resident Chenrezik in the human form of Songtsen Gampo and his rebirths, but *is made of* the bodhisattva as another one of his illusory emanations. *Yangchen's Lute* extends this embodiment in historical time and place to its late seventeenth-century setting, when the Fifth Dalai Lama is recognized as the latest of Songtsen Gampo's rebirths in Tibet. At the same time, it recalls how Chenrezik exceeds his body to surround and support others' bodies, and to enter their minds. Its poetry invites the supplicant to engage simultaneously with the particularity of the bodily manifestation called "Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso," and with the expansive personhood of the Dalai Lama-as-Chenrezik comprising pervasive sensory media in countless times and places.

A similarly encompassing environment would have been created by the display of *Array of Avadānas*, and was also effected in the grand hall of the Potala's Red Palace. Unlike the imaginary water-world evoked through language in the opening stanza of *Yangchen's Lute*, through portrait painting the person of the Dalai Lama is visibly proliferated into dozens of bodies, surrounding its contemporaneous viewer in a cosmic vision from Chenrezik's beginning nearly a thousand eons ago to the here and now of late seventeenth-century Tibet. Immensities of scale co-exist both in the display space of the grand hall, as well as in the expanse of time and space compressed into it, from distant buddha-fields to India to Tibet. Giovanni da Col has written from an ethnographic perspective that a Tibetan

⁵⁵ Kapstein 2000, 151.

Being has to be conceived *in time*, being not a singularity but a multiplicity, not one life but a multiplicity of lives and perspective: *the sum of all the perspectives* it will traverse during the course of the virtually infinite extension of its possible lives.⁵⁶

The painted multiplicity of the Dalai Lama's rebirths—fluctuating through different physical frames—makes this mode of conception instantaneously explicit. Ordinary beings are unable to perceive their past and future lives and how these are implicated in the present moment, but the Fifth Dalai Lama, it is suggested, is capable of perceiving the continuum of his lives. He thereby makes it possible to begin to imagine the “sum of all perspectives” that make up a certain kind of person, a tulku who is an emanation of a cosmic bodhisattva. This is approximated by the visual display of his rebirth lineage, which immerses its viewers in a more temporally marked fashion than the metaphorical opening verse of *Yangchen's Lute*. As with *avadāna* stories in which beings have recurring relationships with the buddha Śākyamuni across plural lifetimes, the viewer may be reminded that he or she received karmic impressions from the Dalai Lama in a previous life, making it possible to encounter him again in the present through painting (and perhaps the physical frame of his human body), and yet again in future lives.

Other forms of sensory experience were made available to the supplicant as well. While the coordinating *Array of Avadānas* thangkas were being sketched and consecrated, *Yangchen's Lute* was recited by Paldrong Ngakrampa.⁵⁷ Recognized by title as a tantric master, Paldrong Ngakrampa Ngawang Gelek (Dpal grong Sngag rams pa Ngag dbang Dge legs) was also credited as a scribe for hundreds of works attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama, including other prayers accompanying sets of rebirth lineage paintings of the Dalai Lamas.⁵⁸ His act of reciting the supplication prayer vocalized the “flowing speech” attributed to the Great Fifth, so that listeners would receive the wholesome karmic impressions (*bag chags*, Skt. *vāsanā*) promised in the text, predisposing them to future awakening.⁵⁹ The range of usage in Buddhist terminology permits an

⁵⁶ da Col 2007, 229.

⁵⁷ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 107a6–107b1=215.6–216.1.

⁵⁸ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Collected Works*, vol. 15, 577–601; vol. 21, 388–390, 504–506.

⁵⁹ Although cannot be verified that the Fifth Dalai Lama himself composed this work—it was completed late in life when he was quite ill—it must be remembered that the Fifth Dalai Lama may well have ritually authorized others to perform the work of writing for him through *abhiseka* empowerment, as he did

alternate translation of “receiving wholesome impressions” (*bzang po'i bag chags thos*) as “learning excellent dispositions,” wherein “hearing” (*thos*, Skt. *śruta*) can convey both a more passive state of receiving as well as a more active state of learning that is the gateway to reflection (*bsam*, Skt. *cintā*) and cultivation (*sgom*, Skt. *bhāvanā*), known collectively as the threefold training (*bslab pa gsum*, Skt. *trīśikṣā*).⁶⁰ In this latter sense the supplicant is learning the excellent dispositions modeled by the Great Fifth, as illustrated by his rebirth narratives that are the main subject of *Yangchen's Lute*. The embodied qualities of the king—in all their wondrous plenitude and perfection—could be acquired by his supplicants.

Some of the king's qualities over his many lifetimes were already reflected in his supplicants as the people of Tibet. Among the Dalai Lama's preincarnations were not only Gelukpas, but also leaders of Nyingma, Sakya, Tselpa Kagyü, and Yazang Kagyü lineage traditions (Appendix A, lineage nos. 65, 66, 75; 62, 68, 72, 73; 63; 64). The person of the Dalai Lama was capacious enough, his rebirth lineage asserted, to encompass all these as well as the dynastic ancestry of Tibetan imperial rulers (lineage nos. 37–48, 50–58). If the claiming of these eminent figures for the Dalai Lama might be perceived as an act of appropriation, it could equally be interpreted as an expression of obligation that these Buddhist lineage traditions and ancient clans would be protected and accommodated under the aegis of the Ganden Podrang. In addition to wealth, variety, and numerousness, the aesthetics of abundance articulated by the Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage also promoted a vision of inclusiveness for the subjects of Tibet.

Amidst the highly politicized and turbulent dynamics of the seventeenth century, however, this was a selective form of reconciliation and inclusion. The rebirth lineage excluded groups that did not enjoy the favor of the Fifth Dalai Lama's court. Omitted from the list were the Karma Kagyüpa (Karma bka' brgyud pa) and Jonangpa (Jo nang pa), who were both forced into exile by the Ganden Podrang in the wake of political and territorial power struggles. Also excluded were the Bönpo (Bon po) who, despite improving fortunes by the end of the Fifth Dalai Lama's lifetime, continued to be marginalized as non-Buddhist. To return to the

elsewhere. I thank Janet Gyatso for this observation in response to other materials attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama that I presented at the Harvard Buddhist Studies Forum.

⁶⁰ It may be useful to analyze such doubled language in terms of bitextuality, to borrow Yigal Bronner's term for *śleṣa* and related practices in Sanskrit *kāvya* (Bronner 2010). A Western-language study of bitextuality and bitextual figures (*sbyar ba*) in Tibetan *snyan ngag*, adapted from *kāvya*, has yet to be undertaken.

extended metaphor laid out at the opening of *Yangchen's Lute*, the diffused person of the Fifth Dalai Lama was oceanic enough to contain a cosmologically expansive conception of Tibet, spanning from timeless and remote buddha-fields to India and Tibet, and even stretching to accommodate preincarnations in Nepal, China, and Mongolia (lineage nos. 70, 11, 78). Yet this did not preclude the specificity of his rebirth history in Tibet, which did not or would not include figures from major religious lineage traditions with whom the Gelukpa had come into conflict. For the Ganden Podrang, accommodation of these groups would have to wait until a future time.

Even taking these omissions into account, the ambitious sweep of the Fifth Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage was unprecedented. As Ernst Kantorowicz's classic study of kingship has shown, Tudor jurists conceived of the king as having two bodies, a "body natural" that consisted of his mortal physical frame and the "body politic" that encompassed his "Office, Government, and Majesty royal" and also the totality of his subjects.⁶¹ But they may never have imagined that the body politic could be embodied in the king's person through his manifold lives, thus reflecting back both the diversity of his subjects and the very best that the Buddhadharmā had produced in Tibet and beyond. Nor could they have imagined that the subjects of the king could aspire to attain the same spiritual heights as the king himself, the very "peak of existence," giving them a place in the vast continuum of cosmological space-time. Yet these are the possibilities that the Fifth Dalai Lama's long rebirth lineages asked the people of Tibet to imagine.

4. *Beyond the List*

The Fifth Dalai Lama's court was hardly the first to articulate a cosmological vision that made the Indic world a significant part of an eminent Tibetan lama's personhood through rebirth lineage, as the appearance of the *Book of Kadam* several centuries earlier attests. Nor were they alone in attending to temporal implications of rebirth lineage and personhood. Sophisticated rebirth lineage work among the Jonangpa should also be noted. Dölpoṅpa placed himself favorably amidst the temporal decline of the *yugas* by identifying his preincarnation as the king of Shambhala Kalkī Puṇḍarīka and claiming his teachings from a perfect age. Beyond this he also identified himself as the Kagyü master Drigung Kyobpa Jikten

⁶¹ Kantorowicz 1997 (1957), 9, 13.

Sumgön ('Bri gung Skyob pa 'Jig rten gsum mgon, 1143–1207), the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna, as well as Chenrezik and Songtsen Gampo.⁶² Overlapping with the Fifth Dalai Lama's time, Jonang Tāranātha (1575–1634) located many of his preincarnations in the Indic world, including the *mahāsiddha* Kṛṣṇācārya as well as ones with the prior buddha Vipāśyin and the buddha Śākyamuni while preaching the *Mahābheri Sūtra*.⁶³

However, from the late seventeenth century onward the aestheticized vision of the Fifth Dalai Lama's court had more widespread impact across the Tibetan cultural world. The rebirth lineages of the Pañchen Lamas, the Changkya (Lcang skya) tulku lineage, and the Qianlong emperor evince comparable concerns with Indic and Tibetan imperial-era preincarnations, the embodiment of qualities through rebirth lineage, and models of kingship.⁶⁴ The dramatic increase of tulku lineages during the seventeenth century, especially among Gelukpa—as documented by Gray Tuttle in his contribution to this issue—invites further research on how models set forth by the Fifth Dalai Lama's court for the personhood of tulkus and the production of their rebirth lineages may have been adopted, adapted, and revised. Moreover, although the value of numerousness in rebirth lineage production may have been hard to imitate—apart from respect for the Dalai Lama's uniquely elevated status, there was the problem of the sheer material resources needed for visual lineage production, not to mention the space to accommodate them—other aspects of the aesthetics of abundance were taken up in later courtly settings of Tibet, as I will discuss in future work.

I close by returning to the question of numbers. As we have seen, earlier versions of the Fifth Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage were referred to as consisting of sixteen members—a nice, round, symmetrical number. Dölpopa Sherab Gyaltzen's biography consisted of thirty-two lifetimes, matching the number of a buddha's major marks (*mtshan bzang po*, Skt. *lakṣaṇa*) and thus gesturing to the culmination of his own path to buddhahood.⁶⁵ But why construct a lineage of seventy-eight members? While it has been argued that the Dalai Lama's rebirth lineage made a point of including many earthly kings in their lineage in order to have a free hand with Tibetan politics, this does not explain the full range of narratives included in *Yangchen's Lute* or the supplement to *Fine Silken Dress*.⁶⁶ One such

⁶² Kapstein 2000, 106–116.

⁶³ Templeman 2009.

⁶⁴ In a forthcoming publication, Wen-shing Chou discusses the cultural production of these three rebirth lineages at the Qianlong court.

⁶⁵ Kapstein 2000, 106.

⁶⁶ Staël-Holstein 1932.

narrative drawn from the *Book of Kadam* is simply titled "Hare" (*ri bong*). But unlike the well-known *jātaka* of the virtuous hare who jumps into a fire to offer himself as food, this hare naughtily eats tender rice stalks before they are ready to be harvested, and then laughs at the poor farmer who tries to catch him. Further adventures ensue; though the hare utters some verses of Dharma here and there, there is no indication that they benefit anyone in the story.⁶⁷

Rather, it seems that an attempt at fullness was being made. Whereas a lineage of sixteen highlighted the most important of the Dalai Lama's past lives, a lineage of seventy-eight could serve as a sufficiently thorough accounting of the Dalai Lama's lineage given the sources that were available. Even if some individual stories in the *Book of Kadam* were of unclear hagiographic value, the cumulative effect from proceeding through all seventy-eight lives in prayer recitation, viewing, or reading, would have been one of majestic abundance. It would have approached the effects of taking in the 108 episodes of the *Wish-Fulfilling Vine of Avadānas*, the largest anthology of the buddha Śākyamuni's lives commonly known to Tibetans, and one that was particularly promoted by the Fifth Dalai Lama's court.⁶⁸ Even so, Desi Sanggyé Gyatso recognized the limits of representation. On the topic of emanating beings, he states that they "display bodily arrangements as numerous as the infinite buddha-fields, working for the benefit of beings. Even in this buddha-field, the number of excellent and ordinary rebirth lineage stories defies the imagination. So how could it be within the range of an ordinary person's understanding?"⁶⁹

As the opening epigram indicates, Umberto Eco has suggested that verbal and visual lists can present a "topos of ineffability."⁷⁰ The extent of the rebirth lineage may signify the advanced spiritual state of the Fifth Dalai Lama, who, it is implied, is able to recall many lives both distant and proximate. Yet unlike the auspiciously complete number of 108, the number seventy-eight is striking for its incompleteness. While a lineage of seventy-eight may have exhausted its compilers' sources, it does not have the appearance of an exhausted chain of rebirths. *Yangchen's Lute*, then, may gesture to a lineage that can extend infinitely into the past and indefinitely into the future, that indefinite vanishing point echoing the bodhisattva's vow to serve until all beings are awakened.

⁶⁷ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Yangchen's Lute*, 103a3–103a4; Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, Vol. 4, 68a3–69a2=139.3–141.2.

⁶⁸ Lin 2011, chapter 1.

⁶⁹ Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, Vol. 4, 136a6–136b1=277.6–278.1.

⁷⁰ Eco 2009, 49.

Appendix A
Dalai Lama Rebirth Lineage Members, ca. 1680–1694

<i>Sole Ornament</i> , Western Great Assembly Hall, Red Palace, Potala (ca. 1694) ⁷¹	<i>Yangchen's Lute</i> (ca. 1680)	<i>Supplement to Fine Silken Dress</i> (1682) ⁷²
A1. Sangs rgyas 'Od mdzad ye shes tog		
A2. 'Od dpag med		
B1 (gtso bo). Rje bla ma chen po	[1.] Fifth Dalai Lama	78. Thams cad mkhyen pa Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho: 137b3ff., 234ff.
A3. Thugs rje chen po	2. Spyran ras gzigs	1. Spyran ras gzigs: 8b2–30a6, 77b1–81b4; 24–42, 127–34
B2. 'Jig rten dbang phyug	3. 'Jig rten dbang phyug	2. Rgyal po 'Jig rten dbang phyug: 30a6–33b1, 43–47
B3. Khye'u Sngang ba	4. Sngang ba	3. Khye'u Sngang ba: 33b1–33b4, 47–48
B4. Khye'u Gsal ba	5. Gsal ba	4. Khye'u Gsal ba: 33b4–35b1, 48–51
B5. Rgyal bu Chags med	6. Chags med	5. Rgyal bu Chags med: 35b1–37b1, 51–55
B6. Rgyal po'i sras Kun tu dga'	7. Kun tu dga'	6. Rgyal po Kun tu dga': 37b1–38a3, 55–56
B7. Lha skyes	8. Bsod nams 'phel gyi brgyud [Lha skyes]	7. Rgyal bu lha skyes: 38a3–39a4, 56–57
A6, B8. Dkon cog 'bangs	9. Dkon cog 'bangs	8. Dkon cog 'bangs: 39a4–43a6, 57–65
A7, B9. Dad pa brtan pa	10. Dad pa brtan pa	9. Dad pa brtan pa, 43a6–46b5, 65–70
B10. Rgyal ba dpal [bzang]	11. Dpal [bzang]	10. Dpal bzang: 46b5–47a6, 71
B11. Dad pa rab brtan	12. Dad pa rab tu brtan	11. Dad pa rab tu brtan pa: 47a6–48b4, 72–74
B12. Blo gros 'phel	13. Blo gros 'phel	12. Rgyal bu Blo gros 'phel: 48b4–50b4, 74–78
B13. Khye'u Dga' 'dzin	14. Dga' 'dzin	13. Khye'u Dga' 'dzin: 50b4–52b1, 78–81
B14. Dge bsnyen btsun pa	15. Dge bsnyen btsun pa	14. Dge bsnyen btsun pa: 52b1–53a1, 81–82

⁷¹ The sequence of entries in this column has been arranged to correspond horizontally with the earlier lineage sequence of *Yangchen's Lute* in the middle column. Entries are numbered according to their order of appearance in this section of the text; "A" designates paintings on the ground floor, while "B" designates paintings on the walls above the balustrade. Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Sole Ornament*, vol. 1, 285a3–286b4=579.3–582.4.

⁷² The sequence of entries in this column has been arranged to correspond horizontally with the earlier lineage sequence of *Yangchen's Lute* in the middle column. Entries are numbered according to the the order of appearance of their biographical narratives in this text. The numbers of entries that appear in a different sequence than *Yangchen's Lute* are marked in bold font. Page citations refer to Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Supplement to Fine Silken Dress*, vol. 4, and Ahmad's translation respectively.

B15. [Nor bzang] Rin cen dpal	16. Nor bzang	15. Nor bu bzang po: 53a1–54a2, 82–84
B16. Khye'u Zla ba	17. Zla ba	16. Khye'u Zla ba: 54a2–55a4, 84–86
B17. Rin chen snying po	18. Rin cen snying po	17. Khye'u Rin chen snying po: 55a4–56a5, 86–88
B18. Khye'u Padma	19. Padma	18. Khye'u Padma: 56a5–57a6, 88–91
B19. Khye'u 'Od zer	20. 'Od zer	19. Khye'u 'Od zer: 57a6–58b4, 91–93
B20. Khye'u Byams pa	21. Byams pa	20. Byams pa: 58b4–60a2, 93–96
B21. Seng ge sgra	22. Seng ge'i sgra	21. Seng ge sgra: 60a2–61a6, 96–98
B22. Rgyal po Bde mchog	23. Bde mchog	22. Rgyal bu Bde mchog, or, Ba lang skyong: 61a6–63a3, 98–100
B23. Lha'i rgyal po	24. Lha yi rgyal po	23. Lha'i rgyal po: 63a3–64a1, 100–102
B24. Dge 'dun 'phel	25. Dge 'dun 'phel	24. Khye'i Dge 'dun 'phel: 64a1–65a3, 102–4
B25. Rāja	26. Rāja	25. Pho reng Rāja: 65a3–66a6, 104–6
B26. Ge sar	27. Ge sar	26. Ge sar: 66a6–68a3, 106–9
B27. Ri bong	28. Ri bong	27. Ri bong: 68a3–69a2, 109–11
B28. Lo brgyad byis pa	29. Lo brgyad byis pa	28. Lo brgyad byis pa: 69a2–70a5, 111–14
B29. Rje bo'i rnam pa	30. Rje ba'i rnam par bstan	29. Dzi bo: 70a5–70b5, 114–15
B30. Bram ze Rin cen mchog	31. Bram ze Rin cen mchog	30. Bram ze Rin chen mchog: 70b5–71a3, 115
B31. Bsam gtan bzang po	32. Bsam gtan bzang po	31. Bsam gtan bzang po: 71a3–71b3, 115–16
B32. Dur khrod rnal 'byor pa	33. Dur khrod rnal 'byor pa	32. Dur khrod rnal 'byor: 71b3–72a2, 116–17
B33. Gling phran rgyal po	34. Gling phran rgyal po	33. Gling phran rgyal po: 72a2–72b3, 117–18
B34. Sro long Kun rgyu	35. Sro long Kun tu rgyu	34. Sro long Kun tu rgyu: 72b3–74a6, 118–21
B35. Rgyal po skyabs sbyin	36. Skyabs sbyin	35. Rgyal po skyabs sbyin: 74a6–75b1, 121–22
B38. Gnya' khri btsan po	37. Gnya' khri btsan po	38. Gnya' khri btsan po: 81b4–82a3, 134
	38. Mu khri btsan po	39. Mu khri btsan po: 82a3, 134–35
	39. Ding khri btsan po	40. Ding khri btsan po: 82a3, 135
	40. Mer khri btsan po	41. Mer khri btsan po: 82a3, 135
	41. Gdags khri btsan po	42. Gdags khri btsan po: 82a3, 135
	42. Sribts khri btsan po	43. Sribts khri btsan po: 82a3, 135
	43. Po da gung rgyal po	44. Spu de gung rgyal, or Bya khri bstan po: 82a4, 135
B39. I sho legs	44. I sho legs	45. I sho legs: 82a4, 135
B40. Lde 'phrul gnam gzhung btsan	45. Lde 'phrul gnam gzhung btsan	46. Lde 'phrul gnam gzhung gtsan: 82a6, 135
	46. Se snol nam lde	47. Lde snol nam: 82b1, 135

B41. Pur rgyal byams pas skyong ba rje rgyal ⁷³	47. Rdzogs pa lde rgyal	48. Lde rgyal po: 82b1, 135
	48. Lder sprin btsan	49. Lde sprin btsan: 82b1, 135
B36. Za hor rgyal po Gtsug lag 'dzin	49. Mi bdag Gtsug lag 'dzin	36. Rgyal po Gtsug lag 'dzin: 75b1-77a2, 123-25
B42. Khri sgra dpung btsan	50. Sa spyod sgra dpung btsan	50. Khri sgra dpung btsan: 82b1-82b2, 135
	51. Khri thog rje btsun	51. Khri thog rje btsan: 82b2, 135
B43. Mi rje Tho ri snyan shal	52. Tho ri snyan shal	52. Lha tho tho ri: 82b2-82b5, 135-36
	53. Gnam ri srong btsan	53. Gnam ri srong btsan: 82b5-83a1, 136
A4. Chos kyi rgyal po Srong btsan sgam po B44. Rgyal ba Srong btsan sgam po	54. Srong btsan sgam po	54. Srong btsan sgam po: 83a1-85b2, 136-41
	55. 'Dus srong mar rje	55. 'Dus srong mang po rje: 85b2-85b4, 141
	56. Khri lde gtsug brtan	56. Khri lde gtsug brtan Mes ag tshoms: 85b4-86a3, 141
A5. Tshangs pa lha'i me tog B45. Khri srong lde btsan	57. Khri srong lde btsan	57. Khri srong lde btsan: 86a3-87b5, 142-46
B46. Mnga' bdag Khri ral	58. Mnga' bdag Khri ral [pa can]	58. Khri ral: 87b5-89a1, 146-48
B37. Chos rgyal Dge ba dpal	59. Chos rgyal Dge ba dpal	37. Rgyal po Dga' ba dpal, or, Dge ba dpal: 77a2-77b1, 125-26
	60. Mkhas grub dgon pa	66. Kha che dgon pa ba: 108a3-108a5, 184
B47. 'Brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas	61. 'Brom ston rje	59. 'Brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas: 89a1-91b2, 148-53
	62. Kun dga' snying po	67. Dpal ldan Sa skya pa chen po Kun dga' snying po: 108a5-109a4, 184-85
	63. [Bla ma Zhang] G.yu brag 'gro ba'i mgon po	68. 'Gro ba'i mgon po Zhang rin po che G.yu brag pa: 109a4-110b5, 185-88
	64. G.ya' bzang pa	69. G.yam bzang pa: 110b5-112a2, 188-89
A8. Gter chen Chos kyi rgyal po Nyang ral pa can B48. Gter chen Gong ma Nyi ma 'od zer	65. [Nyang ral] Nyi ma 'od zer	60. Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer: 92a6-94a4, 155-59
B49. Gter chen Chos kyi dbang phyug	66. Gu ru Chos dbang	61. Chos dbang: 94a4-97a1, 159-64
	67. Sum ston Ye shes gzungs	70. Sum ston Ye shes gzungs: 112a2-112b2, 190
B52. Chos rgyal 'Phags pa	68. 'Phags chen chos kyi rgyal po	64. 'Phags pa: 105a4-107b5, 178-82
	69. Dge ba 'bum	71. Lha rje Dge ba 'bum: 112b2-113b5, 190-92
B53. Padmavajra	70. Padmavajra	65. Paṇḍita Padmavajra: 107b5-108a1, 182

⁷³ This is a tentative identification with Lde rgyal po; the text should perhaps be emended as *sa skyong ba lde rgyal*.

A9, B54. Dge 'dun grub pa dpal bzang po	71. [DL1] Dge 'dun grub	74. Pañ chen Dge 'dun grub: 116a6–119b3, 197–202
	72. Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal	72. Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po: 113b5–114b5, 192–94
	73. Mkhyen rab chos kyi rje	73. Dpal ldan bla ma Rin chen mkhyen rab chos rje: 114b5–116a6, 194–96
B55. Dge 'dun rgya mtsho	74. [DL2] Dge 'dun rgya mtsho'i dpal	75. Thams cad mkhyen pa Dge 'dun rgya mtsho: 119b3–124b1, 202–210
B50. Mnga' ris Padma dbang rgyal	75. Gter chen Padma dbang	62. Mnga' ris Pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal: 97a1–100a6, 164–70
B51. Chos rgyal Bkra shis stobs rgyal	76. Chos rgyal Dbang po'i sde	63. Dharmarāja Bkra shis stobs rgyal dbang po'i sde: 100a6–105a4, 170–78
B56. Bsod nams rgya mtsho	77. [DL3] Bsod nams rgya mtsho	76. Thams cad mkhyen pa Bsod nams rgya mtsho: 124b1–130b6, 211–21
B57. Bde chen chos kyi rgyal po Dpal bzang po	78. [DL4] Yon tan rgya mtsho	77. Rje Yon tan rgya mtsho: 130b6–133a5, 221–25

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