

# **THE GYALWANG KARMAPA AND KARMA KAGYU IN LIJIANG AND YUNNAN:**

## **A PILGRIM-SCHOLAR'S RESEARCH TRIP AND OBSERVATIONS**



**Adele Tomlin**

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Dedicated to the 'heart-guru', 17<sup>th</sup> Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,  
Karma Kagyu, sentient beings and Buddha Dharma.

Special thanks to the kind and generous 'life-saver' David, without whom  
this trip and book would not have been possible.

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## Chapter One

ON THE ROAD TO SHANGRI-LA: Following in the footsteps of the 10th Karmapa and Karma Kagyu in Lijiang, Shangri-la, Dechen Tibetan region and seeing the great Khawa Karpo Tibetan mountain (Highlights and research review)

Introduction: the 10th Karmapa and Karma Kagyu in Lijiang (Jang), Yunnan



*1 Image of 10th Karmapa from thangka painted by the 8th Kenting Tai Situpa, Chokyi Jungne.*

This is the first in a new set of original research articles about my recent two-week pilgrimage to Yunnan, South China to visit Lijiang, Shangri-la (Gyalthang) and Dechen Tibetan Autonomous region, and the famed Tibetan mountain there, Kawa Karpo.

For a while now, I have been very interested in the life-story of the [10th Karmapa, Chöying Dorje](#) (1604-1674), his [artworks](#) and what happened to him after the brute, violent Mongolian military invasion of Tibet which imposed the Gelugpas and 5th Dalai Lama as the authoritarian, dictatorial ruling powers of Tibet. This Gelugpa institution ruled over (and suppressed and censored) all the main Buddhist lineages there for the next three centuries, who all suffered from huge theft and destruction of monasteries and shedras, suppression and injustice by the ruling Gelugpas as a result (some worse than others).

The narrative is written by the ‘victors’ and nowhere is this truer than in the case of what happened during this key era in 17th century Tibetan history. The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, has been teaching about the history and teachings of the Karmapas, the Kagyu encampment and their amazing level of study and shedras instituted by the 7th and 8th Karmapas in Tibet, as well as their [strict policy of vegetarianism, even in tantric rituals](#). The Karmapas were extremely powerful in Tibet at that time and were courted by Chinese Emperors, as well as the Tibetan Kings and Queens of central Tibet, Tsang.

The 17th Gyalwang Karmapa recently also explained how the Mongolian invasion led to an almost [complete destruction of all the Karma Kagyu shedras in central Tibet](#). Thousands of Karma Kagyu

monastics and laypeople were brutally slaughtered (including the imprisoned King of Tsang). The Mongolian army tried to murder the 10th Karmapa several times too, but he managed to escape and was forced to live in exile like a beggar in a cave, often going hungry. This was not a 'civil war', which then led to a 'peaceful unity' as many western and Tibetan scholars, and pro- Gelugpa people describe, it was an all-out foreign invasion, mass slaughter of monastics and civilians and complete domination and takeover of other lineage monasteries and shedras, that were either destroyed or taken over and converted to Gelugpa.

The 10th Karmapa was forced to flee for his life, but also for the preservation of the Karma Kagyu into exile in Lijiang (where the Karmapas and Karma Kagyu had built monasteries and had patrons of the Naxi Mu Kings for centuries before). The 10th Karmapa stayed in the Lijiang area for over twenty years, and he and other Karma Kagyu Rinpoches, such as the 8th Khenting Tai Situpa and 6th Gyaltsab Rinpoche, Norbu Zangpo maintained and preserved several monasteries there. In addition, the 10th Karmapa, a prolific and original painter and sculptor also studied and created many of his most famous and unique artworks (which have survived) while in Lijiang. Thus, the area held a great fascination for me and I wanted to visit there personally.

This first chapter is an introduction and summary of some of the highlights of the short trip, as well as an overview of current research and publications (Tibetan and English) on the 10th Karmapa, which proved to be a rich source of information for the trip.

My wish for this new e-book is that this new research and pilgrimage not only inspires people to visit the same places, but also to know and understand more about the amazing life, talents and activities of the peace-making, eccentric, bird and animal lover, 10th Karmapa who refused to tell people to take up arms against the Mongolians and Gelugpas, despite knowing he (and the Tibetans) would 'lose' everything. Like the 8th Karmapa before him, ethical integrity meant more to the 10th Karmapa than worldly power.

I was travelling on a budget, with a very small amount of baggage (not many changes of clothes for me ha ha), and the trip itself was made possible by the kind and generous donations of two main sponsors of my work and website, without whom I would not have been able to survive financially this last year or so, never mind go to these places! So I am eternally grateful for their understanding, support and appreciation of my work and activities and the merit is very much theirs as well.

**Summary/Itinerary of places visited: Kunming, Lijiang, Shangri-La, Dechen Tibetan region**





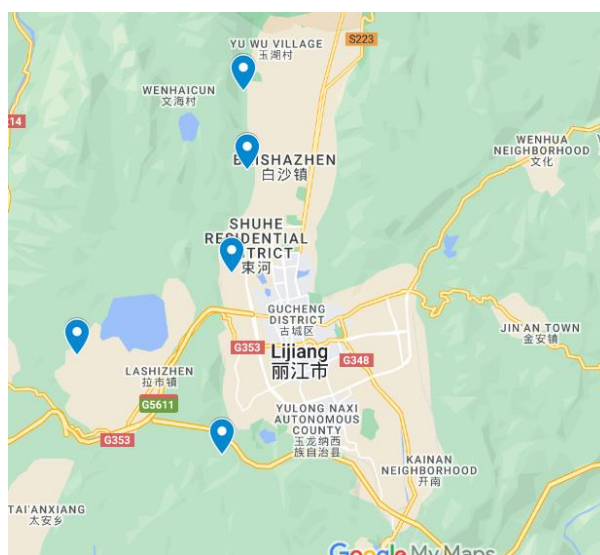
*2 Yunnan, South China is bordered by Burma, Laos and Vietnam, and Sichuan (Kham, Tibet) to the north-west*

Maps showing the Yunnan province in South China, with main city Kunming, which I visited on the way to Lijiang, about four hours north by train. Then travelling further north by train and bus to Shangri-la and Dechen TAR.

During the fifteen day pilgrimage, I first stopped for a night and day's sightseeing at the main city, Kunming, before travelling by the bullet train (3.5 hours) to Lijiang, where I explored the ancient city on foot, more to come on that! The rest of the trip can be divided into four main sections:

### 1. Five main Karma Kagyu monasteries

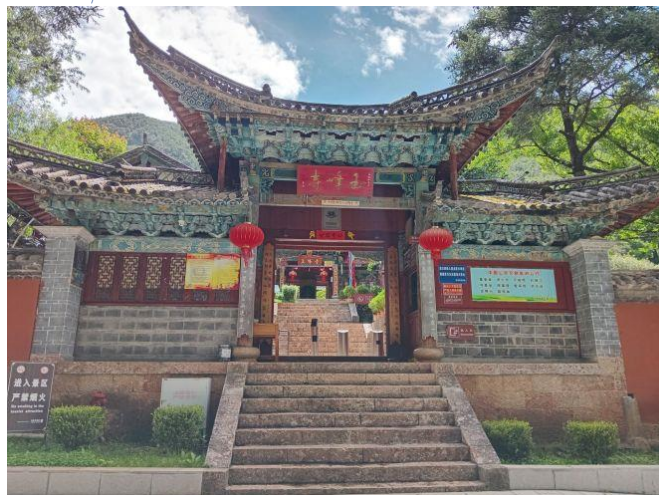
One of the main reasons for my visit to the region was to visit the five main Karma Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Lijiang area, established and maintained by the 8th-10th Karmapas and/or 8th Tai Situpa. There are nine Karma Kagyu temples listed in the Jang area, and five of the main temples are now all called by their Chinese names. I have listed their Tibetan names and created a map of their locations below:



*3 Locations of the five main Karma Kagyu temples in Lijiang, said to have been founded by the 8th-10th Karmapas and maintained by 8th Tai Situpa. Map created by Adele Tomlin.*



1. Tashi Chophel Ling བཏཱ་ཤེས་ཅེས་འཕེལ་གླིང་ (Yufeng Si 玉峰寺)



2. Lhashi Gon ལྷ་ཤེས་དགོན་ (Zhiyun Si 指云寺)



3. Jang Ri Magpo Gon/ འཇང་རི་མགཔོ་གོང་ also known as Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si 文峰寺)



4. Phuntsog Ling/ ཡུན་ཚོགས་གླིང་ (Puji Si 普济寺)



5. Og Min Ling འོག་མིན་གླིང་ (Fuguo Si 福国寺)



I was overwhelmed with emotion and tears at these monasteries, in particular the first monastery I visited Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) where there was still some original artworks by Choying Dorje on the wooden exterior walls. Also, at the naturally self-arisen Vajravārāhī face in the rock cave at the Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) temple and the only three year retreat centre in the region, also named after Vajravārāhī.





4 The amazing naturally-arisen Vajravārāhī rock ‘face’ at the Karma Kagyu Vajravārāhī cave temple, at Sang-ngag Dechen Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



5 Stunning statues of Noble Tara and 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi at the Karma Kagyu Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) temple, Vajravārāhī retreat centre, Lijiang, Yunnan. (Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*6 Entrance to the Karma Kagyu Og Min Ling monastery (Fuguo Si). Five Buddha Families temple, (Rig-Nga Lhakhang) Lijiang, Yunnan. As you can see there is a Karmapa image, right below the name banner. Photo: Adele Tomlin, 15th July 2024.*

Photos and statues of the Karmapas, the 16th and 17th Karmapa, the 12th Tai Situpas, and Gyaltsab Rinpoche were all prominently on display in these monasteries without any censorship (as well as photos of the Chinese recognition of the Panchen Lama). However, there did not seem to be many monks there at all. It was great to see such astonishing art, statues and buildings at these Karma Kagyu temples, many of which had to be completely re-built for various reasons, but there were some original paintings and buildings there too. Not many monastics, and I did not see or hear of any nuns at all. The majority of people spoke Chinese, with only a few speaking Tibetan.

Also, there were zero photos of the 14th Dalai Lama, again proving the point that for the Gelugpas and the Dalai Lama institution the tables have well and truly turned. From being a country where every monastery was forced to have a prominent photo of Dalai Lama on their shrines and bow down to him as the supreme head of all the lineages, now only photos of the other lineage lamas are allowed in Tibetan areas of China and the Tibetan Autonomous Region itself. A cruel, yet also very karmic twist of fate indeed, and one which the Gelugpas in exile (desperately clinging onto worldly and spiritual power via the elderly 14th Dalai Lama) show no signs of accepting as their horrendous karmic result.

## 2. Shangri-La and Little Potala



*7 The city of Shangri-la in the Dechen Tibetan Autonomous Region, and the Songtsang Ling Monastery grounds.*

I also took a brief three day trip into Dechen Tibetan autonomous region by train and bus, to a city called Shangri-la, (formerly Zhongdian in Chinese, Gyalthang in Tibetan). I was delighted that this was my first time in former ‘Tibet’ and the drive there was spectacular indeed (like when I first travelled to Ladakh by bus). Endless huge landscapes of massive mountains, green from the summer rains, and clouds next to the peaks. It felt a joyful land and place. On the outskirts of the city, is home of one of the biggest Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in that region, Songtsangling (“Little Potala”) established by the 5th Dalai Lama and Gelugpas after forcing the 10th Karmapa to flee in fear of his life.



*8 At the Songtsang Ling temple (Little Potala Palace), Shangri-La, Yunnan, China, (now just an expensive, crowded mass tourist attraction) established by the 5th Dalai Lama and the Gelugpas on the back of the 17th Century Mongolian invasion , mass slaughter and violence.*

I will write more about the 5th Dalai Lama and what happened to the 10th Karmapa, when the Mongolians took over Tibet, in a future article about my visit to the ‘Little Potala’ in Shangri La, (coincidentally I arrived there on the day after the Dalai Lama’s birthday). This monastery tragically, unlike the Karma Kagyu monasteries, has been turned into a ‘Disneyland’ type tourist attraction with visitors having to pay high entrance fees, and busloads of tourists many wearing national Tibetan dress (predominantly women), spending hours taking personal portraits with professional photographers, with full make-up looking stunning, but no Dharma practice or pilgrimage type activities from what I saw and heard.

For example, one Han Chinese woman in full Tibetan costume and make-up (who did not speak a word of Tibetan) shouted at me when I accidentally brushed past her photographer’s shoulder (they were

both taking up the whole path way for many minutes taking portraits of her). When I asked her whether she was Tibetan she said she was not but that Tibet is part of China so the monastery was Chinese. She also shouted something in English about ‘white privilege’.

The irony of this incident to a ‘white woman’ who has spent the last fifteen years of her life in India and Nepal self-funded studying and translating the Tibetan language for the Dharma, by a such a woman was so tragic it was almost comical. I quickly left as it felt like a bit of a ‘demonic’ attack, and the monastery (now a tourist attraction) itself clearly has a lot of ‘unaired’ historical demons, and paying a karmic result for them too. I did not see any monastics and very few Tibetan speakers either. Yet, the Karma Kagyu monasteries, in Lijiang, were generally peaceful havens and hardly a tourist in sight. No entrance fees either, and still functioning to some extent as authentic Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. Karma works in mysterious (or not so mysterious) ways.

### 3. Dechen Tibetan region and Kawa Karpo mountain range

The final stop up northwards was at Dechen TAR and Kawa Karpo (ཁ་བ་དགའ་པོ་, 卡瓦格博) the highest mountain in Yunnan, and the mountain range it is part of. Kawa Karpo is one of the most sacred mountains in Tibetan history, praised and visited by several Karmapas (more on that in Chapter Six). It is visited by thousands of pilgrims each year from throughout the Tibetan world; many pilgrims circumambulate the peak, an arduous 240 km (150 mi) trek. It was the rainy season when I was there so no clear gleaming peaks for me, but seeing the clouds and the peaks piercing through, especially at sunset, was magical indeed.

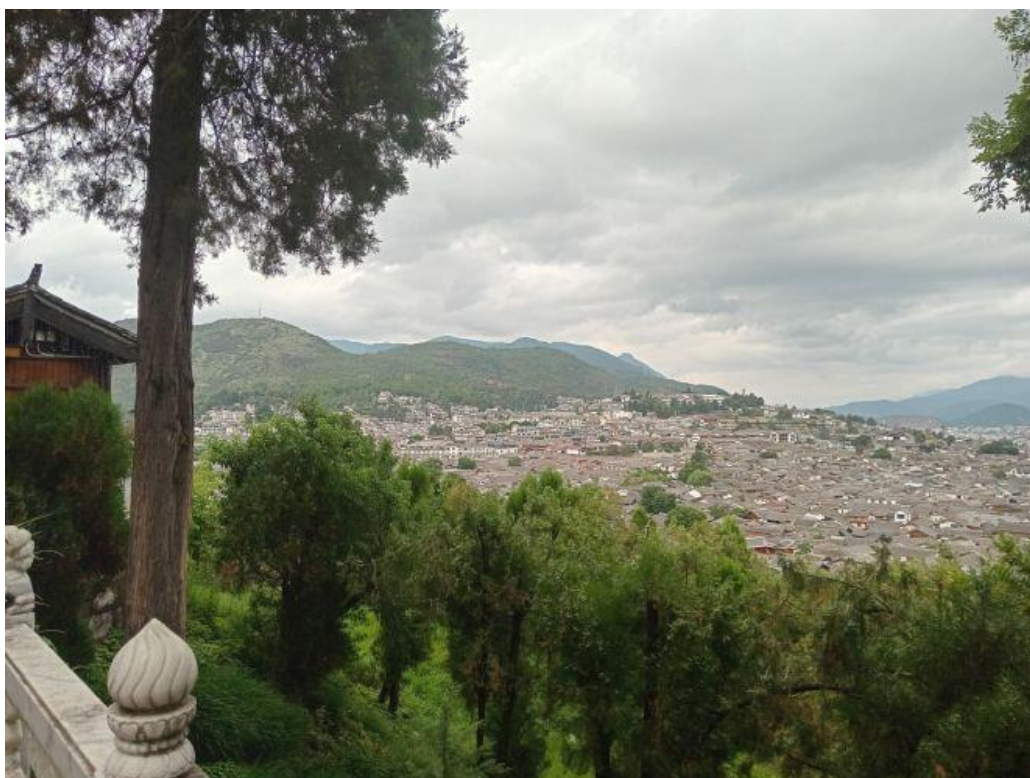


*9 At the highest mountain in Yunnan, and famed Tibetan mountain, Kawa Karpo (referred to in Chinese as Meili Snow Mountain). This mountain has been immortalised in praises by the 3rd Karmapa. I also penned by own spontaneous song to the mountain range here.*

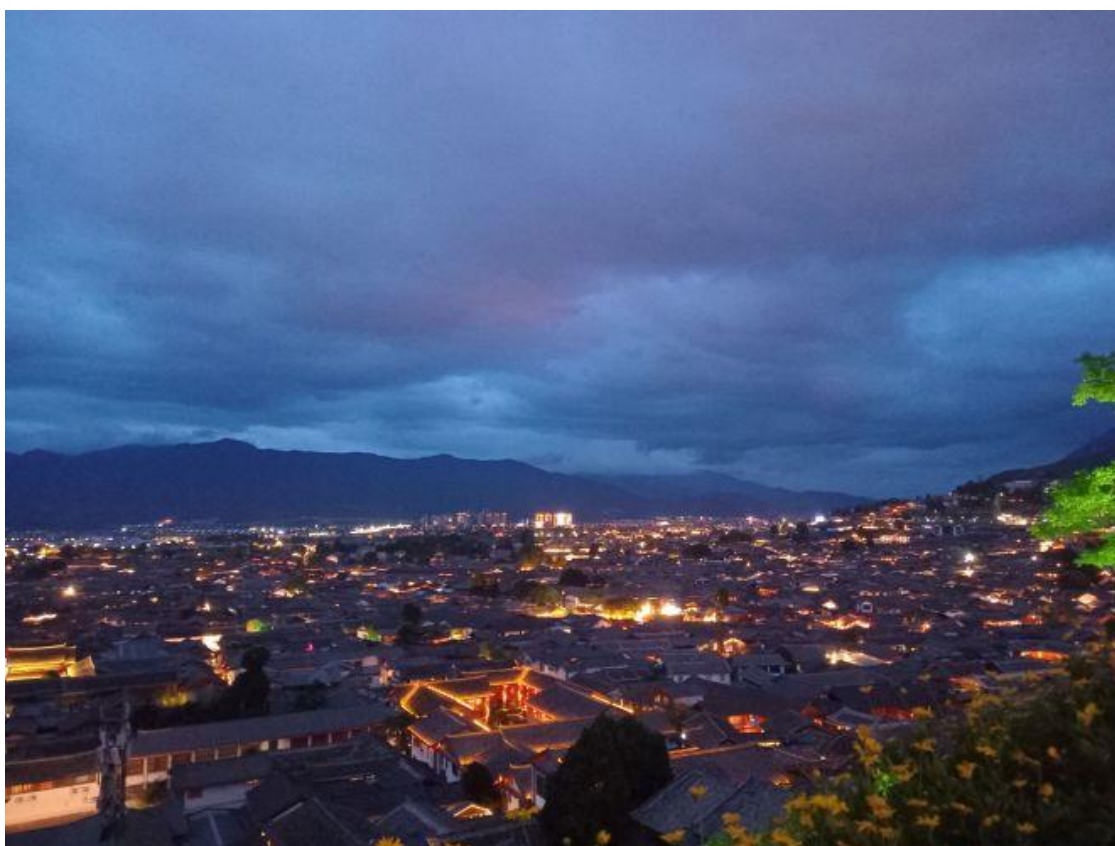
### 4. Lijiang and Baisha Town: UNESCO heritage ancient murals, parks, temples and Mu's Palace

The rest of my time in the Lijiang area was spent exploring on foot the exquisite ancient UNESCO heritage towns of Lijiang and Baisha and visiting the Naxi King Mu's Palace, Dabaojigong Temple, Baisha ancient wall murals, Lion Rock Mountain, and Dragon Lake Park, and spectacular city vistas.





*10 Even on a cloudy day, the city and mountains of Lijiang are a stunning sight to behold. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*



*11 Night-time scene of Lijiang. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



*12 Up on Lion Rock Mountain's Wangu Tower Temple, Lijiang as the sun set and the lights turn on (July 2024). A magical time indeed!*

#### 4. Practicalities: safety, travel, costs, food, language and being a lone, female (non-Chinese speaking) foreigner



*13 Adele Tomlin in Lijiang at a place where people write messages of love on hearts (July 2024).*

In general, as a solo, female budget traveller during my 15 days of travels in Yunnan and Dechen Tibetan autonomous region, I did not see or hear hardly any foreigners at all, for example, one black person, a couple of Indians, and maybe one or two white people. It was predominantly Han Chinese, or Asian tourists from Chinese-speaking countries. That said, China has just announced two week visa free entry for 11 European countries so that may change in the future. People were not wearing masks anywhere and COVID injection proof was not required to enter the country.

Overall, I felt very safe as a solo female there, and got the impression there was almost zero crime (one of the major positives of an authoritarian dictatorship perhaps?) but faced several practical challenges too, which I will write more about in the forthcoming articles.

As a general word of advice though, I would say a) make sure you can eat with chopsticks and b) learn Chinese! I knew some basic Chinese phrases and numbers but I needed more. When, and if, I go back to China again, I will be sure to take a two to three month intensive course on spoken Chinese, because it is very difficult to move around and do even basic things without it. Google Translate helped a lot, but in areas where there was poor internet connection (which happened to me a lot), one is left floundering and rather helpless. Nonetheless, Chinese people were generally very helpful, patient and accommodating. I was even offered help when I had not asked for it.

The cities and roads were clean, well-developed and in Lijiang in particular an abundance of food, cafes, restaurants, beautiful buildings and so on. As a vegetarian I was surprised there were zero vegetarian-only places, but I was able to ask for no meat dishes if I went to Chinese places. Meat again, as in all the other countries I visited in SE Asia was the norm was served with literally everything. Prices of food and coffee were high though, about three times the price (e.g. cappuccino 20-40 RMB, meal 30-60 RMB) I was paying in Chiang Mai, Thailand, or India. Although hotel rooms, and I was told apartment rents, were comparable and not too expensive (from 100-200 RMB) for a lovely, clean and central hotel room, although of course much more expensive 4 and 5 star options are available too for those with the need and budget!

There was no metro in Lijiang, unlike in Kunming (which was excellent and very easy to navigate and not expensive at all), but once one had set up Wechat or Alipay to pay for Didi, the local cab driving app, then getting around is easy and not too expensive either. This was not easy for me to do initially, when my bank suddenly blocked my card on the first day for no good reason and did not lift the block for 5 days either! There are buses too, but these are not so easy to find or know where they are going as the bus-stands are all written in Chinese. I tended to get Didi app taxis to the places and then once there, found it easier to grab a lift with other people there (if any) or be directed to a bus going from that location.

### Brief review of the sources and research on the 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje

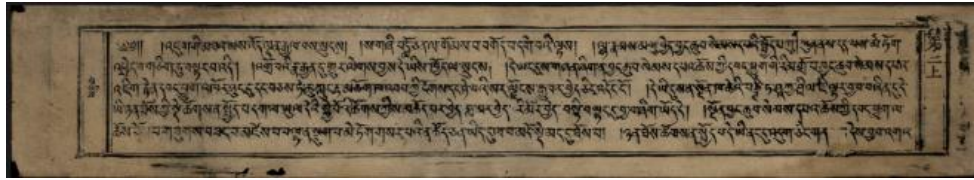
Here is a brief summary of some the main Tibetan and English language sources on the 10th Karmapa I compiled:

#### 1) Tibetan language sources

There are three main autobiographical Tibetan language accounts said to be by the 10th Karmapa (I have shortened the poetic, long titles). These are about the 6th Zhamarpa, his faithful attendant, Kuntu Zangpo and his travels with 6th Gyaltsab Rinpoche, Norbu Zangpo:

- *“The Wish-Fulfilling Cow” (Kungi Dopa Jowai Bamo རྒྱལ་ཁྱབ་སེམས་དཔའི་རྟ་གསལ་བཟོད་པ་ཞིང་ཀུན་རྒྱ་རང་ཉིད་འོང་བ་གདུལ་བར་བྱ་བ་ཀུན་གྱི་འདོད་པ་འཇོག་པའི་བཅོམ་པ་)*. Deeds of the 6th Zhamarpa.
- *“The Resounding Dharma Drum” (Dragpai Choki Ngawoche རྒྱལ་ཁྱབ་སེམས་དཔའི་རྟ་གསལ་བཟོད་པ་དེས་བར་བྱུང་བའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྩམ་གངས་སྤྱིང་པ་གསུམ་དུ་སྟན་པར་གྲགས་པའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྩ་བོ་ཆེ་)*. A text celebrating the past deed of Bodhisattva Kuntu Zangpo (the 10th Karmapa’s faithful attendant).
- *“The Travel Song” (Kala Pingkai Lam Lu རྒྱལ་ཁྱབ་སེམས་དཔའི་རྟ་གསལ་བཟོད་པ་དེས་བར་འབྱུང་བའི་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྩམ་གངས་ཀྱི་ལ་ཕིང་ཀའི་ལམ་གྱི་)*

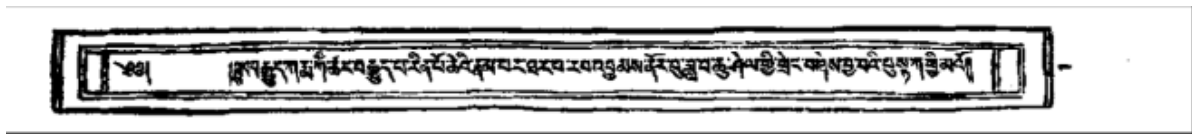




14. Image of the first page of the 'Wish-Fulfilling Cow about the 10th Karmapa's student 6th Zhamarpa. Published in Jang Sa Tham (17th Century). BDR: MW3CN412.

Other important biographical historical account on the 10th Karmapa's life is an 18th Century Karma Kagyu history text by the 8th Tai Situpa, Chokyi Jung-ngey and his assistant/scribe, Belo in a text called:

- the *Moonstone Mala* (*Dawa Chushel gi Trengwa* ལྷ་བ་བཟུང་ཀླུ་ཀྱི་ཚང་བཟུང་པ་རིན་པོ་ཆའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་རབ་བྱམས་ལོ་རྒྱུ་བླ་བ་ཆུ་ཤེལ་གྱི་ཐང་བ་).



## 2) English language sources

Due to lack of time, to prepare myself for this pilgrimage trip, I consulted the previous English-language research on 10th Karmapa, and his time in Lijiang in particular. The main individuals who have done the most research on the 10th Karmapa are:

1. Karl Debreczeny, art historian/Tibetologist, now Curator at Rubin Museum of Art, New York, has written several articles and books on the 10th Karmapa.
2. Imgard Mengele, European Tibetology scholar, who used to teach at University of Carolina has written a couple of articles, a biography and a book on the 10th Karmapa.
3. 14th Zhamarpa, Mipham Chokyi Lodro (1952 – 2014), whose book *Golden Swan in Turbulent Waters* (2012), is an under-rated yet very interesting and useful translation of the main autobiographical/biographical Tibetan sources on the 10th Karmapa.

See bibliography for details of their work. I tried to get hard-copies of their books to read but they were either out of stock or ridiculously expensive. Mengele, who also translated the biography of the radical rebel, Gedun Chopel (1903–1951) (who openly criticised the Ganden/Gelugpa governing classes and was imprisoned, and died shortly after being released), told me on contacting her, that she no longer had anything to do with academia, and would not be able to send me copies of her books. I hope to write more on Mengele's work and life in a future post. However, I was able to read her very useful [Treasury of Lives biography of the 10th Karmapa](#).

Fortunately, Debreczeny's work was easily and freely available online and so were used as the main source of information on the history and places the 10<sup>th</sup> Karmapa visited in Lijiang (and its environs) as well as his magnificent artworks. However, Debreczeny's research is mainly focused on the artworks and painting styles, and there is not so much detail, focus or photographs of the monasteries and places themselves, which I provide here.

I was able to get an e-copy of 14th Zhamar Rinpoche's 2012 book, "*Golden Swan in Turbulent Waters*", which is a translation and summary of the 10th Karmapa's autobiographical accounts combined with the Karma Kamtsang historical text *Moonstone Mala* by Tai Situpa and Belo (Be Lotsawa). It is full of rich anecdotes and information about the 10th Karmapa's life too. Full citations of these sources are listed below.

## Chapter Two

### THE NAXI MU KINGS OF JANG, TIBETAN BUDDHISM AND THE KARMAPAS: Lijiang, the Naxi Mu Kings and the Karmapas, Mu's Mansion, a 500 year old tree, the original Jang Kangyur and Black Dragon Lake park

"While the kings of Jang had close contact with the Kagyu order since at least the early fifteenth century, the development of significant relations are traditionally marked by both Tibetan and Chinese sources with the visit of the first hierarch who personally interacted with Lijiang, the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje who visited in 1516, when he was but ten years old."

"This massive literary undertaking was begun at the request of the king and completed by the Sixth Zhamar during his second visit to Lijiang in 1621. This was an extremely important project for the Tibetan cultural world as it was only the second xylograph edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka (and therefore, mass-producible)." --Debrecheny (2013: 198)

In this second chapter, I first explore a little of the historical and cultural background of Lijiang the city itself, the Naxi people, language and culture indigenous to that region (the Han Chinese refer to them as one of their minorities), and the institution of the Naxi Mu Kings during their allegiance to the Chinese Ming Dynasty. I briefly explore their connection to Tibetan Buddhism and the Gyalwang Karmapas, from the 15th century onwards with their support and patronage of the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> Karmapas.

Also, their extremely important collaboration in the 17th Century with the Karma Kagyu master, 6th Zhamarpa, Chokyi Wangchuk (1584-1629) (who became an important teacher for the 10th Karmapa) in producing the second edition of the Tibetan Kangyur (the Jang or Litang edition). This version of the Kangyur was what the 8<sup>th</sup> Kenting Tai Situpa, Chokyi Jungne (1700-1774) based his famous Derge Kangyur edition on. For more on the Karmapas/Karma Kagyu and their importance in publishing the Tibetan Kangyur editions, see my previous article [here](#).

This is followed by sharing personal photos and information about my visits to two main historical sites and places in Lijiang itself. A visit to the newly built replica Mu's Residence/Palace (in the same original site), which contains not only an old statue of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, paintings of the Karmapa and Mu Kings, but also a copy of the famous Litang Kangyur. There is also a magnificent five-hundred year old tree in the grounds, which I felt particularly moved to touch, knowing that this tree had been there during the 17th Century and time of the Karmapas (photos below).

Then, I share some stunning scenes, buildings and mountain views of Black Dragon Lake Park, with Naxi Manuscript and Culture Museum showcasing old Naxi scriptures (one of the most delightful and joyful written hieroglyphic languages I have ever seen). The perfect place to wander around the lake and take in the mountain vista from the exquisite cafe on the lake there.

Music? [Naxi traditional music by female musicians, Traditional Naxi Music concert in Lijiang](#), and for the stunning red and pink roses in Lijiang, including their lovely Lijiang Rose tea (more on that later), [Kiss from a Rose](#) by Seal.

## 1) Historical and Cultural Background of Naxi Mu Kings

### Naxi People, Language and Culture in Lijiang

One of the personal revelations (for me at least) of visiting Lijiang, was the discovery of the Naxi people and culture indigenous to the region, and their vivid, joyful delightful 'child-like' hieroglyphic script. There are several museums and places in Lijiang dedicated to the Naxi Dongba cultural heritage and also re-constructions of the Mu's Palace at the same place it was initially built. More on that place later, first a little background on the Naxi Mu Kings and their connection to the Karmapas and Karma Kagyu masters, such as 8th Tai Situpa.



15 Naxi ancient script. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



16 View of one of the cobbled streets of the UNESCO heritage ancient town of Lijiang. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





Prior to the fleeing into exile of the 10th Karmapa, it is clear that the Karmapas (from the 7th to the 9th onwards) had been invited and given patronage by the local Naxi Mu Kings of Jang, and the Jang Buddhist students were even given their own 'house' in the main Karma Kagyu monastery in Tsurphu. Debreczeny (2013) explains:

"Jang, in remote northern Yunnan, was for centuries a powerful petty kingdom located between Tibet and China, beyond direct imperial control. While ethnically and linguistically related to the Tibetans, the local inhabitants, the Naxi, had closely aligned themselves politically and culturally with the Chinese, depicting themselves as Chinese officials in official portraiture and keeping records in Chinese.

Through military campaigns the kingdom of Lijiang expanded its domain into Tibetan territories, and the local ruling family took an increasing interest in Tibetan Buddhism. The main trade routes between Yunnan and Tibet all passed through Lijiang-controlled territory, giving the Naxi control over the Yunnan-Tibet tea-horse trade, which provided a great deal of revenue to support such construction projects.

During this peak period, when the kingdom of Jang controlled large areas of Tibetan territory, the Mu (木) ruling family began to take an active interest in Tibetan Buddhism, which corresponded to an explosion of temple building activity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the time of 8<sup>th</sup> Tai Situ's death in 1774, this enthusiasm had resulted in the construction of thirteen Karma Kagyu temples in the Jang area alone."

According to Debreczeny (2013):

"The rulers of Lijiang were so famous for their enthusiastic patronage of Buddhism that they were known as the "Mu heavenly kings" (*Mu tian wang* 木天王) after the martial Guardian Kings of the Four Directions. Several of the larger royally sponsored Karma Kagyu temples, such as Fuguo si (福國寺, 'Og min gling) and Xitan si (悉檀寺, Gsing than gsi, 1617), even contained shrines called "Mu Heavenly King Halls," which housed statues of the greatest king of Lijiang, Mu Zeng (木增, r. 1598-1624 [1646]), whose Tibetan name was Karma Mipham Tsewang Sonam Rabten (Karma mi pham tshe dbang bsod nams rab brtan)."

"According to the *Moonstone Mala* historical account by 8th Tai Situpa and Belo, in 1473 the 7th Karmapa (1454-1506) received gifts from the king of Lijiang Mu Qin, and between 1485 and 1487, the Fifth Mu hereditary chieftain (tusi 土司), Mu Qing (木青, 1442-1485), and the Sixth Mu hereditary chieftain, Mu Tai (木泰, 1486-1502), both sent invitations to the 7th Karmapa to come to Lijiang, but he did not accept."

However relations started to develop when the 8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje visited Jang as a boy at their invitation (Debreczeny 2013):

"While the kings of Jang had close contact with the Karma Kagyu order since at least the early fifteenth century, the development of significant relations are traditionally marked by both Tibetan and Chinese sources with the visit of the first hierarch who personally interacted with Lijiang, the Eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje who visited in 1516, when he was but ten years old...his seven-day visit is found in his biography by Si tu and 'Be lo, which recorded that the Mu ruler dispatched four generals and ten thousand soldiers as escorts and that he was met at the border by the king and royal family members riding on elephants. As a result of his visit, the king of Jang promised that five hundred boys would be trained as monks at his expense and that he would build "one hundred temples."

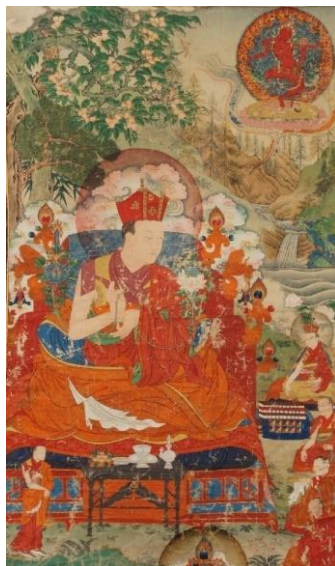


20 8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje (1507-1554) with his teachers. Thangka painting, Eastern Tibet  
16th century. <https://www.asianart.com/mehmethassan/d10267.html>

Moreover:

"The kingdom of 'Jang was prominent enough within the Kagyu system to even warrant its own exclusive multi-storeyed regional dormitory (Grwa rgyun) to house approximately three hundred Naxi monks, called the Yellow House of Lijiang ('Jang khang ser po), at the Kagyu mother monastery Tsurphu in central Tibet, where they went for advanced education."

The 9<sup>th</sup> Karmapa and 6<sup>th</sup> Zhamarpa and the publication of the important Jang Kangyur (Jang Sa Tham)



21 Sixth Zhamarpa, Chokyi Wangchug (1584-1629)

Thus a positive connection between the Jiang dynasty Kings and the Karmapas had been ongoing since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and the time of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Karmapas. According to 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa (in a speech he [gave in 2016 to commemorate his publishing of the Jang Kangyur](#)):

"Generally, the kings of the Jiang dynasty had an excellent Dharma connection with the Gyalwang Karmapas. The fifth king Muk Ching had great faith and devotion for the 7th



Karmapa Chodrak Gyatso (1454–1506), and made great offerings to him. The seventh king Muk Ting invited the 8th Karmapa Mikyo Dorje (1507–1554) to Jiang, making offerings to him and showing him great respect. Following the intention of the 8th Karmapa, the king did not wage war against Tibet and also promised to send yearly offerings to Central Tibet.

During the reign of Muk Tsang, the 13th king of the Jiang dynasty, the kingdom had spread widely and was prosperous; from Litang in northern area of Kham to Chamdo in the west, a large sweep of territory came under his power. Further, Mu Zeng was very skilled in grammar and poetry and had a deep appreciation of the Dharma as well. It was during the reign of this highly accomplished king that the Jiang Kangyur was published and then transmitted.”

The next Karma Kagyu master to visit Lijiang was the Sixth Zhamarpa, Chokyi Wangchug (1584-1629) (an important teacher for the 10th Karmapa), who first visited Lijiang in 1610. The meeting of the Mu King with the 6th Zhamarpa led to the production of the Jang ('Jang sa tham) edition of the Tibetan Kangyur (also known as the “Litang Edition”). According to Debreczeny (2013):

"This massive literary undertaking was begun at the request of the king and completed by the Zhamar during his second visit to Lijiang in 1621. This was an extremely important project for the Tibetan cultural world as it was only the second xylograph edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka (and therefore, mass-producible)."

I wrote about this edition (and others) of the Tibetan Kangyur here: [The Kangyur and the Karmapas' role in their publication and preservation](#) (2020):

“the Jang/Litang Kangyur was published due to the efforts of the 9th Karmapa and his student, 6th 'Red Hat' Karmapa, Chokyi Wangchug and the patronage of the Jang Dynasty King. According to Nourse (2014):

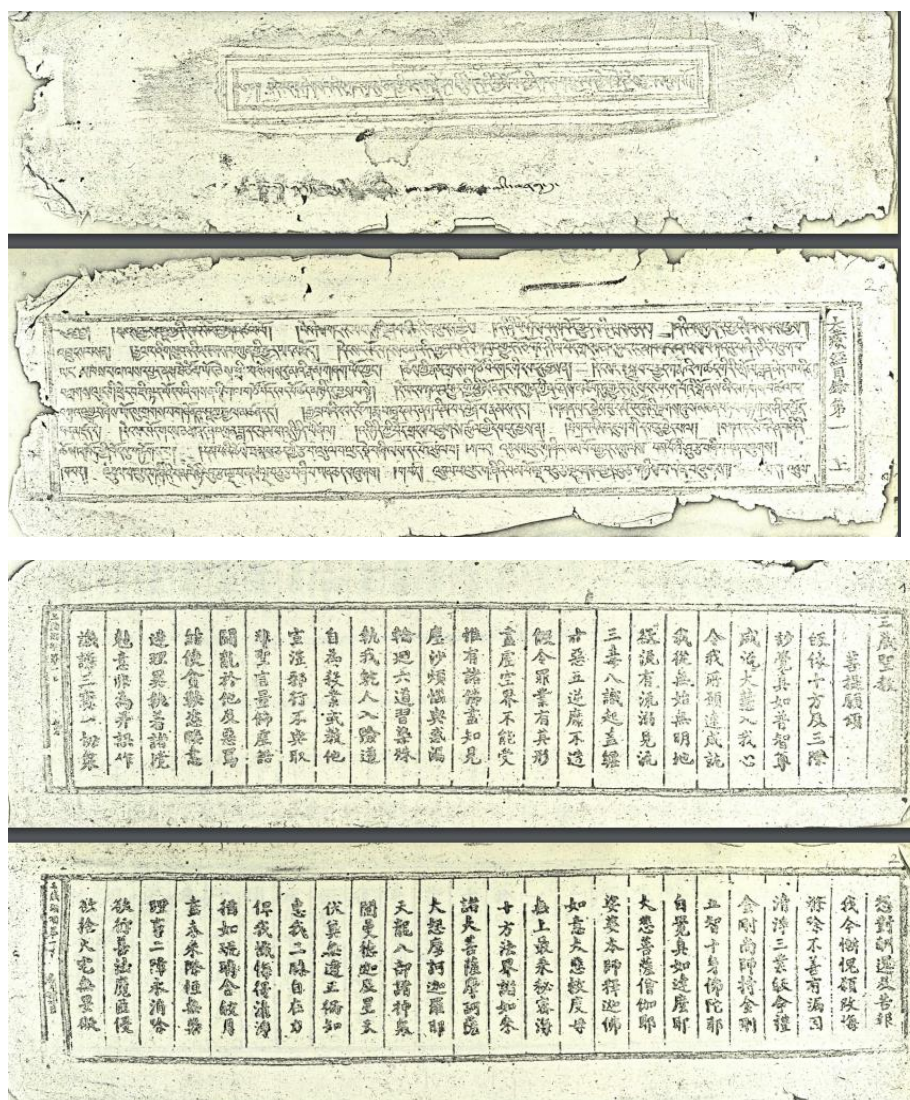
“The only other printed edition of the Kangyur (other than the Yongle edition) produced prior to the late seventeenth century was the Jang Satam, or Litang, Kangyur. The work on this Kangyur was carried out from 1609 to 1614 in the kingdom of Jang Satam ('Jang Sa tham), a Naxi kingdom in the area Lijiang in today's northwest Yunnan province. The king of Jang Satam, known by the Tibetan name Sönam Raptan (Bsod nams rab brtan, d. 1647), invited the Sixth Zhamar (Zhwa dmar) of the Karma Kagyü school, Chokyi Wangchuk (Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1584-1630), to oversee the project. Chokyi Wangchuk brought with him a copy of a Tselpa Kangyur which had been stored at a place called Chingwa Taktsé ('Phying ba stag rtse) and used this as the base text of his editorial work. This edition then, along with the Yongle Kangyur, falls within the Tselpa line of Kangyurs.

Chökyi Wangchuk wrote a narrative catalogue for the collection. The blocks of the Jang Satam Kangyur were later removed and placed in a Gelukpa monastery in Litang (Li thang) in Kham during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, so that this edition of the Kangyur is often known as the Litang Kangyur.” (p.34).

In *Describing the Sources of the Kangyur* by the 6<sup>th</sup> Zharmapa, Chokyi Wangchuk, gives an explanation that the original [handwritten] manuscript that served as a basis for the Jiang Kangyur was “the best among the later editions. It was given its name based on the time period and its owner and known as the Tselpa Kangyur. The masters and scholars who edited, annotated, and corrected it, included Zhonu Tsul Shakyai Gyaltsen, one or two in the

succession of the Gyalwang Karmapas, Thamche Khyenpa Chenga Chokyi Drakpa, and Go Lotsawa. In Tibet these days, it is the peerless jewel.”

In 1615, the 6th Zharmapa wrote the catalogue (dkar chag) for the Jang Kangyur which is available at [TBRC WC1CZ881](#) ( li thang bka' 'gyur dkar chag). It is the original catalogue of the Kangyur carved in Jang Satam. Printing blocks were later moved to Litang by the Gelugpas. Here is a screenshot I took of the first two folios from it:



22 Catalogue (dkar chag) of the Litang Kangyur by 6th Zharmapa, first published in 1615.

In 2016, the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa explained that “This Litang Kangyur is the very first woodblock edition of the words of the Buddha that was printed in a Tibetan region and so it has an immense historical significance as well as its own inherent value.”

The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa also explained that the Litang Kangyur also became the basis for the Dege Kangyur: “when the great scholar, the all-knowing 8th Tai Situ Chokyi Jungne, was preparing to print the Dege Kangyur (named after the place it was printed), he referred mostly to the Litang Kangyur, though he did change the order and edit it.”[\[xii\]](#)

***The Tsalpa Kangyur as basis of the Jang and Derge Kangyurs***

The original hand-written manuscript of the Kangyur that the Jang Kangyur was based on, was the only one of its kind in Tibet at that time and considered the best among all manuscripts. Famous as the Tsalpa Kangyur, it was named after its time and its owner[vii]. Nourse (2014) explains its origin:

"The monastery of Tsel Gungtang ('Tshal gung thang) in Central Tibet (Dbus) produced a number of Kangyur sets under the patronage of the myriarch (khri dpon) Tselpa Künga Dorjé ('Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje, 1309-1364) and his predecessors. An edition of the Kangyur produced between 1347 and 1351 became the basis for many subsequent Kangyur recensions which are thus referred to as members of the Tselpa line of Kangyurs, the other main line in the textual history of the Kangyur (other than Narthang edition). Most of the xylograph editions of the Kangyur are from the Tselpa line. Editions in the Tselpa line of Kangyurs sometimes include a section of ancient tantras (rnying rgyud) and collected spells (gzungs 'dus) not found in manuscripts of the Tempangma line (many of the ancient tantras having been excluded by Butön from his catalogues)."

This Kangyur was edited and annotated by many great scholars, including Zhonu Tsultrim Shakyai Gyaltzen and previous incarnations of the Karmapas and Zhamar Rinpoches, so it was renowned in Tibet as the incomparable Tsalpa Kangyur[viii]. This new printing of the Jiang/Litang Kangyur was based on this Tsalpa manuscript[ix].

The 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa described the connection between the Tsalpa Drungchen Monlam Dorje (tshal pa drung chen smon lam rdo rje) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Karmapa:

"At the time of the 3rd Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339), Tsalpa Drungchen Monlam Dorje had a relationship of priest and patron with the Mongolian Emperor asked him for support [to publish a Tengyur] so the emperor gave to Tsalpa Situ the seal of a Situ and also gifts. Likewise, Tsalpa Situ asked [the 3rd Karmapa Rangjung Dorje] for advice on how to arrange and print the Tengyur. There are the records that can be found. Whether this Tengyur is the Tsalpa Tengyur or the Thukdam Tengyur of the 3rd Karmapa Rangjung Dorje is not very clear. What we know is that there was definitely a relationship between Tsalpa Drungchen Monlam Dorje and the 3rd Karmapa."

### ***17th Karmapa and 2016 digital launch of the Jang/Litang Kangyur***



*23 17th Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre in 2015*



In February 2016, the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa launched a [new digital edition of the Jiang/Litang Kangyur](https://adarsha.dharma-treasure.org/home/kangyur), explaining that:

“Eventually, the woodblocks for the Jiang Kangyur were brought to Litang (hence the alternate name) where they remained, but these days only a few of original woodblocks remain. Further, there are just two or three printed copies of the Jiang Kangyur remaining in the world today. So in order to restore and revive the teachings of the Buddha, we have had the meritorious opportunity to use modern technology in preserving the Kangyur, the precious words of the Buddha.” See: <https://adarsha.dharma-treasure.org/home/kangyur>

The website also includes editions of the Lhasa and Derge Kangyur.

Original folios from the Jang/Litang edition were housed and exhibited in the Ten Thousand Book Tower at the Mu Mansion complex in Lijiang, which I was delighted and moved to see in person.



*24 Jang edition of the Tibetan Kangyur exhibited in Mu's Residence. photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*

In sum, the Naxi Mu Kings of Jang were Buddhist practitioners and patrons who had a very productive and good relations with the Tibetan Karmapas and Karma Kagyu teachers from the early 17th century onwards, before the 10th Karmapa sought their help and support when fleeing for his life from the Mongolian invading army and Gelugpa takeover. One of the oldest Naxi Buddhist temples in Lijiang, Dabaojigong contains wall murals said to have been painted by the 10th Karmapa himself, more on that in a later post.

## 2) Historical Sites, Buildings and Artworks

While in Lijiang I visited several building and places dedicated to highlighting the Naxi people, language and Mu Kings there. Here are some photos I took of these places below here. First is Mu's Mansion/Residence, second is the Black Dragon Lake Park.

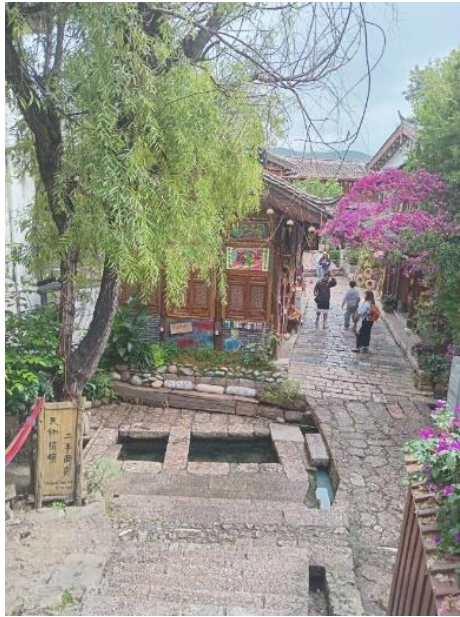
### *Mu's Residence (木府), the Litang Kangyur and 500 year old tree*

I visited the Mu Residence/Palace, which is in stunning the Lijiang old Town area. The Mu were a Naxi family who became well-known for their exceptional skill and experience in city planning, and eventually masterminded the construction of Baisha Village and Dayan Town (modern-day Lijiang Old Town). They managed to maintain rule over the area right up until the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), when they were overthrown by the Mongolians and reinstated as Tusi. Under their new title, they led the region into financial prosperity throughout the Yuan, Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties. In the heyday of Tusi Mu, it was consisted of 100 buildings. However, it was destroyed by war and fighting, and so the current buildings are replicas, although stunning nonetheless Here are some stunning scenes on my walk to it near Lijiang's Zhongshe River. The town was filling up with mainly Chinese tourists as it was summer holidays, but mornings were generally uncrowded.

Mufu is a sprawling estate that covers several acres. Like other Chinese mansions and palaces, it is divided into courtyards, each beautifully manicured and with its own purpose. The buildings within are great examples of Ming Dynasty architecture (with some Naxi influence).



*25 Lijiang old town scenes on the way to Mu's Mansion. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



26 Lijiang old town scenes on the way to Mu's Mansion. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



27 The main entrance gate to Mu's Residence is imposing and stunning indeed, and leads to another stunning gateway. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



28 The stunning gate to the Mu Residence/Palace in Lijiang Old Town. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





29 Second gateway to Mu's Mansion. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



30 Information panel outside the Mu's Mansion/Palace site. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



31 A tree outside the Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



32 One of the main buildings in the Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

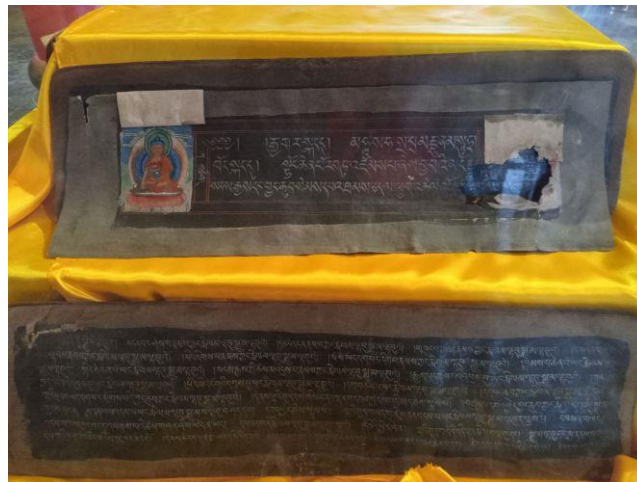


33 Ten thousand Book Tower in Mu's Palace complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





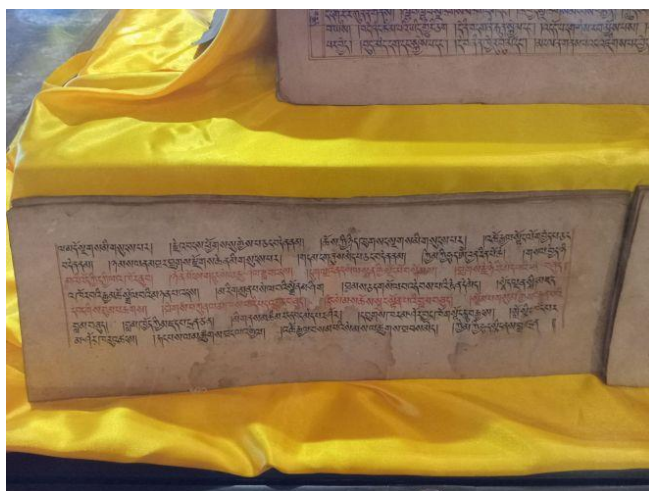
34 Litang edition of the Tibetan Kangyur at Mu's Palace complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



35 Litang edition of the Tibetan Kangyur at Mu's Palace complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



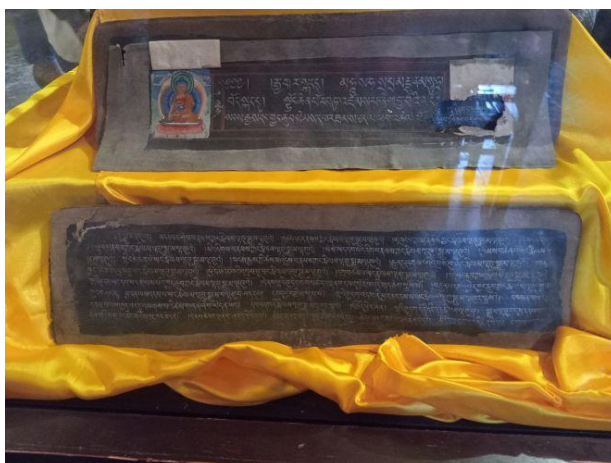
36 Litang edition of the Tibetan Kangyur at Mu's Palace complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



37 Litang edition of the Tibetan Kangyur at Mu's Palace complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



38 Litang edition of the Tibetan Kangyur at Mu's Palace complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



39 Litang edition of the Tibetan Kangyur at Mu's Palace complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



40 Manuscripts housed in one of the buildings. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



41 Exquisite drawings of life in the town. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





42 Paintings of the Naxi Mu Kings. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



43 Paintings of the Naxi Mu Kings. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





44 Paintings of the Naxi Mu Kings. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



45 Paintings of the Naxi Mu Kings. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



46 Drawing of one of the Karmapas. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



47 Statue of the 2nd Karmapa. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024. The 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204-1283) was said to have been the first Karmapa to establish a monastery in Dechen Tibetan region (now Yunnan, China), see Debreczeny, Karl 2013.



48 Drawings of the Mu Kings. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

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49 A white or red Vajravārāhī?! Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



50 Statue and drawing of the Karmapas. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





51 View from the Street Bridge in Mu's Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



52 Side view of Chinese temple in Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





53 Temple in Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



54 Old tree next to the Mu Mansion temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



55 View of the Mu Mansion temple from a stunning rose garden below. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



56 Adele Tomlin standing with the stunning pink and red roses below the temple. July 2024.

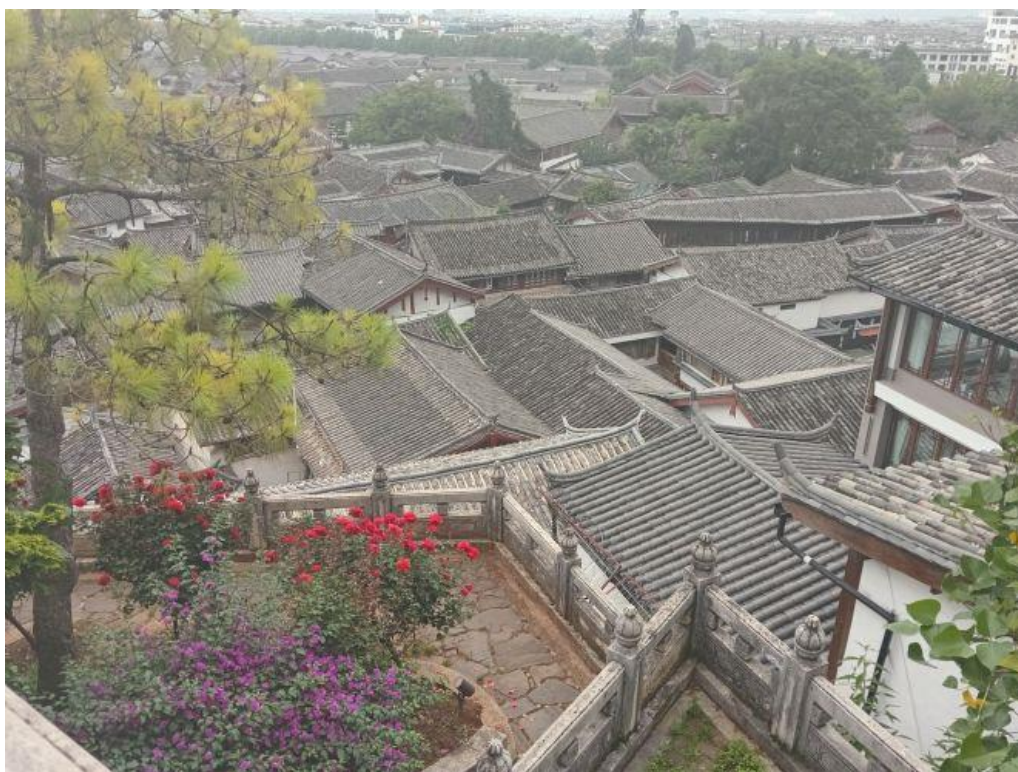


57 View of Lijiang old town and surrounding mountains from the temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



58 View of Lijiang old town and surrounding mountains from the temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





59 View looking down on Lijiang city and the Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



60 View looking down on Lijiang city and the Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



61 View looking down on Lijiang city and the Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



62 Statues in the Chinese temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.







63 Scenes from inside the Mu Palace. Photos: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

### *Five-Hundred Year-old Tree at the Mu Mansion complex*

There was a very old tree in the Mu Mansion complex, said to be over five hundred years old. Many scarves and prayer flags were draped around it. I touched the tree to receive its blessings/energy. Knowing it had been there when the 10th Karmapa and other great masters were in Lijiang was moving to see and feel indeed.



64 Entrance gate in front of the five- hundred year old tree. at Mu's Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



65 Five- hundred year old tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





66 Five- hundred year old tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



67 Five- hundred year old tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



68 Five- hundred year old tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*69 Five- hundred year old tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



*70 Pond with fish at the Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*

### ***Black Dragon Lake Park***

Another stunning place I visited in Lijiang, was the Black Dragon Lake park complex, started in the Qing era with buildings of the Ming, Quing dynasty/ Mu era and a museum dedicated to the Naxi culture and manuscripts. It is said that the lake is one of the main sources of water for Lijiang city. This park was about a fifteen minute walk above the North Gate of Lijiang old town. Be sure to go to the front gate and not the back gate though, as they do not take cash payments for the tickets there. Here are some photo scenes from my visit there. The lake is said to offer one of the best views in China of the Jade Dragon Snow mountain.



71 Back gate to the Black Dragon Lake Park. No entry unless can pay with Wechat. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



72 Walk along the Zhongje river in Lijiang on the way to Black Dragon Park in the morning, not many crowds. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



73 Front Gate entrance to the Black Dragon Pool. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





74 Map of the Black Dragon Pool Park. View looking down on Lijiang city and the Mu Mansion complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



75 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*76 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



*77 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*





*78 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



*79 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*

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*80 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



*81 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*





82 Naxi cultural dancing in the park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



83 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





*84 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



*85 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



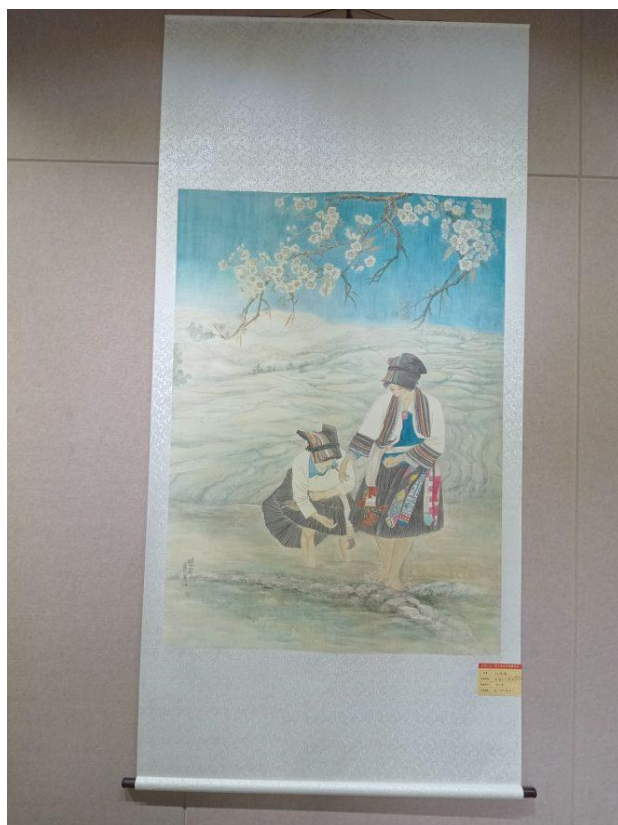


86 Tai Chi in the park. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



87 Naxi cultural dancing in the park. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





88 Chinese artworks. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



89 Chinese artworks. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



90 Chinese artworks. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



9184 Chinese artworks. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





92 Chinese artworks. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)







93 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



94 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

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95 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



96 One of the most beautiful cafes and views in the world! View of a lifetime! Said to be one of the best views in China. The Black Dragon Lake View of Jade Dragon Snow mountain, Lijiang. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

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97 View of a lifetime! Said to be one of the best views in China. The Black Dragon Lake View of Jade Dragon Snow mountain, Lijiang. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

#### *Naxi Culture and Manuscript Museum and Institute*

Also in the Black Dragon Lake complex was a museum full of art, clothing and manuscripts by the indigenous Naxi people and culture. The most stunning and interesting things I saw there were the joyful, childlike hieroglyphic script of the Naxi people.



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98 Naxi scriptures in museum. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



99 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

Dakini Publications (2024)

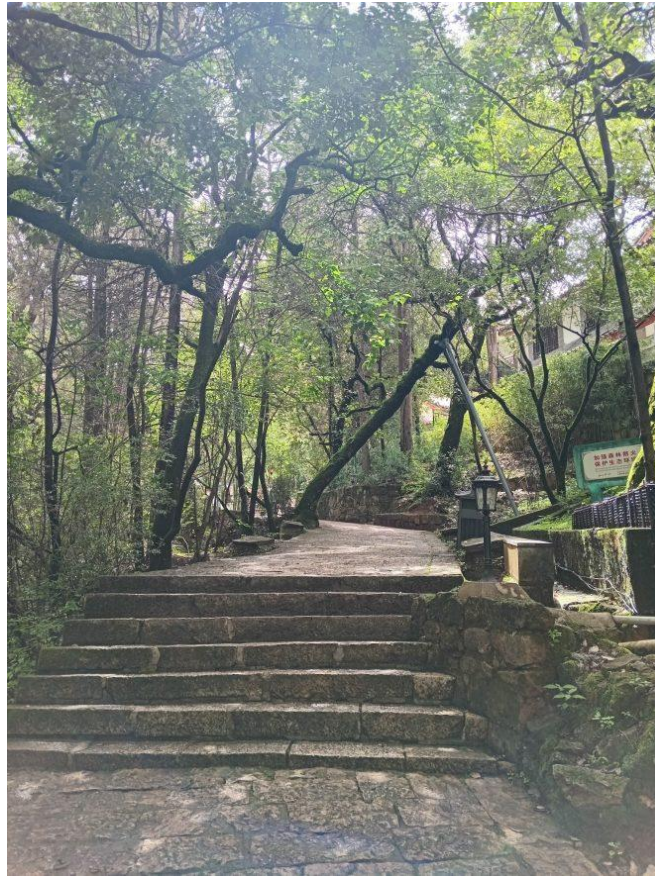


*100 Nazi culture Museum, in Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



101 Information at the Naxi culture Museum, in Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





102 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



103 Entrance to the Naxi culture Museum, in Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

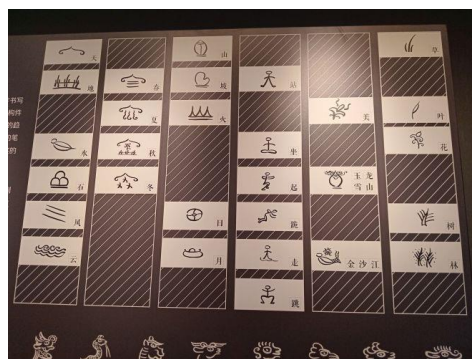


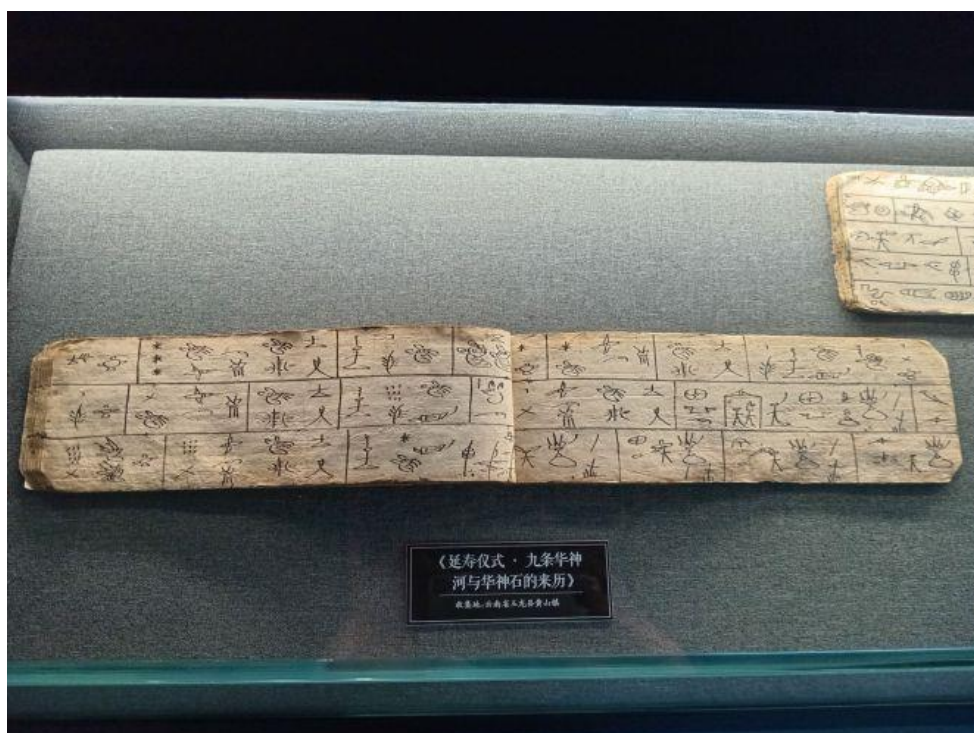


104 Stunning art mural at the entrance of the Naxi Culture Museum. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



105 Examples of Naxi script with phonetics and Chinese translation. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





106 Naxi script hieroglyphs. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



107 Close up of the art mural in the Naxi Manuscript Museum. A beautiful representation of Buddha and deities. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*108 Scenes of Black Dragon Lake Park. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



*109 View of a lifetime! Said to be one of the best views in China. The Black Dragon Lake View of Jade Dragon Snow mountain, Lijiang. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*





110 Naxi script carved in wood. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





111 The Green-Locking Bridge. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



112 Naxi script and Chinese symbols. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



## Endnotes

[1] Rin chen dpal bzang, ed., *Mtshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag kun gsal me long* [*Descriptive Catalog of Tsurpu Monastery, a Clear Mirror*] (Lhasa, 1995), 161-2.

## Sources:

Debreczeny, Karl, 2013. "Si tu paṇ chen's Artistic Legacy in 'Jang.'" *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 7.

See also for Chinese readers/speakers: [Preliminary Discussion on the Relationship Between the Mu Chieftains and the Karma Kagyü School], in *Lijiang Mushi tusi yu Tian Chuan Zang jiao jue chu yu lishi wenhua yantao hui lunwen ji* 丽江木氏土司与滇川藏交角区域历史文化研讨会论文集 [A Collection of Essays from the Symposium on the Lijiang Mu Family Chieftain and the Yunnan Tibet Intersection of Regional History and Culture], ed. Mu Shihua 木仕华 (Beijing; China Tibetology Publishing House, 2009

## Chapter Three

VISITING TASHI CHOPHEL LING MONASTERY (Yufeng Si 玉峰寺) AS A LONE FEMALE PILGRIM: One of the five main Karma Kagyu monasteries in Lijiang. Original artworks by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje and a five-hundred year-old tree said to have been planted by 8th Karmapa



113 First Entrance Gate to Tashi Chopel Ling (Yufeng Si).

### Introduction

The oldest Buddhist temple in Lijiang is said to be Dabaojigong temple, with its fabulous wall murals located in the former capital of Baisha ancient town has been documented to some extent in terms of its artworks in particular, by the art curator and Tibetologist, Karl Debreczeny (see Chapter 1). One of the five remaining Karma Kagyu monasteries, such as this one Tashi Chopel Ling (called Yufeng Si 玉峰寺 in Chinese) is mentioned by Debreczeny (2013) mainly in relation to the 8th Kenting Tai Situ Penchen's visits there and his artworks ( See [Situ Penchen's Artistic Legacy \(JIATS, no. 7 \(August 2013\)\)](#) and not so much the temple itself.

The first Tibetan Buddhist monastery said to have been established in Yunnan province, was by the 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204-1283) in the Dechen Tibetan region. The first built in close proximity to Lijiang was called Dzebo Dargyeling in Yongning in 1353 (Debreczeny 2009). It is said that Tibetan Buddhism did not really enter into the Lijiang region until later during the Ming dynasty, in particular by the Karma Kagyu. As was stated in the previous article, the Mu King Wang (r. 1580-1596) expressed his wish to commission a woodblock of the Tibetan Kangyur in 1582, a monumental task that was completed during the reign of his grandson Mu Zeng (r.1598-1624).





FIG. 2 Lijiang during the Ming Dynasty (1369–1644)

114 *Map of the region around Tibet and Lijiang (Debreczeny (2009))*

The monastery is said to have been originally founded there around 1700 (see more on that below). Unlike the majority of online 'travel/tourist' articles about this 'scarlet sect' small Buddhist temple on the outskirts of Lijiang, my research aims to give more detail on the historical background of the temple in terms of its Tibetan Buddhist Karma Kagyu roots, my personal visit there and photos of the temple statues and thangkas, the original art on the wooden exterior said to be by the 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje, and a five-hundred year old Camellia tree said to have been planted (or at least blessed) by the 8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje (who is said to have been the first Karmapa to visit Jang when he was a boy).

One of the most memorable and emotional moments of the visit there for me was seeing some original artworks on the wooden panels outside the temple, which the monk told me were said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje himself. When I saw them my heart leapt in devotion at what seemed very much to be the highly original style of Choying Dorje. Before I went on the pilgrimage, I had decided that if I could at least see some original artworks up close by the 10th Karmapa, and ideally touch them with my hands, my purpose was accomplished. So seeing these works on the wooden panels, without any museum glass or security, seemed like a dream come true and blessing from the guru himself.

I reached up to touch the wood and the paint, as if to touch the guru's hands and suddenly a huge wave of emotion released in me and I started sobbing uncontrollably in front of the monk and was unable to stop the flood of tears and outpouring of emotion. I am not an art historian or expert (and it was not possible for me to ascertain if they were indeed by 10th Karmapa), nonetheless being in the temple touching the wood and flaking paint, there was an energy there which was unmistakably real and present. At this point, I felt as if I had accomplished one of the main purposes of the trip and even (dramatic as it might sound) of my lifetime.

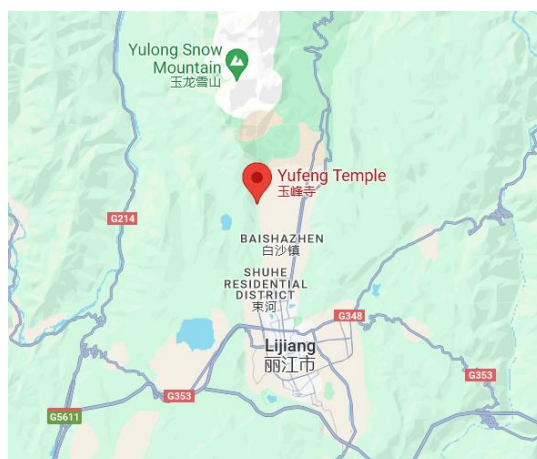
Another highlight was the 500 year-old Camellia tree (not in full bloom at that time), the monk told me had been planted by the 8th Karmapa (or at least blessed by him) when he visited there as a ten year old boy. I was unable to touch the tree but was close enough to it, and did several circuits and aspirations around it. For more detail and photos of the temple, the art and trees, see below.

I dedicate the merit of this research as an act of preservation of the Karmapa's and Karma Kagyu monasteries in Jang, and to the flourishing of the Karmapa's activities and long-life.

Music? The [Short Vajradhara Prayer](#) chanted by the 17th Karmapa on his gorgeous album the *Lion's Roar-Great Compassion* (2007) , and [Lamb](#) by Gorecki for the sheer emotion of being in that place and moment, "If I could die this very moment, I wouldn't fear...."

Written and compiled by Adele Tomlin, 22nd July 2024.

## Getting There: Location in the hills



115 Map of the location of Yufeng Si temple in relation to Lijiang town.

The temple is in quite a remote location in the hills outside the quieter old Baisha town north of Lijiang Old Town, and is accessible via taxi (about half an hour's drive and 5 GBP one way). There is a public bus number 6 that goes directly there but I could not find the bus stop where the bus left from at all, despite asking several people in Chinese with translator app. They did not seem to know either!

When the taxi dropped me off, there was no one else around other than an old Chinese woman persistently selling some incense. There were zero tourists and I was the only lone white female foreigner. I tentatively walked up the hill alone to the main entrance, not knowing what would be there or where I was going.

## The Tashi Chophel Ling Temple: Origin around 1700 and rebuilt around the time of Tai Situ's last visit

In his research on 8th Tai Situ Penchen, Karl Debreczeny (2013: 232) briefly refers to the history of this monastery originally built in the early 18th Century:

"The history of this temple and its wall paintings are not clear. According to Rock, there were no memorial steles in evidence when he visited in the early twentieth century. Local Chinese sources generally agree that Trashi Chompel Ling was founded sometime in the Kangxi (康熙, r. 1662-1722) period, about 1700 – the year of Situ's birth. One modern account states that in 1681, the Tenth Karmapa's patron, the king of Lijiang Mu Yi, invited two lamas from Tibet, Duzhi (都知, Dorjé) and Dingri (丁日), who began construction of the monastery.

Like many temples in the area, Trashi Chompel Ling was subsequently badly damaged or destroyed in the intermittent warfare that rocked northern Yunnan; it was rebuilt during the Qianlong (乾隆, r. 1736-1795) period. A building permit (jian si zhizhao 建寺執照) dated the twenty-first year of Qianlong (1756) suggests that major reconstruction of Yufeng si began



three years before Situ's last visit to Lijiang in 1759 and was likely still going on when he arrived. This 1756 permit names a local Tibetan Buddhist monk, the lama Ming Julu (明菊魯), originally from Lijiang's main Karma Kagyü monastery, Fuguo si (福國寺, Okmin Ling), as overseeing the construction project.

Over time, nine structures were built at Trashi Chompel Ling, three of which are extant: one main assembly hall and upper and lower monks' residences, where the paintings under discussion are located.



116 Second Entrance Gate to Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si). The Tibetan name of the temple is written in smaller letters above the Chinese script. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

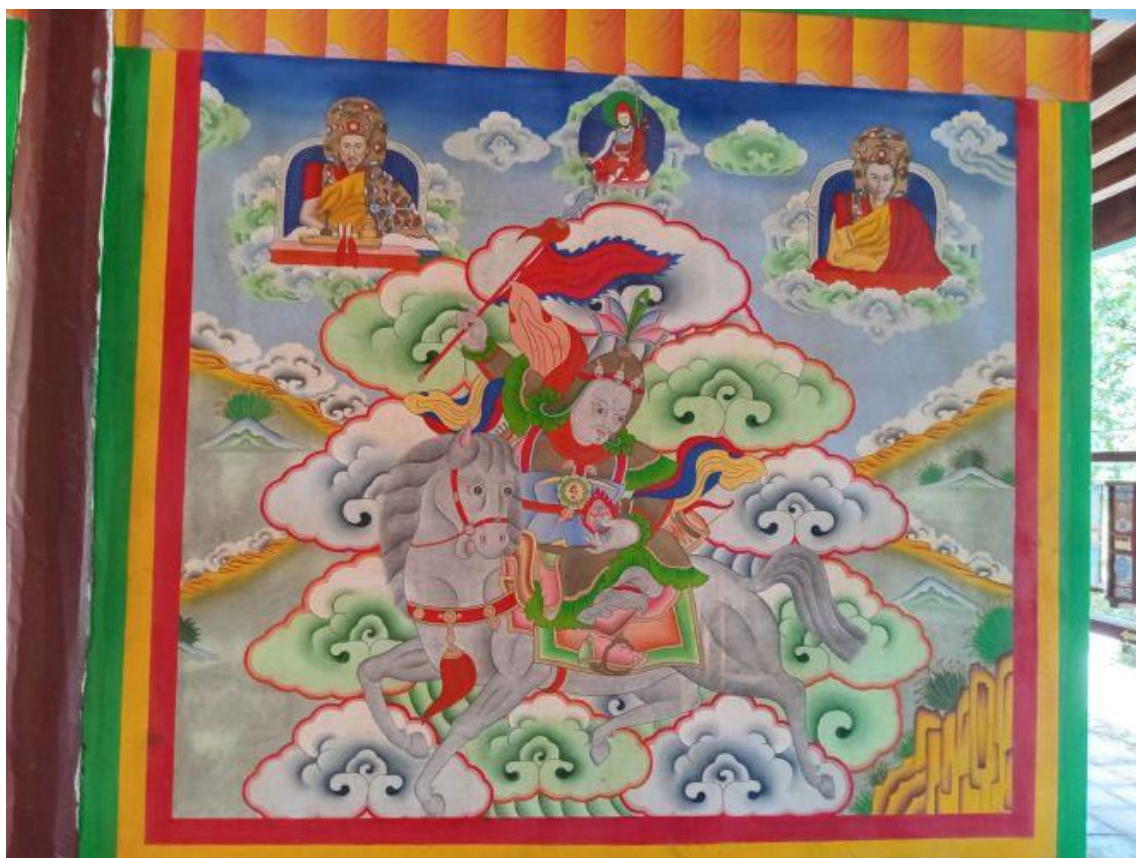
The temple is small but well-known with tourists due to a five-hundred year old camellia tree (see below). There are three courtyards, the famous "camellia" rooted in the north courtyard. When I arrived there the sun was shining, and prayers flags in the courtyards rustling in the peaceful breeze. I heard some drumming and chanting of Mahakala and went through the two impressive entrance gates to the temple and saw a lone Tibetan Buddhist monk (the first I had seen since I arrived in Yunnan a few days previously) doing a Mahakala puja. It seemed a good omen/sign and so I did some prostrations to the main shrine statues and photos and started to do some circumambulations, and take photos.

When the monk finished the puja, I spoke to him in Tibetan and asked him about the temple itself. He did not speak any English, only Chinese and Tibetan and told me he was from Palyul, Tibet. Although he spoke Kham dialect (slightly different from the central U-Tsang dialect) I was able to communicate and understand him reasonably well. I also asked him if I could meditate a little in the temple and he allowed me to do so without any issue.

Here are some photos below I took of the main shrine room and the courtyards and stunning trees there.



117 Art murals around the entrance to the Tashi Chopel Ling temple (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



118 Art murals around the entrance to the Tashi Chopel Ling temple (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





119 Laughing Buddha statue at the entrance to the Tashi Chopel Ling temple (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



120 Art murals around the entrance to the Tashi Chopel Ling temple (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





121 Art murals around the entrance to the Tashi Chophel Ling temple (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



122 Art murals around the entrance to the Tashi Chophel Ling temple (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





123 Art murals around the entrance to the Tashi Chopel Ling temple (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



124 Stunning trees inside the first courtyard of the Yufeng Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

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125 Stunning trees and prayer flags inside the first courtyard of the Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



126 Stunning trees and prayer flags inside the first courtyard of the Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

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127 Stunning old trees and prayer flags at the Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



128 Stunning old trees at the Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



*129 Stunning trees and prayer flags on a sunny day inside the courtyards of the Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple.  
Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*

## Statues, artworks and photos of the historical Karmapas, Tai Situpas and Sharna Drungpo Rinpoche

Inside the small temple, were lovely artworks, thangkas, statues and photos of various incarnations of the Karmapas and Tai Situpa. Unlike the other Karma Kagyu monasteries I visited in the Lijiang region afterwards, I did not see a photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. However, the monk had asked me who I was and I told him I used to live in India and that 17th Karmapa was my root lama for many years. He asked me if that was Ogyen Trinley Dorje, and I replied of course, to which he smiled and said 'so you're student of the Karmapa' and proceeded to show me around the temple. Also, there were photos in the temple of the same living Karma Kagyu teacher, 17<sup>th</sup> Sharna Drungpo Rinpoche, that I saw in the other Karma Kagyu monasteries where the 17th Karmapa photo was openly displayed (more on Sharna Drungpo Rinpoche in the following chapters).



*130 Thangka artworks of the Karmapas at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*





131 Thangka artworks of the Karmapas at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



132 Thangka artworks of the Tai Situpas at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*133 Statues and photos of the Karmapas and Tai Situpas at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*



*134 Statues and photos of the Karmapas and Tai Situpas at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*





135 Statues and photos of the Karmapas and Tai Situpas and Mahakala statue at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple.  
Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



136 Statues and photos of the Karmapas and Tai Situpas and Mahakala statue at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple.  
Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





137 Mahakala statue at Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



138 Photo of the Karma Kagyu teacher, Drungpo Rinpoche. His photo was featured prominently at most of the Karma Kagyu monasteries I visited in the Lijiang region.





139 Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



140 Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si) Temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



141 Courtyard and prayer flags seen from inside the temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



142 Doing Kora around the old wooden temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





143 A lovely Green Tara artwork on the walls of the small kora route around the temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

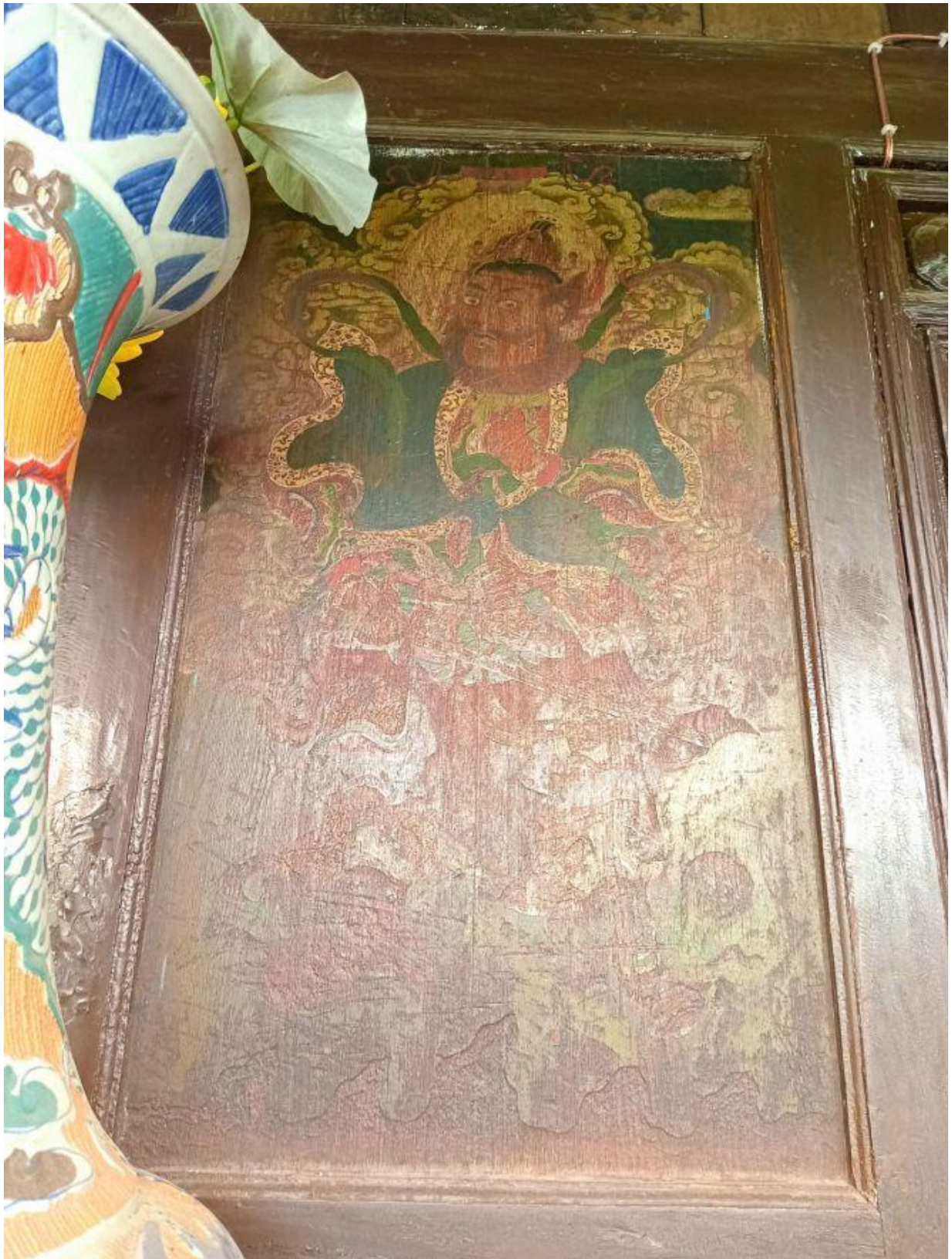
### Original artworks on temple exterior wooden panels by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje

One of the most memorable and emotional moments of the visit there for me was seeing some original artworks on the wooden panels outside the temple, which the monk told me were said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje himself. When I saw them my heart leapt in devotion at what seemed very much to be the highly original style of Choying Dorje. Before I went on the pilgrimage, I had decided that if I could at least see some original artworks up close by the 10th Karmapa, and ideally touch them with my hands, my purpose was accomplished. So seeing these works on the wooden panels, without any museum glass or security, seemed like a dream come true and blessing from the guru himself.

I reached up to touch the wood and the paint, as if to touch the guru's hands and suddenly a huge wave of emotion released in me and I started sobbing uncontrollably in front of the monk and was unable to stop the flood of tears and outpouring of emotion. I am not an art historian or expert (and it was not possible for me to ascertain if they were indeed by 10th Karmapa), nonetheless being in the temple touching the wood and flaking paint, there was an energy there which was unmistakably real and present. At this point, I felt as if I had accomplished one of the main purposes of the trip and even (dramatic as it might sound) of my lifetime.

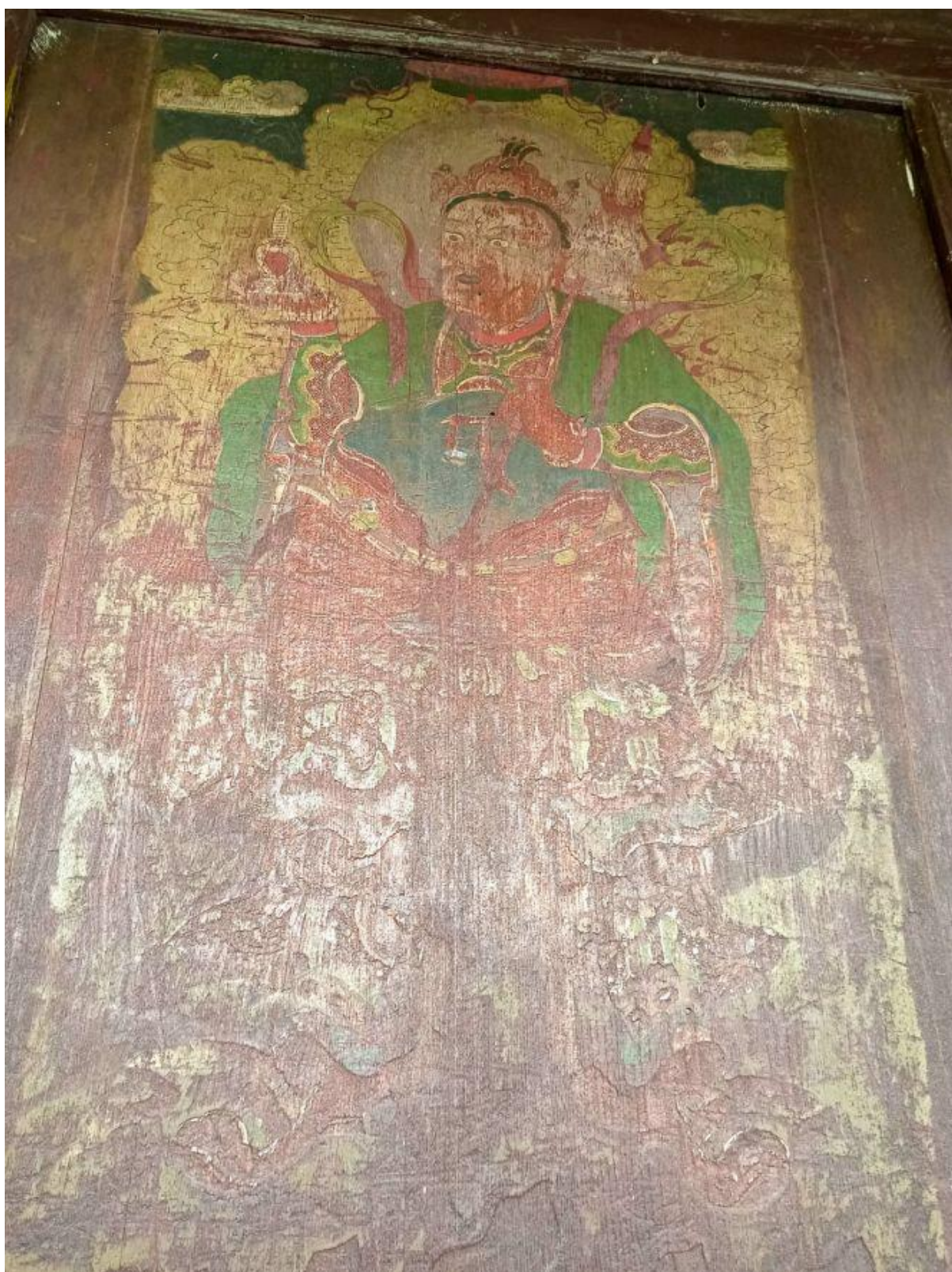
Here are some photos I took of these stunning (and original) artworks, the bird images above the main figures were stunning and displayed some of the Naxi linguistic style in them of the imagery used of birds in their hieroglyphic script. In addition, Debreczeny (2003) has noted that the 10th Karmapa's love of birds is evidenced also by his being considered the author of a 'widely known text *The Buddha's*

*Law Among the Birds* (Bya Chos Rinchen Trengwa) a charming text in which the basic tenets of Buddhist law are explained in terms of birds.



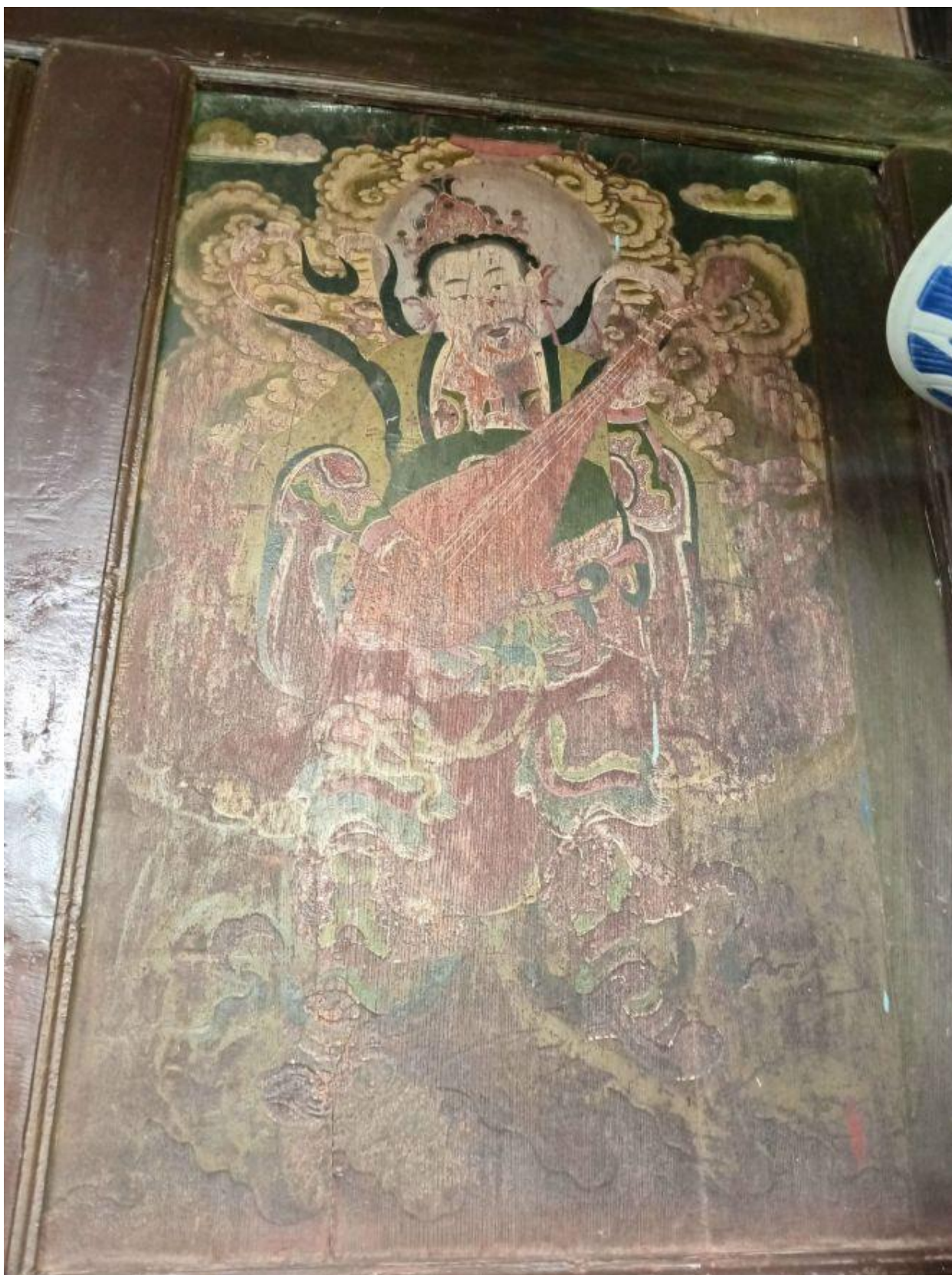
144 Original artwork said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje on the exterior wooden panels at Tashi Chophel Ling monastery (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





145 Original artworks said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje on the exterior wooden panels at Tashi Chophel Ling monastery (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





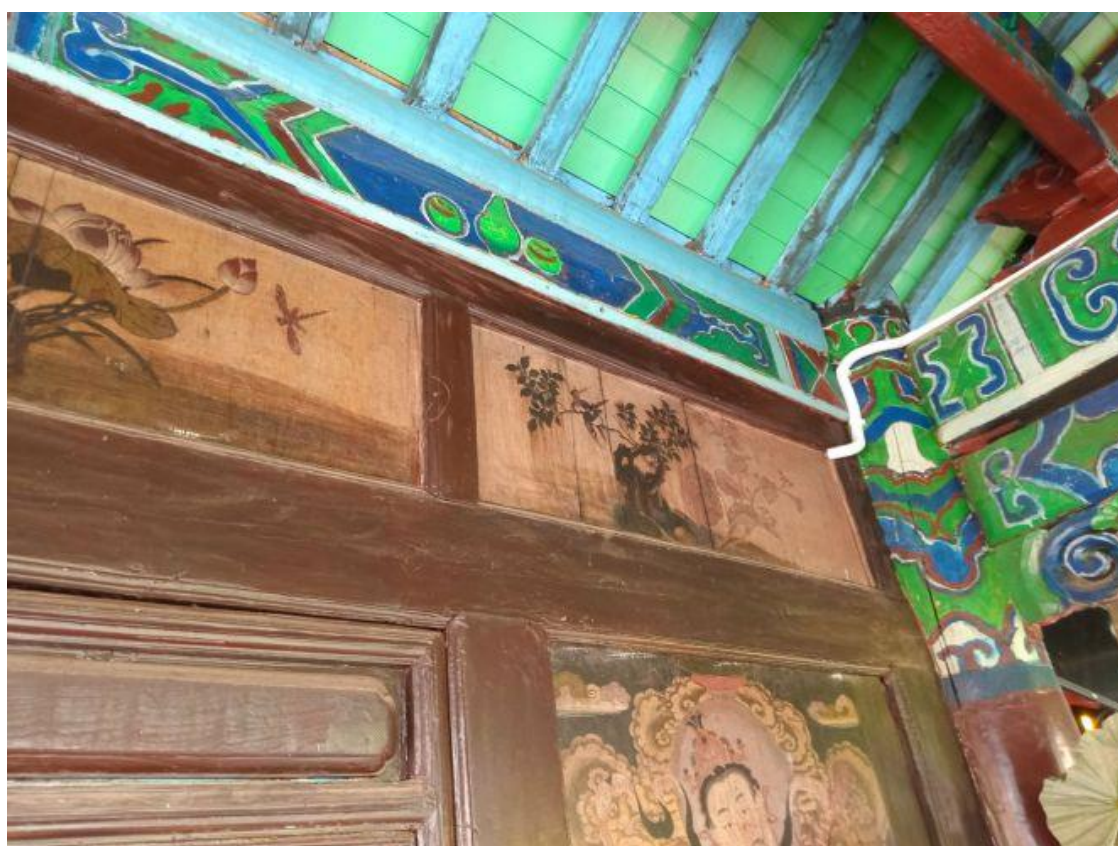
146 Original artworks said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje on the exterior wooden panels at Tashi Chophel Ling monastery (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





147 Original artworks said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje on the exterior wooden panels at Tashi Chophel Ling monastery (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



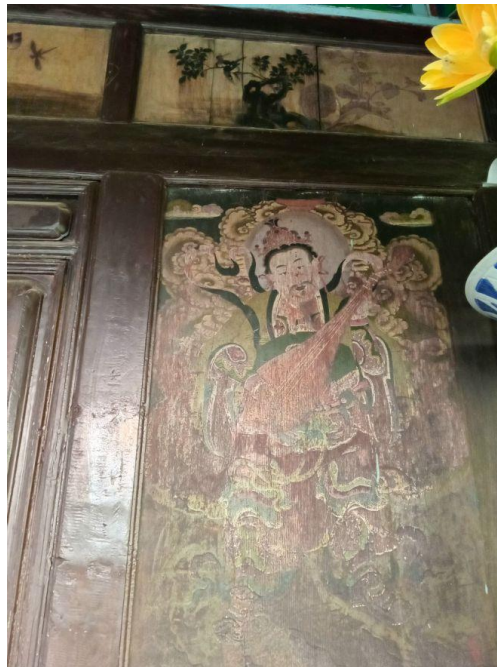


148 Original artworks said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje at Tashi Chophel Ling monastery (Yufeng Si).  
Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*149 Birds and Flowers. Original artworks said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje at Tashi Chophel Ling monastery (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



*150 Birds and Flowers. Original artworks said to be painted by 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje at Tashi Chophel Ling monastery (Yufeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



The five-hundred year old Camellia Tree, said to have been planted by 8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje

Next place after the temple was a walk uphill to the five-hundred year old Camellia tree. Even though it was a sunny day and mid-morning, I was still the only person visiting.



151 The famed 500 year old Camellia tree at Yufeng Temple (Tashi Chopel Ling). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



152 Sign way (in English and Chinese) up to the famed 500 year old Camellia tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

One of the most visited and stunning parts of the temple, for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, is its 500 year old 10,000 blossoms camellia. It is said that this tree was planted between 1465 and 1487 during the Ming Dynasty before the temple was built. The monk told me that it was a tree planted and blessed by the 8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje (and was certainly visited by him when he came to the area as a boy). Its blossoming period lasts more than 100 days a year, and produces more than 20,000 flowers in 20 groups, each group over 1,000 flowers. One blossom is about 17cm in diameter.

The best time to experience the ravishing views of Yufeng Temple is in late spring and early summer, because the famous camellia tree is in full blossom during the period. It is said to be a combination of

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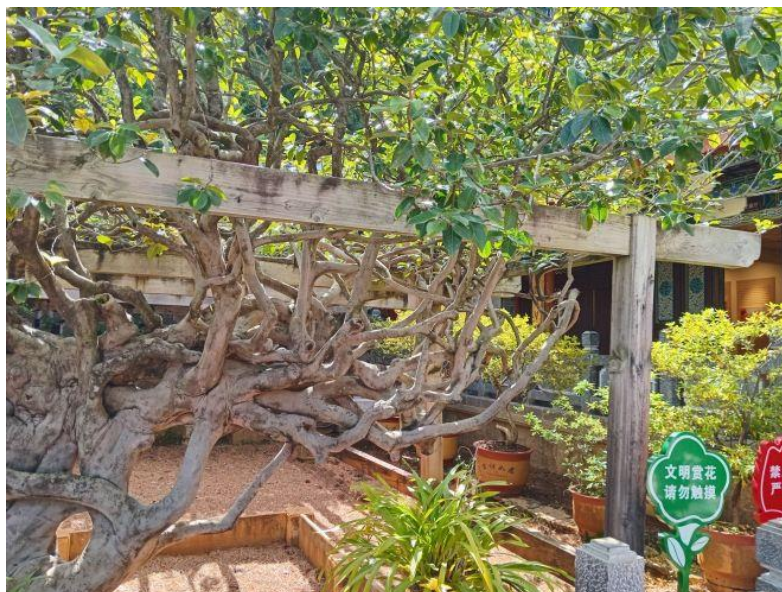


two different breeds of camellia. They were engrafted in one tree and now have grown into a huge tree with the crown shading the whole courtyard. In the eyes of the Naxi, Camellia is the symbol of true love. Naxi young lovers that want to die for their love in Yunshanpin of Jade Dragons snow Mountain will come to Yufeng Temple to take a look at the great Camellia. This tree is believed to have a magical power to persuade the young lovers to cherish their lives and enjoy happy life in real world.

I arrived in the rainy season so no blooms for me! However, it was still magical to see in the sunlight and I did three kora of it. Here are my photos. I also share a photo someone else took of the tree in full bloom. Another day another trip for me perhaps! There were two Chinese guards watching the tree and courtyard as I did kora, they seemed friendly enough, I smiled and said Hello in Chinese and they smiled and greeted me back. Here are some photos I took of the tree and the surrounding area:



153 The famed 500 year old Camellia tree at Yufeng Temple (Tashi Chophel Ling). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



154 The famed 500 year old Camellia tree at Yufeng Temple (Tashi Chophel Ling). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)







158 Statue of an old man (I do not know who this is) and a photo of the Camellia tree in full bloom. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



159 On the way up to the Camellia tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



160 Room next to the ancient tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



161 Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



162 Room next to the ancient tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





163 View from the old Camellia tree. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



164 The Temple Camellia Tree in full bloom. Photographer unknown.

## Chapter Four

### THE STATE OF "SHANGRI-LA" AND "LITTLE POTALA" (GANDEN SUMTSEN LING): A Visit to Shangri-La, Dechen, Tibet, the 5th Dalai Lama's 'Little Potala', Big Buddha monastery, Cultural Museum and Huge Prayer Wheel (Shangri-La pilgrimage, Part 4)

"Shakabpa writes of the era of Phagmo Dru rule of Tibet under Tai Situ, Changchub Gyaltsen: "During his time, the country was so secure that it was said that an old woman carrying a sackful of gold could pass without fear from one end of Tibet to the other; thus, this period of internal security was known as the era of Genmo Serkhor ("Old Woman Carrying Gold")."

"In the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, all the terlung sections found in the discovered terma texts [of Guru Padmasambhava] contained the same prediction: one day the Yellow (Gelug) sect would invite the evil Mongolian armies into Tibet, destroy the genuine Dharma and ultimately bring about the downfall of Tibet."

"The meeting between the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Chinese emperor began a relationship between the Chinese imperial court and Tibet that would eventually lead to the Qing government's interference in Tibetan political affairs and even in the religious affairs of the Gelugpa. Later in the 18th century, Tibet became subject to Qing's laws and edicts. China stationed troops in Lhasa, and a Chinese amban exercised authority over the Tibetan government. The Qing rule of Tibet continued until the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and today forms an important basis for China's claim on Tibet." –14<sup>th</sup> Zhamarpa in *Golden Swan*

#### Introduction

In this fourth chapter, I describe the next stage of my trip after a few days in Kunming and Lijiang, to Shangri-la, a town in the Dechen (Chinese: Deqin) Tibetan Autonomous region. The popularity of James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* (1933), which introduced Shangri-La is said have been written on an inspirational theme of "the Tibetan Buddhist Scriptures, where human beings, animals, and nature lived in harmony under the rule of a Tibetan". The Chinese authorities changed the name of Zhongdian County to Shangri-La County in 2001. The earlier names were – the Zhongdian (建塘镇 *Jiàntáng Zhèn*), and Gyalthang (Tib. རྒྱལ་ཐང་) of the town which has a predominantly Tibetan population.

Although the nature surrounding the area was spectacular, the 'human' created' part of it was clean and developed, but it had become very 'touristy', in particular at the Gelugpa monasteries there. Nowhere was this more on show than the 'Little Potala' built by the 'victorious' Gelugpas/5th Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century after they had destroyed all the Karma Kagyu shedras and monasteries, slaughtered thousands of innocent Tibetans (including the King of Tsang), and even tried to murder the 10th Karmapa who fled into exile.

In this post, I will give some brief historical background of Tibetan political and spiritual rule both prior to and after the Mongolian invasion and the 5th Dalai Lama rule. I will describe some of the tragically petty and ego-driven events (perceived insults in terms of 'respect') leading up to Gelugpa paranoia, mistrust (and plain old aggression) of the 7-9th Karmapa's power and good standing not only in Tibet, but with Chinese and Mongolian leaders. In particular, the actions of the 4th Dalai Lama's Gelugpa



administrator, Sonam Chopel (1595–1657), stand out as particularly malevolent and influential in the use of the Mongolian military in Tibet.

Surprisingly, in the 21st Century, many Tibetans (and their 'woke' 'Orientalist' allies in the US and North America) seem to be cluelessly unaware (or wilfully ignorant) about this historical time period and what actually happened to Tibet and the other main Tibetan Buddhist lineages. The Tibetans that are fully aware of it and speak out about it, such as Gedun Chopel, are shunned, isolated and silenced via social intimidation and defamation as 'Chinese spies'. In that respect, the 'victors' narrative has been very successful even in exile of convincing people that the Mongolian imposed institution of the Dalai Lama was good for Tibet and Tibetans, when the actual reality is, and has been, the opposite.

In sum, it is clear, is that the Gelugpa-incited violence was very much politically motivated, and one-sided and not a civil war as some biased western and Tibetan scholars have suggested. Nor was it some kind of grand beneficial scheme to unify Tibet. It was an all-out foreign invasion of Mongolian army who took over Tibet, murdered thousands of Tibetans, including the Tibetan king of Tsang who had been imprisoned.

The oppression, destruction, murder and chaos caused by the Gelugpas and invading Mongolian army is only just starting to be revealed. For example, scholars are now writing more about the censorship and banning of texts and philosophical views such as Zhentong Madhyamika, and the stealing and sealing up of those texts. The 17th Karmapa recently spoke about how [all the Karma Kagyu shedras in central Tibet were destroyed](#) by the Gelugpas/Mongolians and were never allowed to be re-established until post-1959 in exile. I will explain more about historical accounts of what happened to the 10th Karmapa in particular, in the next post.

Karma often works in not so mysterious ways though, and the 'Little Potala' monastery established by the 5th Dalai Lama, is now nothing more than a profit-making mass tourist (Tibetan Buddhist Disneyland) attraction. Although it is said to currently accommodate in its rebuilt structures 700 monks in 200 associated houses, I did not see any monastics there at all. Nor did I see any prayer rituals or Dharma activity while there. It seemed to be more of a museum where masses of people dressed in Tibetan national dress were bussed in and endless rounds of photographs with professional photographers hired for the day to take self-portrait photos. The energy of the place did not feel spiritual at all, and in fact almost 'oppressive' in terms of the mass tourism and lack of authenticity. However, this seemed to be also a karmic (as opposed to Chinese issue), as the five main Karma Kagyu monasteries were nothing like that at all. There were few tourists, no entrance fees, even though in many ways they were more beautiful and authentic.

I also visited the main 'Big Buddha' (Jokhang) Buddhist temple in the city centre of Shangri-la itself (also a Gelugpa one and again a tourist attraction) as well as one of the biggest prayer wheels in the world next to it (see photos below). There was not a photo of the 14th Dalai Lama in sight. However, the museum there, which also housed some stunning artefacts from the Tibetan Buddhist sites, exhibited huge 'propaganda' thangkas showing the yellow hat Gelugpas bowing down to and collaborating with the Chinese Red Army guard, none of which portrayed the Dalai Lama. There was a thangka studio in Lijiang run by a Chinese artist where I saw such large scale propaganda thangkas being painted hung up alongside thangkas of Tara and Buddha. I did not see any such thangkas like that of the Karma Kagyu or other lineages. In fact, the thangka I saw next to that one was one of the Karma Kagyu refuge tree, with all the Karmapas present.

At night time, the main Shangri la square in front of the 'Big Buddha' monastery was beautifully lit up, and there were pop music concerts and abundant food stalls and restaurants open. On my final night

there, I saw a round of Tibetan dancers (most dressed in normal daily clothes) dancing. It was a testament to the resilience of the local Tibetans there, but perhaps also to the tragedy of what happens to a people and culture when they lose contact with authentic Dharma, and culture is seen as how one looks, dresses and dances. In that respect Tibetans are no different from other cultures suffering under the overwhelming 'religion' of global capitalism and mass consumption (see video [here](#)).

Dedicated to the memory and courage of all those murdered by the invading Gelugpa/Mongolian forces, and to the rightful return of texts and monastic land and property stolen by them, to freedom for Tibetans in Tibet, as well as harmonious relations between India, China and Tibet.

Music? [Can You Hear Me?](#) གློ་མཚན་འདུག་གསལ། by Tibetan exile musician and rapper GTashi (featuring K.Kush).

Written and compiled by Adele Tomlin, 24th July 2024.



## A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GELUG RISE TO TOTAL POWER IN TIBET: PERCEIVED PETTY INSULTS AND MALE EGOISM

In this section/article I will focus on some of the key political and social events in Tibet from the rule of Tai Situpa, Jangchub Gyeltsen onwards to the invasion and takeover of Tibet by the Mongolian military/Gelugpas. Then, how this event, followed by the 5th Dalai Lama's new political relationship with the Qing Dynasty Chinese Emperor marked a new and different era in Tibetan politics, that karmically led to its ultimate downfall, with the Chinese gaining greater influence and control over Tibet as a result of the Gelugpa actions.

Safe as an old woman carrying gold (Genmo Serkho): Secular rule for three centuries from the time of Tai Situpa, Changchub Gyeltsen



165 Tai Situ, Jangchub Gyeltsen (1302-1364)

As the 14th Zhamarpa describes in his 2012 book, *Golden Swan in Turbulent Waters*" (a translation of the 10th Karmapa's autobiographical accounts, and the important *Moonstone Mala* historical account by 8th Tai Situpa and Belo) from the 14th Century time of the Phagmo Dru dynasty led by Tai Situpa, Jangchub Gyeltsen, secular rule in Tibet was peaceful and lasted almost three centuries:

"In the early 1300's, Jangchub Gyeltsen (1302-1364) became the head of the myriarchy of Phagmo Dru, or Phagdru Kagyu. The Mongolian Khan Toghan Temur (r. 1333-1368, the last emperor of the Yuan Dynasty) gave him the Chinese title "Tai Situ," an honorary title roughly equivalent in status to prime minister. He was then known as Tai Situ Jangchub Gyeltsen. By the mid-1300's, the Sakya rule of Tibet had weakened considerably due to government corruption. Over the period 1354-1358, Tai Situ Jangchub Gyeltsen successfully overthrew the government and its corrupt ministers and became head of the Tibetan government. During his rise to power, Jangchub Gyeltsen did not align himself with any foreign military power.

Soon after taking power as the first ruler of the Phagmo Drupa or Phagdru Dynasty, Tai Situ Jangchub Gyeltsen reformed and reorganized the government. He abolished the myriarchy system in which the majority of heads/patriarchs were Kagyupa lamas and replaced it with a secular dzong system rather like the fiefdoms of medieval Europe."

"It came to an end when the Mongolian warlord Gushri Khan invaded Tibet and took power there from 1639-1642. He established the Fifth Dalai Lama as the supreme authority over all of Tibet in 1642. The Fifth Dalai Lama's rise to power occurred during the lifetime of the Tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje who was inadvertently caught up in the turbulence of the time...

Shakabpa (the modern Tibetan historian) writes of Tai Situ, Jangchub Gyaltzen: "During his time, the country was so secure that it was said that an old woman carrying a sackful of gold could pass without fear from one end of Tibet to the other; thus, this period of internal security was known as the era of Genmo Serkhor ("Old Woman Carrying Gold")."

### The termas of Guru Padmasambhava and the predictions regarding the malevolent influence of Gelugpas and the Mongolians on Tibet and Buddha Dharma



166 Painting of Guru Padmasambhava by the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

The 14th Zhamarpa explains that:

"In the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, all the terlung sections found in the discovered terma texts contained the same prediction: one day the Yellow (Gelug) sect would invite the evil Mongolian armies into Tibet, destroy the genuine Dharma and ultimately bring about the downfall of Tibet...

Rather than pay heed to the warnings, some Gelugpas were angry with the tertön lamas and tried to discredit them. "Tertons are fakes. How can the Dharma come from rocks?" they declared. They felt that some termas intentionally criticized their sect."

Little did they know then (or even now) that Guru Padmasambhava's predictions would indeed come true. According to the *Moonstone Mala* historical text:

"Once he (Ogyen Guru Rinpoche) predicted what would become of the four Kagyu sects when the birth or emanation of Lord Tsangpa Lhayimetog- the Fifth Dalai Lama of the Gelug sect- took place. The Karma sect (Karma Kagyu) would be like a cushion; on the other hand, the Taglung (meaning land of the tiger) Kagyu sect would preserve its stripes; the Drigung (dri means female yak) Kagyu's horn would be broken; and the Drugpa (dru means dragon) Kagyu would find its own future."

In one way or another these predictions came true. Tibet's downfall under Chinese rule arose due to the 5th Dalai Lama's new relation with the Qing Emperor shortly after his taking both spiritual and political power in Tibet. Also, for example, the Drugpa Kagyu, booted out of Tibet and Ladakh by the Mongolians/Gelugpas, went on to found Bhutan and banned the Gelugpas from ever going there and setting up monasteries, for more on that see [here](#).



## The Jokhang monastic quarters expansion incident: Gelugpa monks attack and destroy the 7th Karmapa's plans for residence at Jokhang temple for Vinaya vow holding monks



167 The Jowo Buddha statue in Lhasa, Tibet in the Jokhang temple. Gelug monks from Drepung and Sera monastery demolished building work there by the 7th Karmapa for Vinaya-holding monastic residences.

The next petty event that was said to have created tension between the Gelugpas and the Karmapas/Karma Kagyu, was the Gelugpa wrong perception that they owned and controlled the sacred Jokhang Temple in Tibet, and that the 7th Karmapa's plans to expand the monks' residence there was an intrusion into *their* territory.

As a result, some Gelugpa monks actively destroyed the building work for the new residences there. Despite this wanton vandalism and destruction, it is said that many urged the 7th Karmapa to punish the Gelugpa monks but he refused to do so. In fact, "Quite to the contrary, the Karmapa let the unruly monks go free without a trial or even a reprimand." (*Golden Swan* (2012))

## A perceived insult to the 3rd Dalai Lama: 9th Karmapa not standing up to greet him



168 The Ninth Karmapa (1555-1603) who is said not to have arisen from his throne when the 3rd Dalai Lama visited him at Tsurphu monastery in the 16th Century.

The next 'crack ' in Gelug-Karma Kagyu relations also defies belief at the petty worldliness of some of the Gelug attendants around the 3rd and 4th Dalai Lamas:

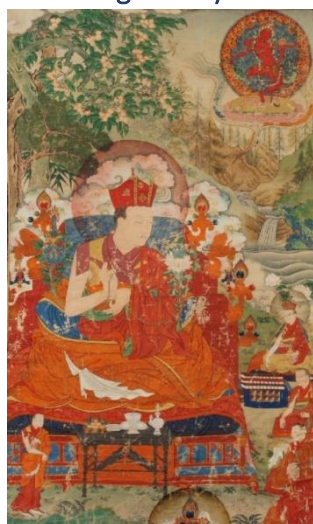
"At one point - the exact year is unknown - the Third Dalai Lama went to see the Ninth Karmapa (1555-1603) and the Fifth Sharmapa at Tsurphu Monastery. The two Karma Kagyu masters

followed customary protocol and received him according to his rank. The Ninth Karmapa remained seated on his throne, while the Fifth Shamarpa rose and stood on his throne.

However, some of the Third Dalai Lama's administrators chose to interpret the fact that neither Karmapa nor Shamarpa came down from their thrones to receive the Dalai Lama as a great insult to their spiritual master. Those administrators used this to drive a wedge between the two sects."

It is said that the Gelugpa administrators then actively hindered and blocked any communication or resolution between the 4th Dalai Lama and the Karma Kagyu lamas. This active blocking was "condemned by key figures of the time - the Fifth Dalai Lama and the chief abbot of the Gaden Monastery (Gaden Thri Rinpoche Konchog Chopel) and Kharnag Lotsa- as well as by the modern scholar Shakabpa."

**The Sixth Zhamarpa's Prophetic Verses on a Scarf, the Mongolian looting of Karmapa's horse ranch and a full on Mongolian invasion instigated by the Gelug administrators**



169 6th Zhamarpa, Chokyi Wangchuk (1584-1629)

Just when you think the petty politics of Gelugpas could not get any more juvenile and egoistic, there is another perceived 'insult' of the 4th Dalai Lama, this time contained in some poetic prediction penned by the 6th Zhamarpa (according to the *Moonstone Mala* historical text):

"Not long after the possible meeting with the Fourth Dalai Lama was thwarted by the schemes of his aides, the Sixth Shamarpa visited Lhasa. At the Jokhang Temple, he offered a white scarf to the Buddha, on which he had written predictions in a series of poems. Later, when the Fourth Dalai Lama's administrators found out about these poems, they selectively picked out just two verses as follow:

"At the three cities of Zhag, Ti, Drag,  
where Je Choying [10th Karmapa] was like a deer in the field  
why lock horns with him?  
Jowo Buddha, you know this should not happen.

The earring of the ear,  
not as long as the measure of a half-finger,  
Dakini Publications (2024)



will one day extend to a length  
even Lord Shiva cannot reach.  
What to do then?  
Jowo Buddha, you know this should not happen."

The Gelugpa administrators, such as Sonam Chopel, by falsely charging that the Sixth Shamarpa's poem was insulting and threatening to the Gelug sect, then incited Mongolians to loot Karmapa's horse ranch. When the Tsang government sent troops to repel the attackers, animosity naturally grew on both sides. Just as Shakabpa observed, those Gelug administrators "destroyed the well-being of Dharma and society in Tibet." Thus it seems that

"...because the meeting between the Sixth Shamarpa and the Fourth Dalai Lama was thwarted, the hostility toward the Karmapa and Karma Kagyu harbored by Sonam Chopel and other Gelug administrators aligned with him festered. Sonam Chopel eventually invited the Mongol Gushri Khan to invade Tibet in 1639. That war won by the Mongol warlord resulted in a Tibetan religious leader, namely the Fifth Dalai Lama, becoming the country's political ruler. Tibet's religious and political powers were unified in the hands of one person after three centuries when they had been divided during the rule of Phagdru, Rinpung, and Tsang [1]."  
(*Golden Swan* (2012))

The Mongolian invasion destroyed and stole many monasteries of Nyingma, Kagyu and Jonang and ultimately led to the total demise of Tibet under Chinese rule.

### The 5th Dalai Lama and the Qing Chinese Emperor The beginning of the end for Tibet



*170 Scenes from the Life of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) An eighteenth century painting of The Fifth Dalai Lama pictured with major scenes from his life. The meeting with the Qing Emperor is included in this painting.*

Ironically, and tragically for many Tibetans who see the 14th Dalai Lama as their Tibetan hero and saviour, it was the meeting and relationship of the 5th Dalai Lama with the Qing Chinese Emperor Shunzhi in 1652 (at the invitation of the Emperor who built a palace for him to stay in) that led to the ultimate demise of Tibet and subsequent Chinese claims of ownership. Thus proving correct the terma predictions by Guru Padmasambhava:

"For the first time since the end of the Yuan Dynasty in the 14th century, a Tibetan political leader travelled to the Chinese court and established a direct personal relationship with a

Chinese emperor. A few religious leaders of different sects did visit the Ming court, but their relationships with the emperors were not political. To be sure, Tibetan heads of state during the Ming Dynasty sent tribute missions to China, but they did not appear in person. Ming emperors bestowed titles on Tibetan rulers and gave them seals (a sign of authority), which they could use to bolster their prestige and legitimacy.

Nevertheless, unlike the situation in the Yuan Dynasty, Ming China did not exert control of Tibet. After Changchub Gyaltsen (1302-1364) came to power in Tibet until after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama- which covered the period from the end of the Yuan Dynasty until the first decades of the Qing rule in China - the Chinese court did not interfere with an independent Tibet.

The meeting between the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Chinese emperor began a relationship between the Chinese imperial court and Tibet that would eventually lead to the Qing government's interference in Tibetan political affairs and even in the religious affairs of the Gelugpa. Later in the 18th century, Tibet became subject to Qing's laws and edicts. China stationed troops in Lhasa, and a Chinese amban exercised authority over the Tibetan government. The Qing rule of Tibet continued until the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and today forms an important basis for China's claim on Tibet." (*Golden Swan* (2012)



*171 5th Dalai Lama having an audience with Shunzhi Emperor of Qing dynasty.*

An opinion which the historical facts support and other scholars attest. The Dzungar Khanate invaded Tibet in 1717 and was subsequently expelled by the Qing in 1720. The Qing emperors then appointed imperial residents known as *ambans* to Tibet, most of them ethnic Manchus, that reported to the Lifan Yuan, a Qing government body that oversaw the empire's frontier. Chinese authorities referred to Tibet as a vassal state up until the 1950s, and then as an "integral" part of China.



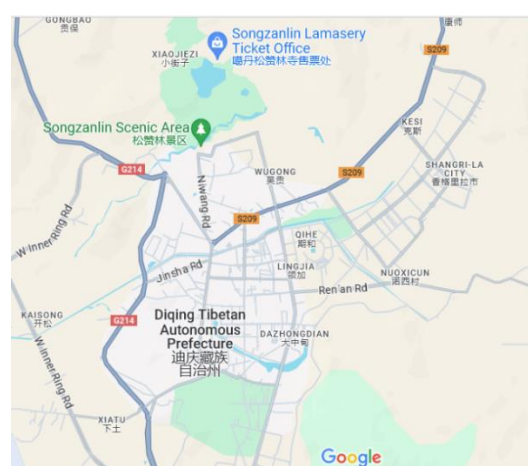
According to Jaques Gernet, the Qing gained a firm hold over Tibet in 1751, although as a protectorate, Tibet retained a large amount of internal authority. Melvyn Goldstein states there is "no question" that Tibet was subordinate to the Qing dynasty following the first decades of the 18th century. Meanwhile, Elliot Sperling says that after the Sino-Nepalese War (1788–1792), Tibet's subordination to the Qing was "beyond dispute" and that one of the memoirs of a Tibetan minister involved in the war states unambiguously that he was a subject of the Qing emperor. The Golden Urn system of selecting reincarnations was instituted by the Qing, and real authority over Tibet was wielded by its offices and officials. However, for most of the 19th century this authority was weak. After the death of the 8th Dalai Lama, Jamphel Gyatso in 1804, the Dalai Lamas did not exercise any real power for the next 70 years, during which monk regents reigned with the support of the Qing.

Although the 13th Dalai Lama managed to wrestle back some power from the Chinese in the 19th Century, this was short-lived and in 1959 the Chinese communists (with the support of many progressive Tibetans, like Gedun Chopel who wanted the Ganden government removed from absolute power there) violently booted out the ruling Gelugpas in a manner not that dissimilar to how the Mongolians booted out and destroyed the Karmapa and Karma Kagyu, Jonang, Nyingma and Drugpa Kagyu. The tables had truly turned on the Gelugpas in the most obvious and horrific way possible, although it seems they have yet to see it as a karmic result at all.

## B. VISITING SHANGRI-LA: LITTLE POTALA, BIG BUDDHA TEMPLE AND THE HUGE PRAYER WHEEL

Getting There: Shangri-la train station with Tibetan-style architecture and huge white stupa

Shangri-la is located on the famous Southern Silk Road, which originates in Sichuan province in the north, crosses Yunnan province and goes to Vietnam. It is 198 kilometres (123 mi) to the northwest of Lijiang in the Dechen Tibetan Autonomous Region and well connected by road and air with other major cities in Yunnan and Sichuan.



172 Map of Shangri-la. The Songsangling monastery (Little Potala) can be seen here north of the main city, in the Dechen Tibetan region.

I got the super-fast bullet train to Shangri-la from Lijiang, which took only one hour (ticket one way around 6 GBP). Below is a photo of the 'Tibetan-style' architecture at the new, modern and well-

organised train station and huge white stupa nearby. My internet connection (China Unicom) stopped working several times I was in China, including on my first day after spending 100 RMB for 30 days and over 60 GB. I had wanted to buy China Mobile but there was no place to buy that at the Kunming airport. Thankfully, I was able to use my other SIM card for international roaming. When I arrived at the train station, my internet connection did not work, I could not use the taxi app and my phone battery was almost finished, so I asked a young Chinese guy (and his friend ) who had spoken to me in English on the train if I could share their taxi to the old town, which he agreed. While in the taxi, he told me he was on holiday from his training as a member of the Secret Service police!

I first spent some time in the town of Shangri-la visiting the Big Buddha temple, huge prayer wheel next to it, and the cultural museum. These were all situated in the main square (see photos below). Other than the huge prayer wheel and the Buddhist artefacts in the museum there was very little actual 'Dharma'/religious activity to see there though.



173 Tibetan style architecture and Vajrayana symbols at the Shangri-la train station. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



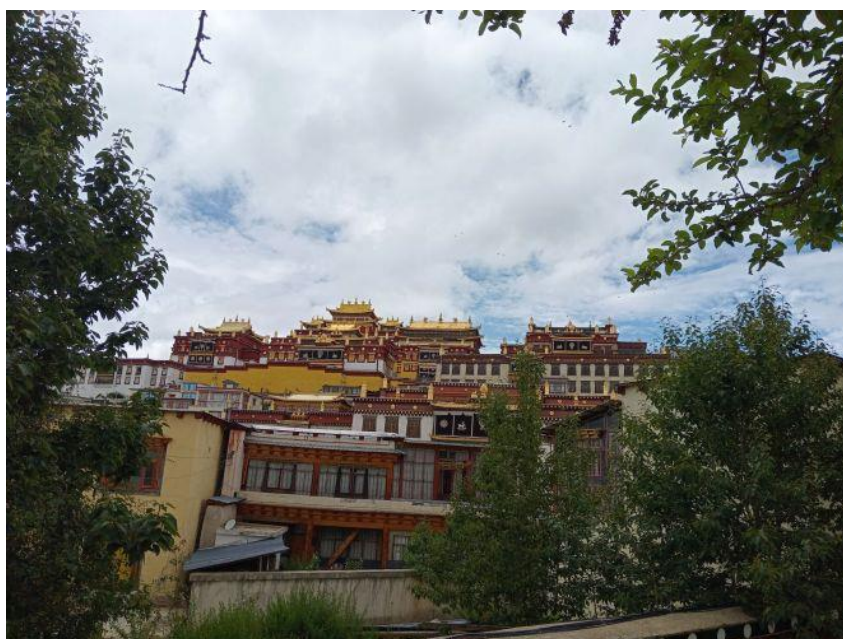
174 Huge white Tibetan Buddhist stupa next to the Shangri-la train station. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





175 Billboard at Shangri-la train station in Chinese and Tibetan. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024

### The Ganden Sumtsenling Monastery (Little Potala)



176 The Ganden Sumtsenling monastery (དགའ་ལྷན་གླུ་མ་ཆེན་གླིང་, 松赞林寺 Sōngzànlín Sì) established in 1679 by the Mongolian-imposed Gelugpa authorities. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

The Ganden Sumtsenling monastery (དགའ་ལྷན་གླུ་མ་ཆེན་གླིང་, 松赞林寺 Sōngzànlín Sì), is situated 5 kilometres (3.1 mi) from the city of Shangri-la at elevation 3,380 metres (11,090 ft) in Yunnan province, China (the capital of the Dechen Tibetan Autonomous Region). Built in 1679, by the Gelugpa sect at the bidding of the 5th Dalai Lama, the monastery is the said to be the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Yunnan province and is sometimes referred to as the *Little Potala Palace* due to its being based on the style of the Potala Palace in Lhasa.

Its architecture is a fusion of the Tibetan and Han Chinese. It was extensively damaged in the Cultural Revolution and subsequently rebuilt in 1983; at its peak, the monastery contained accommodation for 2,000 monks. The entrance gate is at the foot of the hill and provides access to the main hall of the monastery through 146 steps. In the 24 April 1936, it is said the monastery had provided full support to the Communist general He Long who passed through this area during his campaign. However, the monastery was partially destroyed in 1959.

Here are some photos I took of my short trip there on the 7th July 2024 (the day after the 14th Dalai Lama's birthday). Unlike photos of the Karmapas at the Karma Kagyu monasteries in Lijiang, there were no photos of the Dalai Lamas anywhere. I was the only foreigner there and did not stay long, the energy of the place was kind of depressing and crowded and the tourists posing for photographs in Tibetan national costume for hours at a times, rather sad indeed.

For example, one Han Chinese woman in full Tibetan costume and make-up (who did not speak a word of Tibetan) shouted at me when I accidentally brushed past her photographer's shoulder (they were both taking up the whole pathway for many minutes getting the pose right). When I asked her whether she was Tibetan she replied that she was not, but that Tibet is part of China so the monastery was Chinese. Even though I was the only foreigner visiting there, she also shouted something in English about 'white privilege'. The irony of this incident to a 'white woman' who has spent the last fifteen years of her life in India and Nepal on self-funded studying, translating and promoting the Tibetan language for the Buddha Dharma, by a such a Chinese woman in front of the biggest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in that Tibetan region was so strange, it was almost comical. I quickly left as it felt like a bit of a 'demonic' attack, and the monastery itself clearly has a lot of 'unaired' historical demons, and was paying a karmic result for them too.



177 Information about Ganden Sumtsen Ling (Little Potala) in Chinese and Tibetan. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





178 As in Lijiang, there was a lot of women (and men) most of whom (if not all) were Han Chinese and not Tibetan) dressed up in national costume and make-up spending hours taking photos of themselves at these Tibetan Buddhist temples and sites. Photo: Adele

Here are some photos of the short bus trip up to the monastery itself. It was well-organised and as the bus dropped us off, the many Chinese speaking tourists in Tibetan national dress began to take photos of themselves in front of the monastery:



179 On the way to Ganden Sumtsen Ling (Little Potala). Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



180 On the way to Ganden Sumtsen Ling (Little Potala). Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

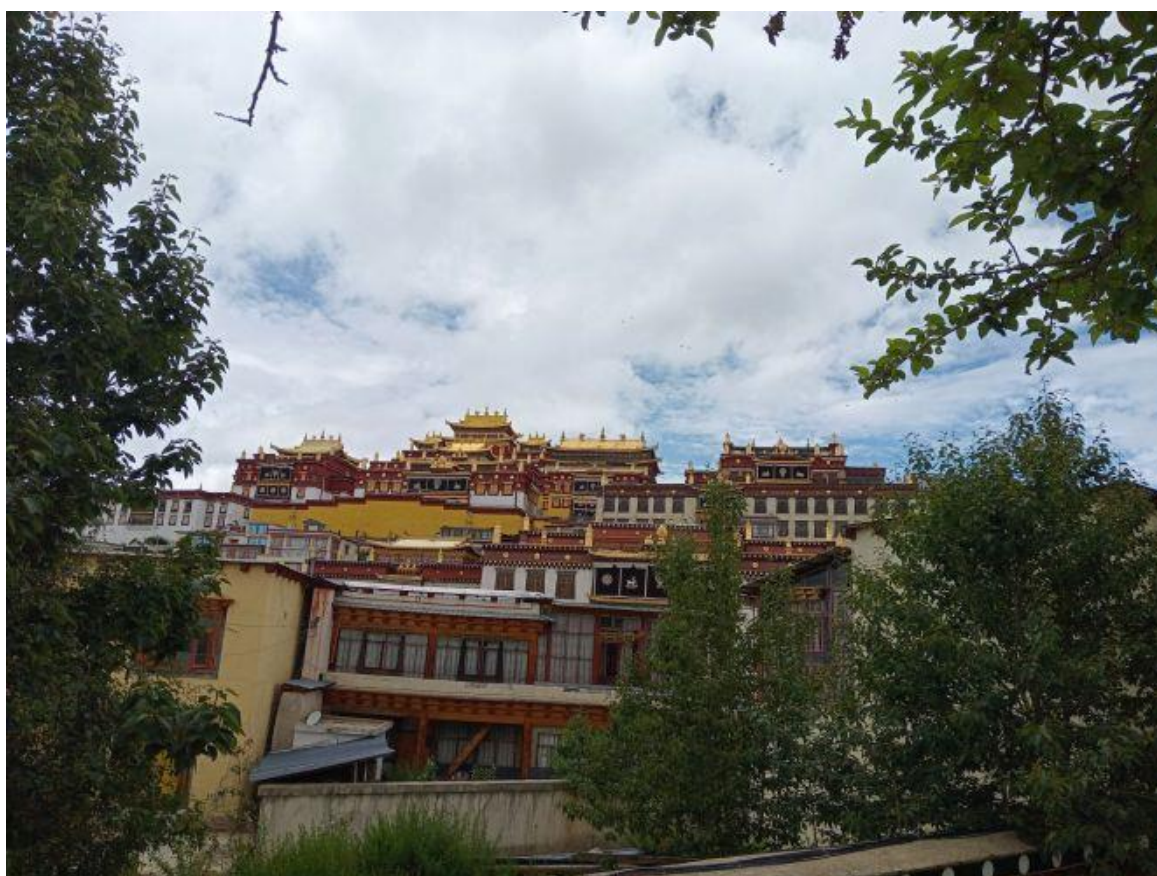


181 On the way to Ganden Sumtsen Ling (Little Potala). The name of the monastery is given in Tibetan and Chinese. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





182 On the way to Ganden Sumtsen Ling (Little Potala). Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



183 Arriving at the foot of Ganden Sumtsen Ling (Little Potala). Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



184 Outside Ganden Sumtsen Ling. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



185 Many Han Chinese women came dressed in Tibetan national costume to take photos in front of the monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024





186 Walking up towards the Ganden Sumtsen Ling monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



187 Information panel about the monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



188 Outside the main temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





189 Art mural outside the entrance way of one of the buildings at Ganden Sumtsen Ling. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



190 Inside one of the main temples. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

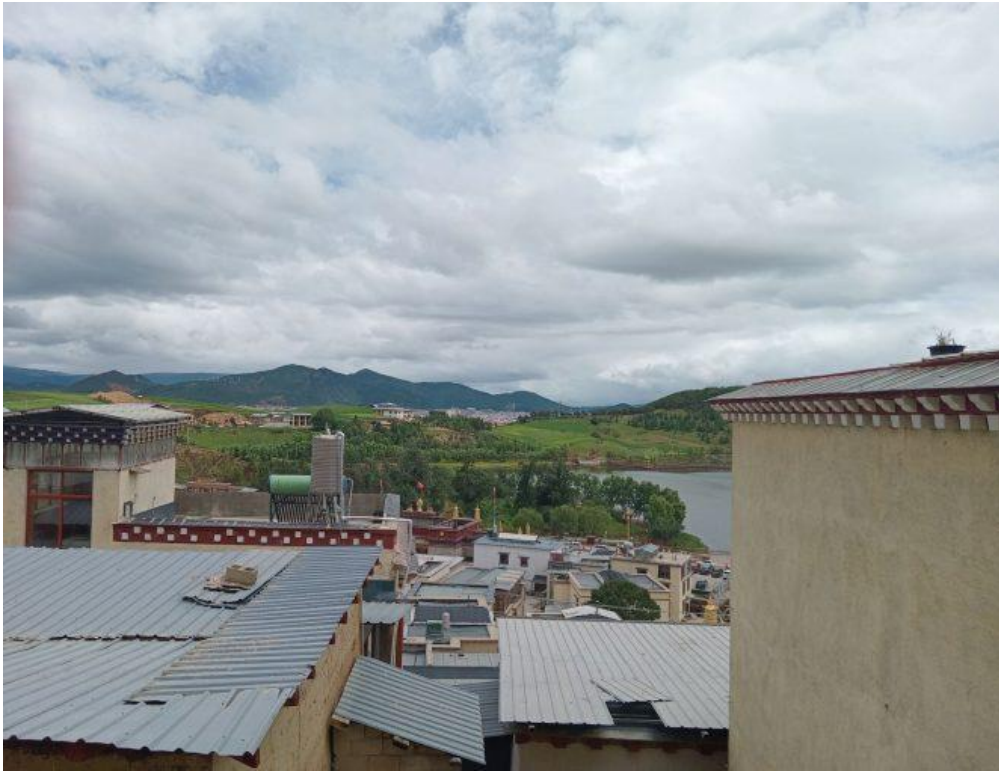


191 Art mural outside the entrance way of one of the buildings at Ganden Sumtsen Ling. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



192 View down the steps from the monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024





193 View from the Ganden Sumtsen Ling monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



194 View from the Ganden Sumtsen Ling monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



195 View from the Ganden Sumtsen Ling monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



196 View from the Ganden Sumtsen Ling monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024





197 View of Shangri-la city from the monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



198 The people in national Tibetan dress were generally not Tibetans. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024





199 On the steps at the monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



## Scenes from the City: Big Buddha Temple, Huge Prayer Wheel and Culture Museum in Shangri-la City



200 A stuffed yak outside some of the shops.



201 Shops in Shangri-la city. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



202 Shangri-la city. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



203 Shangri-la city square lit up at night, the Big Buddha temple, Cultural Museum and Prayer wheel are lit up. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





204 When I arrived in Shangri-la a stunning white bird type cloud (dove or crow?) was visible in the sky at sunset. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



205 When I arrived in Shangri-la a stunning white bird type cloud (dove or crow?) was visible in the sky at sunset. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



206 Shangri-la City Centre Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



207 Kalachakra symbol. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





208 The Big Buddha temple on the hill. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



209 Main City square at the foot of the Big Buddha temple and huge Prayer Wheel. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





210 Big Buddha temple. Photos were not allowed inside. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



211 Information panel at the foot of the monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024





212 View from the hill. It was a cloudy and rainy day. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



213 Information panel. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



214 Big Buddha temple. Photos were not allowed inside. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



215 Big Buddha temple. Photos were not allowed inside. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





216 Huge Prayer Wheel next to the Big Buddha temple. I did some kora while there with other people. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



217 Huge Prayer Wheel next to the Big Buddha temple. I did some kora while there with other people. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



218 Building style in Shangri-la. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



219 Building style in Shangri-la. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





220 Building style in Shangri-la. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



221 Shangri-la city stupas. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



Several huge thangka style paintings were on display in the main cultural museum in Shangri-la of the yellow hat Gelugpas bowing down to and co-operating with the Chinese. There were no thangkas like that of other lineages such as Karma Kagyu and Karmapas. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



222 Huge thangka style paintings depicting relations between the Gelugpas and Chinese. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





223 Huge thangka style paintings depicting relations between the Gelugpas and Chinese. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



224 Huge thangka style paintings depicting relations between the Gelugpas and Chinese. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



*225 Shangri-la city stupas. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*

Chinese women dressed in full national Tibetan costume spent hours in Shangri-la and Lijiang having self-portrait photos taken with professional photographers. It seemed to be rather an obsession in the area.

## Endnotes

[1] Regarding the Sixth Shamarpa's poem on a scarf, Shakabpa writes of the nonsensical interpretations by the Fourth Dalai Lama's administrators:

"Then the administrators of the Dalai Lama made silly judgments about this poem....There was not one word that was insulting to the Gelug sect, but they (the Dalai Lama's administrators) construed the poem as threatening to their sect. Although they were not intelligent, the administrators acted as if they were. They took revenge by requesting the Mongolians to loot the Karmapa's horse ranch. This event is known to be the basis for the destruction of the well-being of Dharma and Tibetan society.



## Chapter Five

'SEEING' THE WHITE PEAK OF KHAWA KARPO (ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ་) MOUNTAIN: Visiting Khawa Karpo the highest mountain range in Dechen, Tibetan region, overview of the 'opening' of the Tibetan pilgrimage site by the Karmapas, the 3rd Karmapa's Praises to it as a Chakrasamvara mandala and personal experience

“This Khawa Karpo, the tsen of the Rong [country], is the palace of both, mundane and transcendental deities. There is even a pilgrimage guide (lam yig) of [Mount] Khawa Karpo, the tsen of the Rong [country]. རྩོད་བཙན་ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ་གངས་རི་དེ་ཡི་ཞེས་པ་དན་མ་འཛིན་རྟེན་པ་རྣམས་ཡི་ཞུས་ཡས་ཁང་དང་པོ་བྱང་ཡིན་པར་འདུས། རྩོད་བཙན་ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ་འཕམ་ཡིག་གཞིག་ཀྱང་ཡོད།”

“When you don’t know everything is in mind. Places – outside and in – aren’t much use.” ཐམས་ཅད་མཁས་ལུ་མ་ཞེས་ན། ཕྱི་ལྗང་བའི་ཡུལ་གེས་དགོས་པ་ཆུད།

--excerpts from writings of 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje

"In degenerate times, bodhisattvas  
Practising the essential accomplishment [siddhi]  
Should rely on the condition of support, solitude,  
As taught in accordance with the sūtras.  
The abodes of the rocky mountains and vast borderlands  
are praised everywhere as the twenty-four sites.  
Thus it was taught in the supreme tantras."  
--excerpt from *Praises to Khawa Karpo* by the 3rd Karmapa

“If you can generate a powerful effort in dark times, if you can stay in isolated places and dedicate yourself to dharma,  
then even though these are dark times, your qualities will be clarified. As the Buddha praised them, these (sites) will help you transform.”  
--3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje from *When I Met Ogyenpa in a Dream*

### Introduction

After the visit to Shangri-la city and the 5th Dalai Lama's Little Potala, I felt like going back to Lijiang. despite being on the road for months, I was becoming tired and weary as a solo, female traveller in foreign land, with an unreliable internet, very basic Chinese language skills and a still blocked bank card (meaning all my transactions had to be in cash, when most in China are on Wechat or Alipay). The creature comforts of Lijiang beckoned me again. I booked a train and hotel to return the following day.

However, after a good night's rest, I changed my mind. I realised that I may not get the chance again to visit Dechen, Tibet and the famed Khawa Karpo (ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ་) mountain again. Khawa Karpo at 6,740m is the highest mountain in Yunnan province and regarded as one of the most sacred mountains of Tibet by Tibetans. So I cancelled my train and hotel bookings and went to the bus station to take the five hour public bus to Dechen. As I boarded the bus a photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley was directly above the driver (see below for details of the trip). It was a great sign and I was glad I went there as it was an unforgettable trip of a lifetime. Even though it was rainy season and cloudy skies, the sun came out in the afternoon I arrived, enough to get a glimpse of the magnificent peaks of the mountain range.

Pilgrimage is about the energy of the place, previous masters who have been there and its sacred geography, and aspirations made there than beautiful photos to share with others though. Below is a record of my personal pilgrimage there.

First, I share historical information about the mountain itself, the importance of the 2nd and 3rd Karmapas in opening up the place/route as a pilgrimage site and the mandalisation of the mountain by the 3rd Karmapa in a praises he wrote while there. The 7th Karmapa also spent time in retreat there. I also share my own translation (with the original Tibetan) of some of the opening verses from *Praise to Khawa Karpo* by the 3rd Karmapa. I had planned to write and translate some of this text a couple of years ago when I first read about it, but things got in the way, as we say. Little did I know then, that I would be visiting the mountain in person. So here it finally is, this time with the blessings of the mountain itself!

I spontaneously penned my own poem/song to the mountain, which I have recorded with images and voice [here](#). As the 3rd Karmapa himself sang in his ode to the mountains, I conclude this introduction here with his words:

"I say these things, to encourage my own depressed mind.  
Even if there are no other listeners, to you, the empty sky, I speak." དེ་ལྟར་ངག་ཏུ་བརྗོད་པ་འདི་སྐྱོ་བའི་ཡིད་གྱིས་

རབ་བསྐྱེལ་ནས། གཞན་དག་ཉེན་པར་མི་འགྱུར་ཡང་། ནམ་མཁའ་སྒྲོང་བ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྒྲུས།

"For those who understand, may it be precious instruction. For those who don't understand, may it be enjoyable." གོ་བ་རྣམ་གྱིས་གདམ་དག་མཛོད། མ་གོ་བ་རྣམ་ཉམས་དགའ་མཛོད།

Music? Here is a Tibetan song called [Dechen Kawa Karpo](#) by Dukhar Gyal and the soundtrack for my trip there, the joyful (and yogic) [Mountains](#) by Prince, and [Long Distance](#) by Tibetan exile musician and rapper, GTashi.

Dedicated to the Gyalwang Karmapa, the Karma Kagyu and to all those 'mountain yogis' meditating in isolated places. May the light of your example, like the peak of Kawa Karpo, shine in the moon and sun of a clear, cloud-free space!

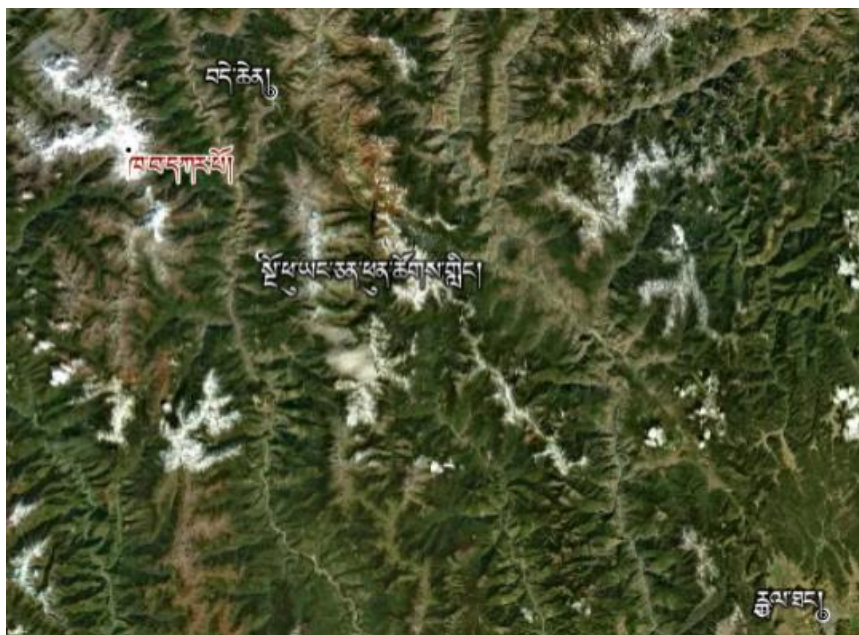
Written and compiled by Adele Tomlin, 27th July 2024.



## I: The History and Importance of Khawa Karpo as a major pilgrimage site and its connection to the Chakrasamvara Tantra and the Karmapas



226 Photograph of the Khawa Karpo mountain range on a clear, cloudless day. Photographer unknown.



227 Satellite map of the area with Tibetan place names. Khawa Karpo is in red. With Dechen town above it to the right.

Khawa Karpo is a mountain range that forms the divide between the Mekong and Salween river basins on the border between Yunnan and Tsawa Rong. In Chinese it is referred to as the Meili Snow mountain range, and is made up of 13 peaks, including several over 6,000m. The highest peak in the range is 6,740m Khawa Karpo which means “The White Snowy Mountain”, and most locals call the entire mountain range by this name. The surrounding region is home to monasteries of the Kagyu and Khatog tradition.

The Khawa Karpo mountain is said to be “unconquered”: various expeditions that tried to climb it in the 1980s and in the 1990s never reached the top due to difficult weather conditions. A major accident occurred in 1991 when a joint Sino-Japanese team of seventeen climbers perished, killed by an avalanche ([here is an article](#) I found about that tragedy). Buffetrille (2010: 198) writes that:

"Tibetans explain all these events as the result of Khawa Karpo's anger at the violation of his territory."

As I detail below, the Khawa Karpo became a major pilgrimage site for Tibetans, from the 14th century onwards, visited by both the second and third Karmapas who were said to have written the first pilgrimage travel guides 'path-guide' (lam-yig) and 'place-guide' (ney-yig) about the mountain. They wrote texts and praises about the mountain, as did the First Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye.



*228 Deity Chakrasamvara associated with the mount Khawa Karpo since the time of the 2nd and 3rd Karmapa.*

Khawa Karpo is also claimed to be one of “the twenty- four sites,” or pīṭha, that are associated with the Cakrasamvara Tantra. As chapter 4 explained, this tantra’s subjugation myth portrays these sites as the twenty- four places in which Cakrasamvara and his consort Vajravārāhī defeated the demonic gods Bhairava and Kālī, and in so doing replaced what were demonic maṇḍalas with awakened maṇḍalas. By the time the 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorjé arrived at Khawa Karpo, three of Tibet’s sacred mountains had already been re- visioned as pīṭha: Tsari as Cārita (or sometimes Devīkoṭṭa), Lachi as Godāvarī, and Kailash as Himavat.

Recently a modern pilgrimage guidebook with relevant rituals to perform at Mount Kawa Karpo in Yunnan, southeastern Tibet was written by Rinchen Dorje (20th cent.). This book also contains editions of the 3rd Karmapa and 7th Karmapa texts on the mountain mentioned below. There is said to be an English translation of this by Katia Buffetrille, but I have not seen it.





had died, Karma Pakshi went to live near Khawa Karpo, at Mount Pungri for eleven years, and reportedly amassed hundreds of students during this time. It was also while staying at Mount Pungri that he accumulated enough resources to begin repairs at the nearby Kampo Nénang, which had become derelict after Düsum Khyenpa's death."



230 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204-1283)

Written sources attribute the composition of a pilgrimage guide (gnas yig or lam yig) to both Karmapas. In his "Biography of Karma Pakshi", Rangjung Dorje writes (Buffetrille 2010):

"This Khawa Karpo, the tsen (btsan) of the Rong [country], is the palace of both, mundane and transcendental deities. There is even a pilgrimage guide (lam yig) of [Mount] Khawa Karpo, the tsen of the Rong [country]. རྩོམ་བཅའ་ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ་གངས་རི་དེའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་བ་དན་མ་འཛིན་རྟེན་པ་རྣམས་ཡི་ཞལ་ཡས་ཁང་དང་ཕོ་བྲང་ཡིན་བར་འདུས། རྩོམ་བཅའ་ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོའི་ལམ་ཡིག་གཞིག་གྱུར་ཡོད།"

but he does not specify who wrote it. Buffetrille (2010:200) gives further written sources on this topic [3].

### 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje: Praises, mandalisation and special role of mountains in his life and songs

It is clear that a young 3rd Karmapa spent a significant amount of time in the mountains in retreat, often marred by local hostility and fighting and even an assassination attempt! As scholar, Ruth Gamble (2011) explains in *"Looking over at the Mountains": Sense of place in the Third Karmapa's "Songs of Experience"* [4]:

"While there were very few people living in the mountains during Milarepa's time, Rangjung Dorje spends much time either travelling to already established hermitages, or founding new ones. He and his entourage journey to new border areas – Tsari in the south, Khawa Karpo in the south-east and Lha-teng in the mountains of north-eastern Kham – "opening the doors of holy places", as they put it, through a process of "seeing" the localities' maṇḍala, living and teaching there, and singing poems in their praise."





231 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284–1339)

Also, in *Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism: The Third Karmapa and the Invention of a Tradition* (2018) Gamble describes how the 3rd Karmapa spent time at Khawa Karpo and the praises he wrote about the mountain:

"In 1302, at the age of nineteen, Rangjung Dorjé left Tsurpu monastery to live in the mountains. During the next twelve years, he spent less than eighteen months in central Tibet and even less time at Tsurpu... At Kampo Nénang, the welcome from the local humans was even less cordial, and for unexplained reasons, he did not enter the monastery's grounds. He did, however, have much to do in Kampo Nénang's neighbourhood. First, he helped stop the fighting that had been raging nearby, and shortly after that, he was invited farther south to visit the magnificent Mount Khawa Karpo. While at Khawa Karpo, he became involved with its maṇḍalization, writing a praise to it and describing its special role in his autobiography."

During the 3rd Karmapas time at one of the important Karma Kagyu monasteries in the region, Khampo Nenang the 3rd Karmapa speaks about being welcomed by a local god, Dorje Peltsek and then about subduing non-humans who had caused lots of conflict in the area around Khawa Karpo:

"Like many other local gods, Dorjé Peltsek is described as a white man on a white horse, and as Rangjung Dorjé explains events, the god not only invited him to the area but also came to welcome him. "When I was traveling to Kampo Nénang," he says, "I saw the great lay Buddhist Dorjé Peltsek riding a white horse with a red mane. He gestured to indicate that he was happy to see me and had come to welcome me."

Despite this celestial welcome, the humans at Kampo Nénang were decidedly less cordial. Rangjung Dorjé does not provide details about what occurred as he approached this monastery, and neither do later redactors. All they acknowledge is that he travelled into the area, was greeted by Dorjé Peltsek, and then left without staying at one of his lineage's most important monasteries. He never returned to Kampo Nénang.

"Instead, he explains in the *Liberation Story in Verse*, he travelled farther south "subduing the enemies of the lay Buddhist Rongtsen Khawa Karpo (Spirit of the Ravine, Snow White)," the god who resided on Mount Khawa Karpo. Eventually, Rangjung Dorjé says he was granted a vision of the local god, who appeared to him "a man on a white horse [wearing] a white, silken

coat . . . [next to] a divine mansion. “This god, he continues, led him to a village called Kolti, where he came to understand that the “great fight” that had beset its inhabitants for generations “was caused by non-humans.” So, he used his “samādhi to calm them down,” until “they did as I said, and I heard them speaking kind words to each other.”

### The death of the 3rd Karmapa's teacher, Orgyenpa



232 Druptob Orgyenpa Rinchen Pal (1230-1309). [Bio here](#).

In the summer of 1309, even though it seemed the 3rd Karmapa had planned to stay longer at Khawa Karpo, he experienced an intense vision of his teacher, Orgyenpa, which was followed by news of his death. He returned immediately to central Tibet, where he stayed for just under a year:

"In the [3rd Karmapa's autobiography] *Liberation Story in Verse*, he wrote that he was informed of Orgyenpa's death by a vision he experienced at Khawa Karpo. In this vision, he saw Orgyenpa directly and continually all the way through sunrise, but as “a sign of [Orgyenpa's] degeneration, he appeared as if reflected in a mirror.” Determined to fulfill his guru's wishes by studying the Kālacakra Tantra with Kūnga Özer, he left Khawa Karpo in late 1308 and travelled to his teacher's elder student in Nyédo." (Gamble: 2018).

Gamble (2018: 226: n.32) helpfully explains how the details of this vision have been preserved in the 3rd Karmapa's Collected Works (Sung Bum) in a text, *The Way I Met Orgyenpa in a Dream* ལྷ་མཁའ་པ་རྒྱུ་ལམ་དུ་  
མཇུག་པུ་གསུངས།. The lines discussing isolated places say:

“If you can generate a powerful effort in dark times, if you can stay in isolated places and dedicate yourself to dharma,  
then even though these are dark times, your qualities will be clarified. As the Buddha praised them, these (sites) will help you transform.”

Gamble asserts that this idea is a precedent for the idea of the “hidden land,” or bey-yul (sbas yul).



## The mountain yogis and the importance of solitude in degenerate times



As Gamble (2011) notes, the 3rd Karmapa wrote many songs about solitude and mountains, one such example she cites is particularly moving, and I have translated it here for the purposes of this article (with the original Tibetan below):

"Mountain yogis like I,  
Looking at the expanse of space  
Instantly remember empty-luminous clarity,  
Manifestly unceasing arisal.

Looking at the stream's flow,  
Instantly remember continuity,  
Manifestly free from expression.

Looking at the mountain over there,  
Instantly remember immutability.  
Manifestly unmoving." (tr. Adele Tomlin, 2024)

བདག་འདྲེན་ལ་འཕྱོར་རེ་ཁྱོད་པ། ཉམ་མཁའ་དབྱིངས་ལ་ཕར་བརྟམ་པས། རྫོང་པ་འོད་གསལ་ཏུར་གྱིས་དྲན། ཞེ་འགག་མེད་པ་མངོན་དུ་གྱུར་ཆུ་བའི་གཞུང་ལ་མར་ལྟམ་པས། ལྷན་ཆད་མེད་པ་ཏུར་གྱིས་དྲན། བརྗོད་དུ་བྱལ་བ་མངོན་དུ་གྱུར། རེ་བོ་འདྲི་ལ་ཕར་ལྟམ་པས། འགྱུར་བ་མེད་པ་ཏུར་གྱིས་དྲན། གཡོ་འགལ་མེད་པ་མངོན་དུ་གྱུར།

Two place guides (gnas yig) to Khawa Karpo that are attributed to the 3rd Karmapa are a *Secret Guide to Khawa Karpo* and a *Rain of Siddhi: A Site Guide for the Great Sacred Site Khawa Karpo*.

### *Praises to Khawa Karpo by 3rd Karmapa*

In the colophon of the 3rd Karmapa's *Praises to Khawa Karpo* (རོང་བཅན་ལ་བ་དཀར་པའི་བརྗོད་པ།) [5] it says he wrote it in 1308, at the same time he was traveling in the area. Gamble (2018) gives a helpful translation and some analysis of the Praises, which are interesting to read in full (although she does not always list the

original Tibetan with them). Frankly, most people will not have the time or energy to buy or read her (rather expensive) book, so I footnote some of her observations in my own new translation (with the original Tibetan) of some of the verses from the Praises, which I publish here:

"In degenerate times, bodhisattvas  
Practising the essential accomplishment [siddhi]  
Should rely on the condition of support, solitude,  
As taught in accordance with the sūtras.

The abodes of the rocky mountains and vast borderlands  
are praised everywhere as the twenty-four sites.  
Thus it was taught in the supreme tantras."

(Tibetan: རྟེན་མའི་དུས་ན་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ནམས། རྒྱལ་པའི་སྤྱིང་པོ་ཉམས་སྤྱིང་ལྟེང་པ། དེ་ཉིད་རྟེན་གྱུར་དཔེན་བརྟེན་བྱ་ཞིང། མདོ་ལས་བྱུང་བ་དེ་དང་མཐུན་གྱུར་པ། རི་བླ་བས་མཐའ་ཆེན་པོར་གནས་པ་ནམས། རྩྱགས་སྤྱིང་གསལ་གྱི་ཤུ་ཙུ་བཞིའི་གནས། རྒྱུད་ལྟེང་མཆོག་ལས་སྤྱིང་པོར་གསུངས་པའི་བྱིས།)

The Karmapa then goes on to explain the mandala of the site, with Mount Meru, a vajra seat and sacred sites in the different directions (see Gamble (2018) for detailed observations). The 3rd Karmapa then again returns to the identification of the place as that of siddhas (drubthob).

### Seventh Karmapa, Chodrag Gyatso: Seven years in retreat at Khawa Karpo



*233 7th Karmapa, Chodrag Gyatso (1454–1506)*

The 7th Karmapa, Chodrag Gyatso (1454–1506) also had a strong connection with Khawa Karpo. In 1471, at the age of seventeen, he travelled with his Kagyu encampment monastic camp to the mountain and is said to have entered into intensive meditation for seven years there in order to complete his training.

In common with all other Karmapa incarnations, Chodrag Gyatso had a natural affinity with Guru Padmasambhava. In fact, the Karmapa is considered by many as an emanation of Padmasambhava. Having returned after his long retreat to Karma Gon monastery, Chodrag Gyatso had a visionary experience of Guru Padmasambhava surrounded by Nyingma symbolic deities, Shakyamuni Buddha and lamas of the Kagyu lineage. It is said the Karmapa was prompted by this vision to find certain hidden valleys which would afford safety during the coming conflict he foresaw as inevitable.



## II: Getting There and Personal Pilgrimage tales



234 Photo at the front of the bus to Dechen, above the digital clock, was of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

As I boarded the bus, a photo at the front of the bus, above the driver's head, was of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje. It was a welcoming 'sign' to see, and I was happy to have changed my mind and venture further north into sacred Tibetan Buddhist territory. The whole trip I felt as if the 17th Karmapa was there with me in spirit and mind, and did not feel so alone.

I was the only foreigner on the bus, never mind the only white female, yet people were friendly and smiled and I managed to communicate with some of them in English, who wanted to practice their English with me.

As we drove further into Tibetan territory, the Kawa Karpo is positioned in the middle of sacred areas of former Kham, such as Derge and Litang, I was blown away by the breathtaking mountains all around, green from the rains of the summer season. It was like nothing I had seen before. I have been to Ladakh several times this lifetime, and it was similar to that landscape (albeit they are desert/dry mountains).

I switched on my mobile and played Prince's *Mountains* internally laughing with joy that I had made it on my own to that Tibetan region, and would soon see the famed Khawa Karpo. Some people around me were sick due to the many bends and turns of the road and the high altitude, but years of travel in India, (particularly the road trip from Dharamsala to Delhi by bus) had prepared me well, and I fortunately did not get travel sick.

### Police checkpoint at Dechen: request for ID and phone number

As we approached the Dechen Tibetan Autonomous region area, the bus was suddenly stopped by two very young men (late teens/early 20s) in police clothing who came on the bus and demanded the ID cards of the people sitting next to me and my passport. They took them off the bus with them, we waited on the bus nervously unsure what they were doing and why they needed our IDs. I did some Tara and Guru Rinpoche mantras silently. The young men then came back on the bus with the passport/IDs and requested my phone number in Chinese (this was translated by the Chinese next to me). I was about to give it to them but then I asked them via my Chinese 'translator' why they needed my phone number, and I also that I could not remember it (true). After some discussion, smiling and laughter, the young men went off the bus, then told us from the road checkpoint that the number would not be necessary. Phew!

Most of the people on the bus were Han Chinese, and a few Tibetans. When we arrived at Dechen, the nearest town to the mountain range, I got out to get some croissants from the bakery there (luxury item!). The bus then continued on another twenty minutes and arrived at the mountain range (Felai Si in Chinese).

Tibetan-run hotel, Khampa manager: "Oi Bhumo!"



*235 View of the peaks from my hotel room just behind. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



*236 View of the peaks from my hotel room just behind. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*



I stayed at a Tibetan-run hotel with a magnificent view of the range. As a pure 'coincidence' I arrived the night before the Chokhor Duchen. The hotel was managed by a Tibetan man with a strong Kham accent. He would refer to me as 'Bumo' (Tibetan for girl), which was mildly flattering but also kind of impolite too ha ha ha. I realised I was in Kham where people are *khari-khatug* (very direct) and felt overjoyed by this experience.

He offered to take me to the Karma Kagyu monastery, Dondrub Ling nearby in his car alone the following day, which I really wanted to visit too, and would have been ideal had I not been travelling alone, but I decided it was a bit too much of a risk travelling for an hour or two to an isolated mountain alone with a man (physically much bigger than me) in a car in a foreign land with no one else around, and decided to decline the kind offer. Prior experiences had taught me to be more cautious with such things.

In any case, in the afternoon of arrival (it turned quite sunny) I was able to gaze at the mountains and do some practice there with it right in front of me. I imagined previous Karmapas and masters before me gazing at this view, albeit not from a hotel room, but was overjoyed to be there this lifetime. Coincidentally the following day was the big Buddhist day of Chokhor Duchen, when Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma, and I was able to practice there in the morning (a very cloudy and cold one) before getting the bus back to Shangri-la again.

Although it was generally cloudy, the trip was well worth it, and I thought perhaps I would come back again during clearer, bluer skies in the spring or autumn.

Here are some photos of the range, daylight hours and later during sunset.



With a Tibetan woman at the mountain range when I first arrived there by bus.



237 The Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



238 The Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024





239 The Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



240 The Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



241 Stupas at the Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



242 View of the Khawa Karpo and surrounding mountains from my hotel room. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





243 View of the Khawa Karpo and surrounding mountains from my hotel room. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



244 View of the Khawa Karpo and surrounding mountains from my hotel room. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



245 The Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.





246 Line of Stupas from the view facing away from the mountains at the Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



247 The Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024



*248 The Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024*



*249 Line of stupas from the front-facing view of the Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.*





*250 Statues on the shrine in the small temple next to the Khawa Karpo mountain range.*



*251 Stupas at the Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024*



252 Photo of Khawa Karpo at sunset. Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



253 Just before sunset at the Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024





254 Sunset at the Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.



255 Sunset at the Khawa Karpo mountain range. Photo: Adele Tomlin, July 2024.

## Lucky number 13 and number of circuits of Khawa Karpo



Peak of Mount Khawa Karpo. Photographer Unknown

Buffetrille (2010: 202) also points out that unlike Mount Tsa-ri, another difficult pilgrimage on the border between India and Tibet where one circumambulation (skor ra) is sufficient to be purified from negative actions and defilements, at Khawa Karpo many ritual circuits are required:

"A large number of pilgrims hope to do as many as thirteen skor ra in one lifetime, a number that appears with great frequency in Tibetan non-Buddhist cosmology, history and religion. But whatever the final number, it must always be an odd number because, say the pilgrims, even numbers represent processes that have come to an end and no longer bear fruit. In contrast, odd numbers being "incomplete" are full of potential and continue to produce positive effects. Thus 3, 9, and – above all – 13 are lucky numbers in Tibetan tradition."

This was interesting to read as in many European countries, the number 13 is considered unlucky - proving that human concepts make their world what it is!

## Bibliography

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Gamble, Ruth (2011): *"Looking over at the Mountains": Sense of place in the Third Karmapa's "Songs of Experience"* Himalayan Nature: Representations and Reality, Studia Orientalia, vol. 109, 2011.

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## Endnotes

[1] Buffetrille, Katia (2010) see bibliography for citation.

[2] For the differences between a gnas yig and a lam yig, see Vostrikof 1970: 217-232; Wylie 1965: 17; Buffetrille 2000: 3-7; Bründer 2008: 13-14. 19



[3] Buffetrille (2010: 199) : "The 2nd Zhamarpa, Khacho Wangpo (Mkha' spyod dbang po (1350-1405), in his "The great divine drum" (Lha'i rnga chen, 1978, vol. 2, f. 11b.3) repeats Rangjung Dorje 's first sentence without referring to any text written by the 2nd Karmapa. The Lhorong Cho-jung (Lho rong chos 'byung) by Ta-tsag Tsewang Gyel (Rta tshag Tshe dbang rgyal. (1446-1451) mentions the 2nd and 3rd Karmapas' presence at Khawa Karpo but not any text written at that time (1994: 235, 258).

In the "Biographies of the precious lineage of the Karma pa school" (Karma kam tsang gi brgyud pa rin po che'i rnam thar, 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun kyab 1998: 107), Situ Panchen Chos kyi byung gnas (1700-1774) claims that, while he was at Khawa Karpo , Karma Pakshi wrote (mdzad) a lam yig and Rangjung Dorje wrote a ney-yig (gnas yig).

The biography of Karma Pakshi by Sman sdong Mtshams pa Karma nges don bstan rgyas (b. 1770) only mentions the presence of Karma Pakshi at Kha ba dkar po for a few months and the fact that he wrote a lam yig (f. 33a; Epstein 1968: 30)

Lastly, in Dpal karma pa kyi phreng rim byon gyi mdzad rnam, "Successive biographies of the glorious Karma pa" (1997: 68, 84), Ldan ma 'Jam dbyangs tshul khirms repeats exactly what Situ Panchen claimed in the volume quoted above. As far as I know, none of these guides have come to light. "

[4] Gamble, Ruth (2011) in Himalayan Nature: Representations and Reality, Studia Orientalia, vol. 109.

[5] *Praises to Khawa Karpo* edition in electronic scan see: [purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW3PD1288\\_F1A11B](http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW3PD1288_F1A11B)).

## Chapter Six

THE NATURALLY-ARISEN VAJRAVARAHI AND CAVE AT 'JOYFUL LAND OF SECRET-MANTRA' (WENFENG SI 文峰寺): Visiting another of the five main Karma Kagyu temples, Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si), the three-year retreat centre, Vajravārāhī cave, naturally-arisen Varahi and stunning Kagyu statues and artworks

"The Tenth Karmapa took shelter in Jang for approximately twenty-five years (c. 1646/7-1672) in the wake of Gushri Khan's entry into at the behest of the Fifth Dalai Lama's (1617–1682) regent in 1642. This Mongol onslaught resulted in the destruction of the entire Karmapa encampment; the Karmapa barely escaped and fled to Jang with only his personal attendant Küntu Zangpo. The king of Jang took the Karmapa under his protection, and proved himself a staunch supporter of the Karma Kagyu...

..this resulted in the almost total eclipse of the Karma Kagyü tradition in central Tibet, after which many Karma Kagyü monasteries had been seized and forcibly converted. Under the watchful and often hostile eye of the Tibetan government, the Karmapa's seat, Tsurpu Monastery, remained suppressed into [8th] Situ's time."

Chapter Six of the pilgrimage series on China/Tibet, I share my experience and photos of one of my favourite Karma Kagyu monasteries I visited in the Lijiang area in July 2024, known as *Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling* (*Joyful Land of Secret-Mantra*), known as *Wenfeng Si* in Chinese. Another Tibetan name for it is *Jangri Mugpo Gon*.

When I returned to Shangri-la, [after visiting Khawa Karpo](#), I got the train back to Lijiang. I did not have much time or budget left (I had only planned for two weeks in China), and wanted to see the other four main karma Kagyu temples in the area, and hopefully more artworks by the 10th Karmapa.

As I mentioned before in [Chapter 1 of my travelogues on this region](#), there are said to be thirteen Karma Kagyu temples that were established in the area by the Karmapas from the 16th Century onwards, five of which are still remaining. One of which is *Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling*. For my visit to Tashi Chophel Ling (Yufeng Si), see [here](#). I will write about the other three main Karma Kagyu temples in Lijiang too.

The monastery complex was big and housed several temples, including a magnificent Maitreya Buddha statue and hall, a three year Naropa retreat centre, and a Vajravārāhī temple and cave, with a naturally-arisen Varahi from the cave rock. The temples all contained statues of the Karmapas and Tai Situpas, and photos of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the 12th Tai Situpa and 12th Gyaltsab Rinpoche. One thing I noticed on all my visits to the five main Karma Kagyu monasteries was the prevalence of images and statues of the 17th Karmapa but also those of Guru Rinpoche statues and the 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi. My favourite 2nd Karmapa statue was one where he was seated next to Noble Tara (see below) and a thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara.

There were six main sites/temples within the whole monastery complex, listed here in the order I visited them. The last four require a car as transport to go up to them:

- First main temple: Karmapa and Tai Situpa statues
- Maitreya Buddha Hall



- Three Year Naropa Retreat Centre
- Vajravārāhī small temple just below the main cave temple
- Vajravārāhī Holy Cave Temple with naturally-arisen Varahi
- 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara Hall (with stunning Tara and 2nd Karmapa statues just below the Varahi cave temple)

In this article I also give some historical information about the history of this monastery in relation to the demise of the Mu Jang Kings after the 10th Karmapa (1604-1674) went into exile there, and how later, the 8th Tai Situ Penchen (1700-1774), a master artist and painter in his own right, took over the preservation and spiritual leadership of Karma Kagyu in that region, and how he visited this temple three times. According to one of the most important scholarly works on this period of history by Karl Debreczeny (2013), after the Mongol invasion of Tibet, the 8th Tai Situ Penchen, a brilliant artist and scholar, became influential in this region and paid three visits to this temple.

It is ironic for a female scholar-translator writing about history to discover how much trouble, conflict and death has been caused by men fighting other men, based on often very petty, ego-driven reasons like jealousy or aversion. And yet history is full of his-stories, and very few her-stories. The history of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism is no different in that respect from the rest of the world, and yet in Tibetan Buddhism, we have greater and higher hopes that the male teachers will act in better ways than ordinary worldly people.

The 10th Karmapa certainly acted in accordance with Buddhist ideals of love, compassion and non-violence. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the 5th Dalai Lama, the Gelugpas and the Mongolian military allies. That is no doubt the reason the Gelugpas faced a similar violent kicking out and onslaught by the Chinese and why Little Potala is now like a Disneyland resort. Yet, the Karma Kagyu monasteries in Jang are peaceful, beautiful, authentic places of practice and retreat where statues and photos of the 17th Karmapa, 12th Tai Situpa and 12th Gyaltsab Rinpoche can be freely exhibited and revered.

Music? Varahi traditional vibes: [\*Vajrayogini: the dance of Vajravārāhī, “The Diamond Sow”\*](#) · [\*Rameshwor Maharjan, Vajrayogini dance and chanting\*](#) in the Charya style of Newari Buddhists, the [\*Five Elemental Dakinis\*](#) by Yoko. Contemporary vibes with [\*Let the Flames Begin\*](#) by Paramore, [\*There She Goes\*](#) by the Las.

Dedicated to the guru (Karmapa), yidam (Varahi) and Protector (Mahakala and Remati)! May we all realise the inseparability of the three roots/kayas and attain full awakening.

Written and compiled by Adele Tomlin, 1st August 2024.

## 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The demise of the Jang Kingdom and Mu Kings and increasing influence of 8th Tai Situpa and Pelpung monastery in the Jang area



*256 Pelpung Monastery, Derge Tibet.*

As I wrote about in [Part 2](#), the Tenth Karmapa took shelter in Jang for approximately twenty-five years (c. 1646/7-1672) after the violent Mongolian military invasion instigated at the behest of the Fifth Dalai Lama's (1617–1682) regent in 1642. It is generally agreed by scholars that this Mongol onslaught resulted in the destruction of the entire Karmapa encampment; the Karmapa barely escaped and fled to Jang with only his personal attendant Kuntu Zangpo. The king of Jang took the Karmapa under his protection, and proved himself a staunch supporter of the Karma Kagyu. His experience and flight into exile a) will be shared in more detail in a later post.

However, even after the 10th Karmapa had to flee into exile for his life, as Debreczeny (2013) writes, the male conflict and fighting continued into the Jang region, with the Manchu Qing dynasty troops taking control of the area and deposing the Mu Naxi Kings:

"In the mid-seventeenth century, beginning at the time of the Tenth Karmapa's exile, the fortunes of the kingdom of Jang steeply declined. Starting in 1647, shortly after the king Mu Yi (木懿, r. 1624-1669), whose Tibetan name was Chimé Lhawang, rescued the Tenth Karmapa from Mongol troops, the area was overrun by Chinese armies fleeing the 1644 sack of Beijing. Order was restored in Yunnan only after Qing imperial troops arrived in 1659.

According to the Tenth Karmapa's biography, many had been crushed by the Chinese army, the religious community (saṅgha) scattered, and monasteries burned. Then shortly afterward, the rulers of Lijiang became embroiled in a struggle with the Chinese general Wu Sangui (吴三桂, 1612-1678) in Kunming and his Revolt of the Three Feudatories, an open rebellion against the newly founded Qing dynasty. During this tumultuous period of repeated rebellions and tremendous civil unrest, local power in Lijiang was greatly compromised, and the king was even imprisoned for several years.

Then, despite their loyalty to the new Manchu Qing regime, the last king of Jang, Mu Zhong (木鍾, 1687-1725), was forcibly deposed in 1723 by the central government. This came about when, shortly after ascending the throne, a new activist Manchu emperor, Yongzheng (雍正, r. 1723-1735), began to vilify indigenous leaders who controlled Chinese border areas in Yunnan. He aggressively and systematically replaced the local hereditary chieftains, such as



the king of Jang, with imperially appointed bureaucrats. Thus, this abolishment of the kingdom of Lijiang can be seen as part of a larger pattern, as reflected in the local Lijiang gazetteer, where the local rulers are vilified and the people of Lijiang are described as willingly joining the empire, being naturally attracted to Qing imperial benevolence as “animals are attracted to sweet grass.” From this moment on, just six years before [8th] Situ’s first visit, Jang could no longer be called a kingdom."

"Another significant factor in the quickening of relations between Pelpung Monastery and the temples of Jang was the collapse of the Karma Kagyu establishment in central Tibet. The Mongol entry into the Tibetan civil war in 1642 resulted in the almost total eclipse of the Karma Kagyu tradition in central Tibet, after which many Karma Kagyu monasteries had been seized and forcibly converted. Under the watchful and often hostile eye of the Tibetan government, the Karmapa’s seat, Tsurphu Monastery, remained suppressed into Situ’s time. Additionally, several prominent Kagyu leaders died young, such as the Seventh Situ (age sixteen) in 1698 and the Eleventh Karmapa (age twenty-six) in 1702. This was followed by the sudden loss of both the Eighth Zhamar and Twelfth Karmapa in 1732.

People of Kham and neighbouring regions, including Jang, now looked to Situ Penchen as the ranking leader of the Karma Kagyu and to Pelpung Monastery as its new centre. All of the Karma Kagyu temples built in the Jang area, which in the past had sent their monks to distant Tsurphu Monastery in central Tibet for training, quickly became branch temples of Pelpung after Situ’s successive visits. A history of Pelpung states that it had thirteen satellite temples in Jang, and, as we shall see, Situ had either a direct hand in their founding or some significant involvement with the five most prominent of them. His history lists nine Tibetan names: Mingyur Gon, Nyen Gon, Trabur Gon, Lhashi Gon (Zhiyun si指雲寺), Trashî Chömpel Ling (Yufeng si), Okmin Ling (Fuguo si), Püntsoḳ Ling (Puji si), Jangri Makpo Gon (Wenfeng si), and Shaktup Ling."

### The Wenfeng Si temple: history and connection to Tai Situpa and Karmapa



*257 8th Tai Situpa Penchen and one of his main yidam deities, White Tara. He is said to have been asked to write a White Tara sadhana in Chinese by the Mu King.*

In terms of the history of the temple, after the 10th Karmapa and the Mongolian invasion of Tibet, the temple has a particular connection to the brilliant scholar and painter 8th Tai Situ, Penchen Choekyi Jungné reached far beyond the kingdom of Degé (Dege 德格), extending even into Yunnan Province of southwestern China, where Situ travelled three times, over a thirty-year period from 1729 to 1759.

The 8th Tai Situpa wrote about the increasing presence of Chinese during the Qing dynasty rule, whose presence and control in Tibet had initially been started by the 5th Dalai Lama after his 'victory' taking over Tibet. As Debreczeny (2013) explains:

"Once Situ arrived in Lijiang in 1759, he returned to Wenfeng si, the same temple he had arranged for the patronage of the Qing imperial governor on his previous trip in 1739. There Situ twice performed rituals to end warfare and strife in Yunnan [2].

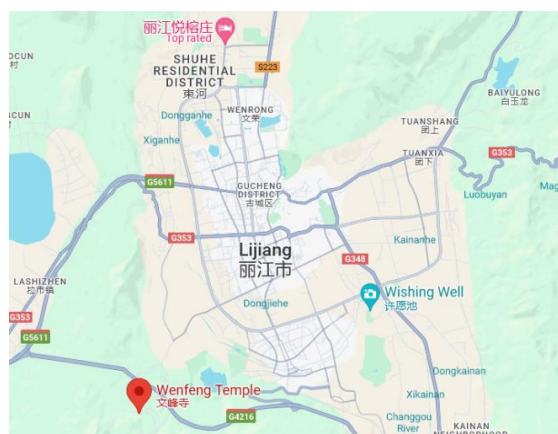
Afterward Situ went to the town of Lijiang, where he met with his patrons, the imperial governor and the "former king," Mu De, who offered him a banquet.[3]

Debreczeny (2018) observes that as "indicated by Situ's repeated performance of rituals to end warfare and strife in Yunnan at Wenfeng si, the political situation seems to have been getting increasingly tense in northern Yunnan in 1759. One immediately notices from Situ's account of this later trip that he met many Chinese upon the road, and he had several encounters with the Chinese army [4]

"On this occasion, uncharacteristically bitter feelings come forth regarding sectarian violence in Kham, which depresses Situ...Situ rarely expresses his feelings in his diaries as in this passage, and seldom were such plain feelings about sectarian fighting discussed in Tibetan sources." [5]

## 2: PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE

### The contemporary state of Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling: Getting There and personal first-hand observations



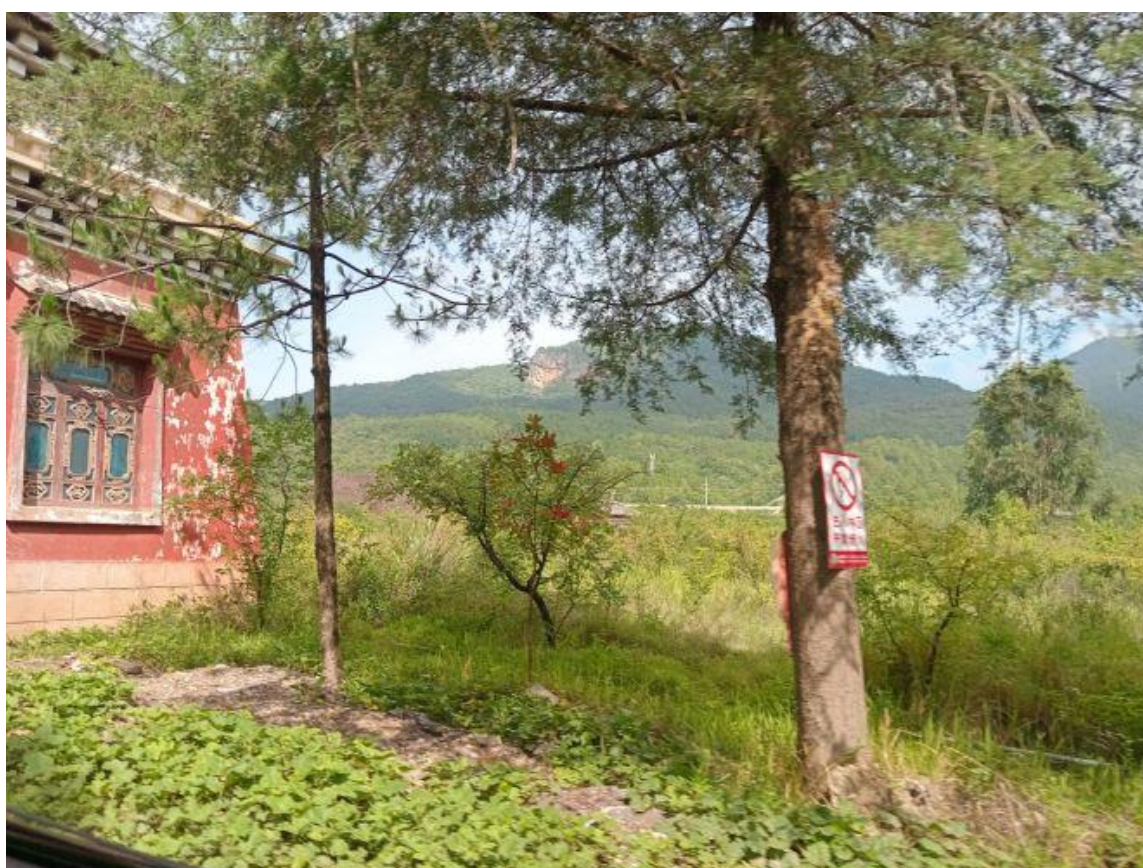
258 Location of the Karma Kagyu Temple (Wenfeng Si) in relation to Lijiang City and Old Town

The Joyful Land of Secret Mantra (Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling, Wenfeng Si) temple is located about 11km south-west from the centre of Lijiang City. I took a taxi there alone (no public buses), which took about half an hour.





259 Tibetan prayer flags and stupa on the way to Joyful Land of Secret Mantra ( Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling, Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

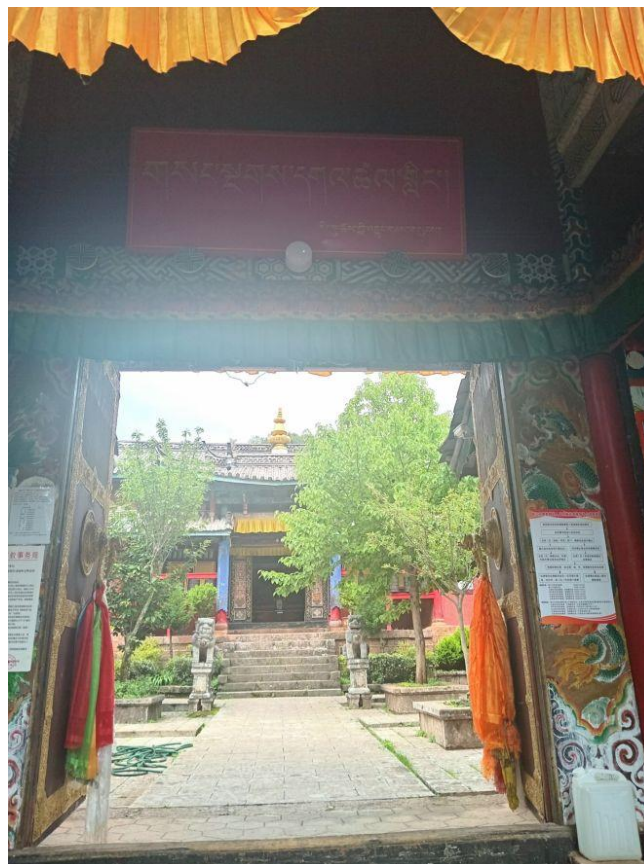


260 Arriving at Joyful Land of Secret Mantra ( Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling, Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





261 The Tibetan words Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling above the first entrance way. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



262 The Tibetan words Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling above the first entrance way. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





263 First entrance way to Joyful Land of Secret Mantra ( Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling). The sign above the door in Chinese is Wenfeng Si, as it is more commonly known in the region. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



264 Outside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



265 Old tree with sign on it outside the first and main entrance gate of Sang-Nang Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



266 First entrance way to Joyful Land of Secret Mantra ( Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling). The sign above the door in Chinese is Wenfeng Si, as it is more commonly known in the region. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





267 A small 'Laughing Buddha' temple at the Joyful Land of Secret Mantra (Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling, Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



268 Monks outside one of the entrance ways of the Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling monastery complex. Posted on Wechat by one of the monks. July 2024

When entering the main entrance gate, I was the only foreigner there but also there were very few (if any) visitors. The energy of the place felt welcoming and good, and it was a sunny and clear day. I heard monks chanting further upwards in one of the main temples, and so headed that way.

In the first main temple I saw about twenty or so monks doing a sadhana together. It was the first time I had seen a group of Tibetan Buddhist monastics doing such a ritual since I had arrived in the region. There were two huge statues of Tai Situpa and the Karmapa on the shrine and many thangka paintings of the Karmapa and Tai Situpa lineage, as well as hundreds of Buddhists texts/pechas wrapped and exhibited in cabinets

I left this first temple to have a look at the other buildings, and a Tibetan monk was standing outside who seemed friendly. He only spoke Tibetan and Chinese, so we communicated in Tibetan. It was easy to communicate as he had a central Tibetan dialect. He was very helpful and friendly indeed, in his early 30s and he offered to show me around the temple complex.



269 The first main temple at Joyful Land of Secret Mantra ( Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling, Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



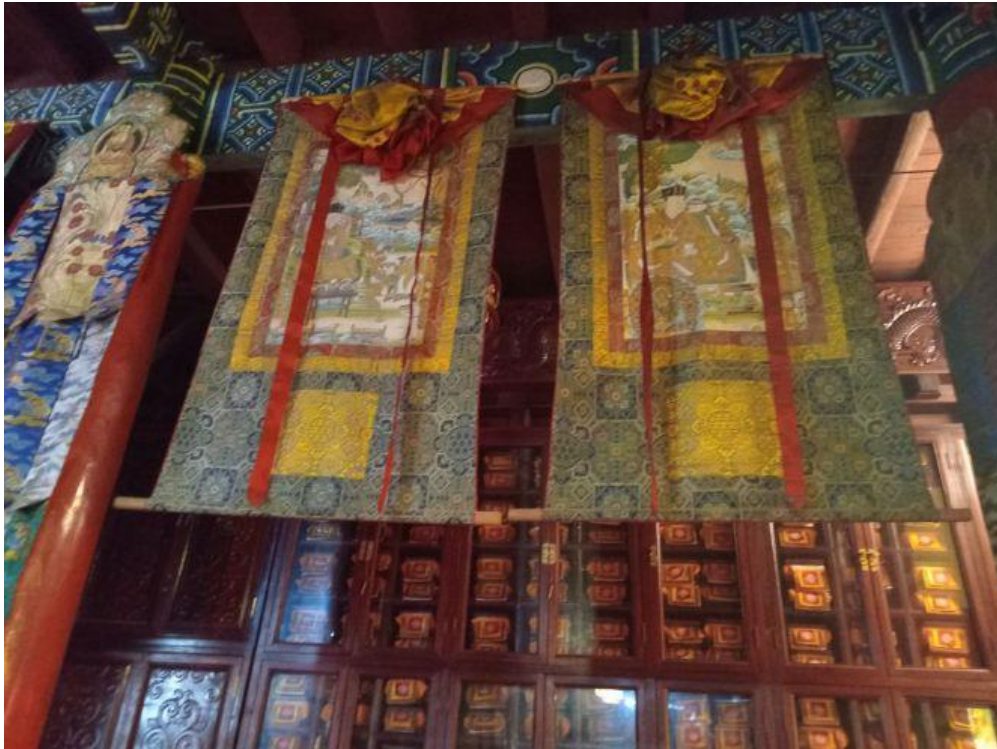


270 Monks performing a ritual at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling. ( Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



271 Huge Karmapa statue at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling ( Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





272 Many Karmapa thangkas and Buddhist pecha texts at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling ( Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



273 Statues of the Tai Situpa and Karmapa on the main shrine of Sang-Ngag Gatsal ling (Wenfeng Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





274 Statue of Tai Situpa. Sang-Ngag Gatsal ling (Wenfeng Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



275 Sang-Ngag Gatsal ling (Wenfeng Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



276 Rooftop of the first main temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



277 The Vajravārāhī Retreat Centre, Cave and temple, visible on the hill above this temple below it. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





278 A map of the monastery complex exhibited at the Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

### The Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling

The next temple upwards from this first smaller one, walkable by foot, was the Maitreya Buddha temple, which contained a huge statue of Maitreya and photos of both the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, 12th Tai Situpa, 12th Gyaltsab and the 16th Karmapa, Rigpe Dorje. There were also several stunning statues and thangkas of the Karmapas, Tai Situpas and photos of other well-known Karma Kagyu masters.



279 Inside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





280 Outside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



281 Outside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





282 Outside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



283 Inside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). A photo of 12th Gyaltsab Rinpoche is on the main shrine too. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





284 Inside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo of the Sharna Rinpoche, said to have been recognised by the current 12th Tai Situpa, resident in Sherab Ling, India. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



285 Photos of 17th Gyalwang Karmapa and 12th Tai Situpa. Inside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





286 Inside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



287 Photo of 12th Gyaltshab Rinpoche inside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





288 The stunning mandalas ceiling art inside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si), Lijiang area, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

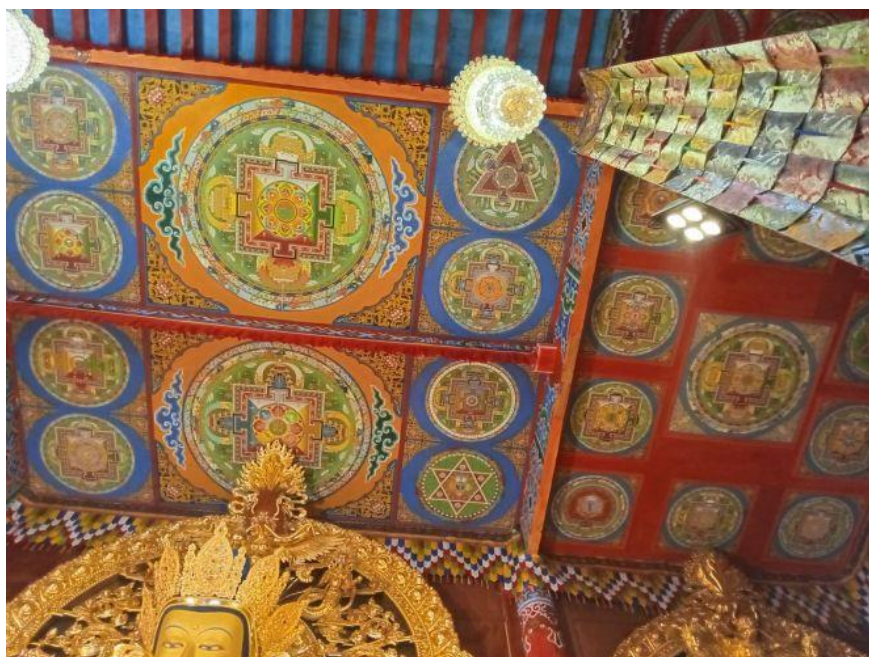


289 Inside of the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





290 The stunning ceiling art inside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



291 The stunning ceiling art inside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





292 The stunning ceiling art inside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



293 The ceiling art inside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





294 Inside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



295 Outside the Maitreya Buddha Temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si) Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

### The Three-Year Nāropa Retreat Centre

The monk kindly arranged for a driver and small van to pick us up and take us to the upper parts of the monastery grounds, where the three-year three month Naropa retreat centre, situated next to a Vajravārāhī temple and cave, with a naturally-arisen Varahi.



296 On the way up to the Vajravārāhī Retreat Centre and temple at Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



297 View of Lijiang and a nearby reservoir on the way up to the Vajravārāhī Retreat Centre and temple at Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



Arriving at the main car park of the three year retreat centre, I first stopped to admire the magnificent view from the hill of the Lijiang city and surrounding mountains below:



298 The car park next to the Vajravārāhī Retreat Centre and temple at Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



299 View of Lijiang and a nearby reservoir on the way up to the Vajravārāhī Retreat Centre and temple at Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



300 The car park next to the Vajravārāhī Retreat Centre and temple at Sang-Ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

The three year retreat centre was closed to visitors, but I was able to take some photos of its external buildings and signs:



301 The three year and three months Nāro Retreat Centre next to the Vajravārāhī temple and cave (Wenfeng Si), Yunnan, China. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





302 The three year and three months Nāro Retreat Centre next to the Vajravārāhī temple and cave (Wenfeng Si), Yunnan, China. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



303 View from the Nāro Retreat Centre next to the Vajravārāhī temple and cave (Wenfeng Si), Yunnan, China. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



304 The Vajravārāhī Cave (Dorje Phagmo'i Drub Phug). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



305 Nāro Retreat Centre next to the Vajravārāhī temple and cave (Wenfeng Si), Yunnan, China. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

### The Vajravārāhī cave temple

We then walked up from the three year retreat centre to the highlight (and highest point) of the visit there), the Vajravārāhī temple and rock cave, with a naturally arisen rock Vajravārāhī in the cave.



306 The Vajravārāhī temple and cave (Wenfeng Si), Yunnan, China. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





307 The Vajravārāhī temple and cave above the three year retreat centre (at Wenfeng Si), Lijiang, Yunnan China. The sign in Tibetan reads Dorje Phagmo Drub-Phug Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

Before going into the main temple, I spent some time in a small shrine room next to it with a big, red Varahi statue. This room also housed stunning statues of the 2nd Karmapa, Guru Padmasambhava and Avalokiteshvara. There was also a photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje prominently displayed on the shrine. I asked the monk to leave me alone here for ten minutes or so to meditate and make some aspirations, which he kindly did. I could have stayed in there for hours though.



308 Small Varahi temple with statue next to the main Vajravārāhī temple and cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



309 Varahi statue in the small Varahi temple below the main Varahi Cave and Rock. Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling (Wenfeng Si), Lijiang. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





310 Statues of the Karmapa, Avalokiteshvara and Guru Padmasambhava in the small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



311 Statue of the 2nd Karmapa in a small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave. Photo of the 17th Karmapa, Gyen Trinley Dorje is also prominently displayed. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





312 Statue of the 2nd Karmapa in a small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave. Photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is also prominently displayed. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



313 Karmapa and Karma Kagyu masters thangkas in the small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





314 Statues in the small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



315 Statues in the small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



316 Statues in the small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



317 Guru Padmasambhava statue in the small Varahi temple next to the main Varahi cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*318 Selfie at the small Varahi temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*

### **The Vajravārāhī (Dorje Phagmo) Cave temple, Sengdeng Varahi statue and naturally-arisen rock Varahi**

The next and final temple I visited on the hilltop, was the Varahi Cave with a naturally arisen Varahi from the rock. This rock cave was surrounded by a temple building (see photos). Inside the building was another Varahi statue, which the monk told me was made from Sengdeng (Acacia tree) wood.

This cave and rock 'face' had a profound and lasting effect on me. As I touched my forehead and mala, it triggered something deep within (as well as my strong devotion and connection with the yidam, Vajravārāhī) so that I started weeping and crying profusely and uncontrollably in front of my monk guide. He left me alone in the cave for a while to meditate.



*319 Tea fields on the way up to the Varahi temple and cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



320 Sengdeng (Acacia) wood Varahi statue in the Varahi cave temple at Sang-ngag Gatsal Ling, Lijiang area. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

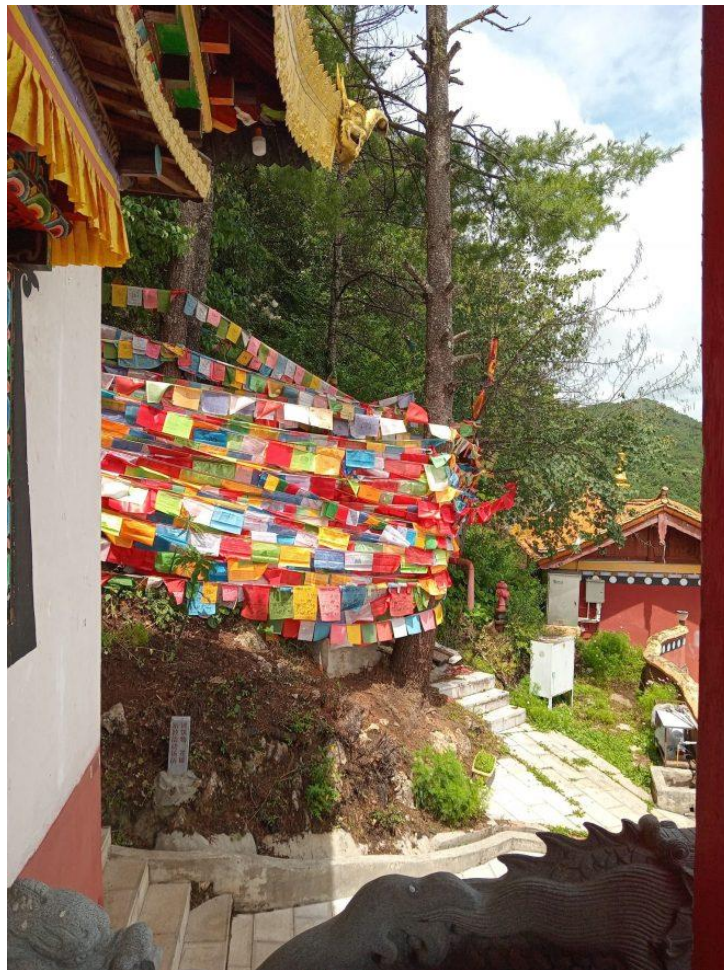


321 Sengdeng wood Varahi statue in the cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





322 Golden Mandala in the Varahi Cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



323 Tibetan Prayer flags around a tree next to the Varahi temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



*324 Statues in the small Varahi temple next to the Varahi cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*

There was also a Chakrasamvara statue with photos of the 17th Karmapa, 12th Tai Situpa and 12th Gyaltsab Rinpoche above it.





*325 Chakrasamvara statue with photos of the 17th Karmapa, 12th Tai Situpa and 12th Gyaltsab Rinpoche above it. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



*326 Chakrasamvara statue with photos of the 17th Karmapa, 12th Tai Situpa and 12th Gyaltsab Rinpoche above it. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



327 The Varahi abode. Closed doors. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

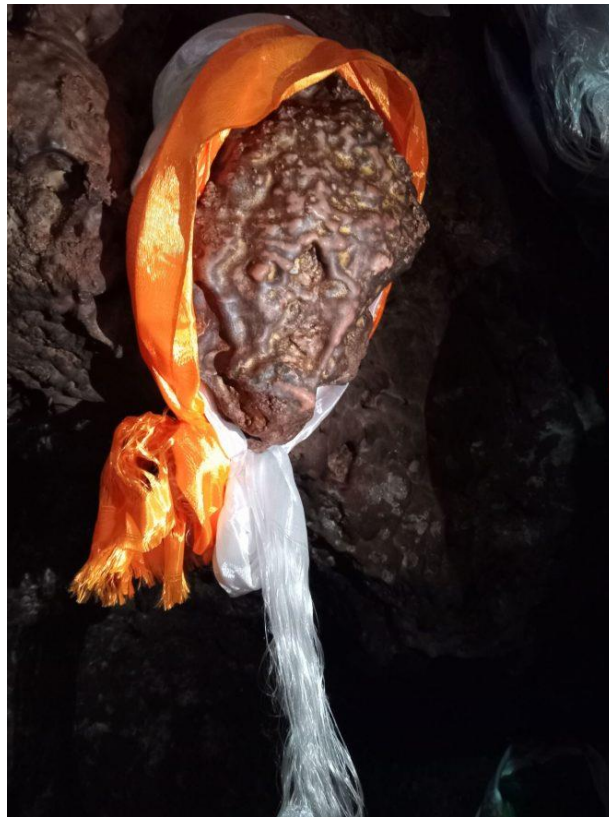


328 The naturally-arisen Varahi rock face. A Tara statue next to it within the rock cave. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





329 The naturally-arisen Varahi rock face. A photo of the Chinese picked Panchen Lama was beneath it. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



330 The naturally-arisen Varahi rock face. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024) Mahakala statue in the cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



*331 View from the Varahi Cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*



*332 View from the Varahi Cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*

### **Stranded at the 1000-armed Avalokitesvara Hall with Noble Tara, 2nd Karmapa statues**

I then went back down to the main carpark below but the monk and his driver had disappeared! I called him and he told me had walked to another monastery nearby but I could not find the path and the two nuns and other monks there sis not know. So I spent some time (stranded) at the big shrine room there, with stunning 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara statue and two of the most beautiful statues I have seen of the 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi seated next to one of Noble Tara.





333 Noble Tara, 2nd Karmapa and 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



334 Noble Tara, 2nd Karmapa and 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





335 Inside the 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



336 Statues in the temple.. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





337 Inside the 1000-armed Avalokiteshvara statue temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



338 Mahakala and Machig Labdron statues. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



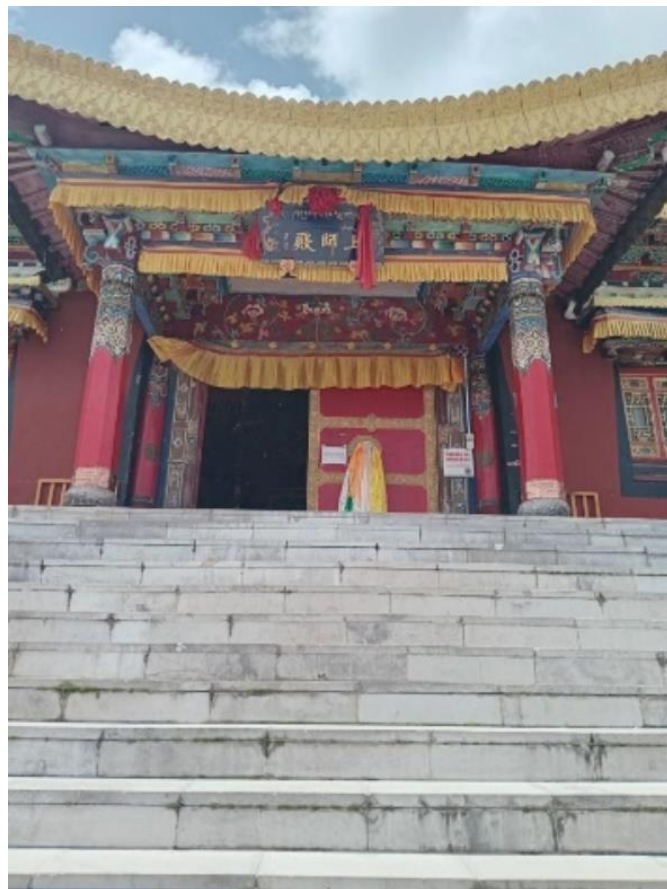


339 Mahakala and Machig Labdron statues. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



340 Mahakala and Machig Labdron statues. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





341 The Vajravārāhī cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



342 The Vajravārāhī cave temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



343 View from the Vajravārāhī cave temple (July 2024)





I finally got a car to take me back down the hill and saw the monk again, who kindly arranged for me to take a shared jeep with some Chinese speaking monks from the monastery (one of whom seemed to be the manager and his assistant) who had a wad of money in his hand and did not act or speak much like a monk at all! I was actually kind of relieved when I got out the van and was back in Lijiang. Shortly after I got a horrendous flu virus too.

## Sources

Debreczeny, Karl (2013) *Situ Penchen's Artistic Legacy*, Rubin Museum of Art

JIATS, no. 7 (August 2013), THL #T5748,

## Endnotes

[1] 8th Tai Situ (Debreczeny 2018) writes:

"I arrived at Jangri Mukpö Göñ. In order that no [more] warfare and other [strife] arise in the Yunnan area, I performed the four maṇḍala ritual arrangement for a rite of aid and propitiation to local deities and guardians (the "amending and restoring" ritual). The whole congregation performed Tārā and the Samlhünma.

On the first of the month on the Buddhists' [calendar], everyone who gathered there went into White Tārā retreat. Throughout saga Dawa we were similarly engaged.<sup>133</sup> On the first day after saga Dawa (that is, the fifth lunar month) we concluded with a brief fire offering. I received twenty-two juicy pears (sili, shui li 水梨) and twenty-two rosaries, this was a good sign for my lifespan. While I was undertaking the performance of long-life services so that warfare would not arise in Lower Yunnan, because [the monks of] Gyiling Si said that there was a need to go, it failed to take effect. I performed the long life sadhana by [the Fourth Karmapa] Rölpe Dorjé. Ritual dough sculpture offerings (captured torma; tator) and thanksgiving verses were extensively offered. I painted a wheel of longevity (tsekhör). I came out of retreat. [The doctor] Lekdzé gave [me] a vajra and rosary. At Netsé I made the great ritual dough sculpture and incense offering for local deities.

Having circumambulated the mountain (Wenbi shan), I returned to the monastery. I performed the donning the hat ceremony, and offered prayers for long life. In the chapel, I completed preparatory rituals for samvara consecration. To Lekdzé and others, I gave oral commentary on mahāmudrā. I departed." Debreczeny (2018).

[2] In one such instance elaborated in Situ's biography:

"Based on the context of this passage, it would appear that Nazangpa is probably a Mongol prince with militant Gelug ties who invaded the area, as there were many such incursions by combined forces of Mongol and Tibetan Gelug partisans that forcibly converted, harassed, or destroyed local Kagyü institutions, as reflected in contemporary local gazetteers such as the one from Balung (the *Weixi Travel Record* written in 1769) quoted above and the Muli Chönjung." Debreczeny (2018).

Situ was invited to the Chinese [military] camp. He was welcomed with music. He met with the company commander (tsangyé, zong ye 總爺) and governor (taiyé, tai ye 太爺) (that is both military and civil officials). A banquet and viewing many sports were offered. He was similarly invited, and went to the Dzana [Fort?] lieutenant's (patsong) and the company commander's places. Situ was served such things as offerings of Chinese cakes and Chinese merchandise, and Chinese style sports [demonstrations].

Debreczeny also observes that:

"One is not only struck by the numbers of such encounters with Chinese but also the more frequent references to Chinese material culture. This may reflect a larger trend of social change in southwestern China – a massive influx of ethnic Chinese settlers, merchants, and soldiers. In the early eighteenth century, when Situ first travelled south, the Chinese were a minority in Yunnan, but a little more than a century later, they became a majority. Also, Situ's abrupt and terse statements reveal that he was suddenly told that he had to leave just after arriving, suggesting a tension and uncertainty in the air, even within Lijiang at the time."

[3] 8th Tai Situ writes:

"Today I made ritual dough sculpture offerings to the protector deities and prayed to the deities and dākinī (khandro) to stop at once fighting among monks, wicked behaviour which undermines laymen's faith. And I became depressed, thinking that [many uneducated local monks], greedy for the faith offerings of the faithful laypeople, stingy ones with [only] the [outer] appearance of a monk (sermowa), squabbling over monastic wealth (kor) – whichever tradition they belong to – and, in particular who, never mind understanding the basic tenets of Buddhism, have never even seen the good behaviour of the Gelukpa monks of central Tibet, and having merely heard only the names Kagyü and Gelug take that to be a religious tradition and [proceed to] commit bad deeds that monks should refrain from, bearing weapons aloft, committing such actions as monks waging war on other monks. Generally, what they have done grievously wounds the teachings of the Buddha, and in particular it is a great disgrace to the matchless Tsongkhapa and his followers. That is all I thought (when seeing it), but I did not show a displeased face or think of responding."

"Based on the context of this passage, it would appear that Nazangpa is probably a Mongol prince with militant Gelug ties who invaded the area, as there were many such incursions by combined forces of Mongol and Tibetan Gelug partisans that forcibly converted, harassed, or destroyed local Kagyü institutions, as reflected in contemporary local gazetteers such as the one from Balung (the *Weixi Travel Record* written in 1769) quoted above and the Muli Chönjung." Debreczeny (2018).



## Chapter Seven

SACRED 'NATURALLY-ARISEN' LETTERS CAVE, ROCK HANDPRINT OF 2ND KARMAPA, AND INCREDIBLE ARTWORKS AND STATUES AT KARMA TASHI NAMGYEL LING (Zhiyun Si 指云寺): Visiting Karma Kagyu monastery, Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si), the role of the Mu Kings and 10th Karmapa in the founding of Tibetan Buddhist temples in the Lijiang/Yunnan area, and personal observations and photos of the monastery

"After Mu Wang, the greatest patron of Tibetan Buddhism in that [Lijiang] region was King Mu Zeng (1598-1646), known in Tibetan accounts as Karma Mipham Tsewang Sonam Rabten. Mu Zeng constructed the greatest number of temples of any of his predecessors or successors. He also expanded Lijiang's territory the most with military campaigns. However, at the young age of 36, he abdicated his throne to concentrate on Dharma activities at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery he had helped to establish."

"Nobody sees a *flower* - really - *it is* so small *it takes time* - we haven't time - and to *see takes time*, like to have a friend *takes time*." --artist, Georgia O'Keeffe

### Introduction

The seventh chapter is about visiting another of the main Karma Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the Lijiang area, 'Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling' [1]. In Chinese it is called Zhiyun Si ( "Zhiyun" means "pointing at the cloud", said to be from a Tibetan Buddhist master pointing at a cloud when suggesting it as a location).

Accounts say it was established during the Qing dynasty in the early 18th Century, and is near Lashi lake, 18 kilometres west of the ancient city of Lijiang. This was an area that the 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje stayed in for many years, and he is said to have founded several temples in the region (one of which, I will describe in the next post).

In this article, I first give some brief history of the establishment of Tibetan Buddhist temples in the Lijiang region with the patronage of the Mu Naxi Kings there, the first being one established by the 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi in Dechen (now no longer existing). As well as their continuing support for the 10th Karmapa when he had to flee Tibet to escape assassination attempts by the Gelugpas/Mongolians, who slaughtered thousands of Kagyu monks in Tibet.

The second half of this article is my personal experience of visiting the Zhiyun monastery complex with photos. Highlights of the visit are the amazing art murals of deities such as Chakrasamvara, Vajravārāhī, Tara, Kurukulla, Gyalwa Gyamtso, Guru Padmasambhava, 2nd Karmapa, Tai Situpas and more. Also, a rock with handprint of the 2nd Karmapa and a cave temple with naturally arisen letters, and ringsel appearing on the rock within it.

As I write in the historical section of this article, during the latter half of the 17th Century (as scholars have written) the 10th Karmapa even after losing everything in central and eastern Tibet to the Mongolian/Gelugpa forces, managed to establish numerous Tibetan Buddhist temples. As well as producing prolific amounts of paintings, statues and so on, which are some of the most unique and stunning in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

Proving that despite all the destruction and slaughter by the Mongolian forces of his shedras, monasteries and monks, he continued Dharma activities building a legacy that lasts into the 21st

Century. A far more astonishing feat and legacy than that of the 5th Dalai Lama/Gelugpas, who built the iconic Potala on the back of the mass plundering, slaughter, suppression and destruction of the other main lineages (in particular those of, the Karma Kagyu, Jonang and Drugpa Kagyu).

The fact that Little Potala and the actual Potala in Tibet built by the 5th Dalai Lama/Gelugpas are now mass tourist attractions, whereas these humble, yet stunning Karma Kagyu temples are authentic places of practice with freedom to exhibit photos of the 17th Karmapa says it all. Often, that which is seen as biggest and most powerful in worldly terms, is not the best/winner in spiritual or karmic terms. Truth and karma have a way of making people see that, only if they are willing to look, and as Georgia O-Keefe said, they have the time to look properly.

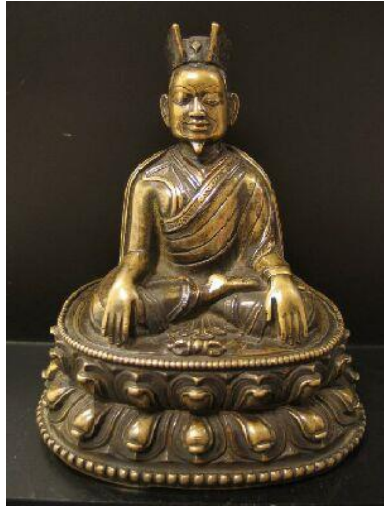
Music? [Naxi traditional music](#), [Won't Back Down](#) by Tom Petty and the HeartBreakers, and [Stand By Me](#) by Ben E King.

Written by Adele Tomlin, 8th August 2024.



## A) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE KARMA KAGYU MONASTERIES IN LIJIANG

The Mu Naxi Kings, Ming Dynasty and establishment of the first Tibetan Buddhist temples in the Lijiang, Yunnan area



344 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204-1283)

In his article *Dabaojigong and Ming-Sino Tibetan Painting* (2009) , art historian and Tibetologist, Debreczeny writes that the first Tibetan Buddhist temple in the expanded area of Yunnan, China was established by the 2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (1204-1283) in Dechen Tibetan region, but the first one built in the Lijiang area was called Dzebo Dargyeling (DeboSaiji Si in Chinese) in Yongning in 1353.

During the Chinese Ming dynasty, from the mid-16th to 17th Centuries, the Naxi Mu Kings of Jang took over and controlled large areas of east Tibetan territory, such as Dechen, Gyalthang (Shangri-la), Ba-thang and Lit-thang and their connection with Tibetan Buddhism and masters began. One of the first Buddhist temples established during that period was Dabaojigong, which I also visited and will write about later. Debreczeny (2009) has written a study on this temple and its artworks, which I also visited and will write about later.

### The important role of spiritual practitioner and King Mu Zeng in establishing Tibetan Buddhist temples in Lijiang and Yunnan area

The two primary patron Kings of the Karmapas and Karma Kagyu in the Lijiang and Yunnan region, were Mu Wang and Mu Zeng. In the 9th Karmapa's biography it states that Mu Wang had a Tibetan Buddhist preceptor named Jangshepa and in 1582 expressed his wish to commission a woodblock edition of the Tibetan Kangyur. A monumental task that was completed during the reign of Mu Zeng. This edition of the Tibetan Kangyur is called the Jang (or Li-thang) edition and was completed the same year that Dabojiong was founded (more on that temple in another post). This Kangyur project brought the 6th Zhamarpa into close contact with the Mu Kings of that region, although it is said the 9th Karmapa never visited the region personally.



345 King of Lijiang, Mu Zeng (1598–1646; r. 1598–1624/46), Official Portrait Mushi huanpu 木氏宦譜「影印本. Kunming: Yunnan meishu chubanshe, 134]

After Mu Wang, the greatest patron of Tibetan Buddhism in that region was King Mu Zeng (1598-1646), known in Tibetan accounts as Karma Mipham Tsewang Sonam Rabten. According to Debreczeny (2009), Zeng constructed the greatest number of temples of any of his predecessors or successors. He also expanded Lijiang's territory the most with military campaigns. However, at the age of 36, he abdicated his throne to concentrate on Dharma activities at the Og Min Ling (Fuguo Si) temple which he had established. He continued to act as regent for his son, Mu Yi, who succeeded him as King. Also, it was said that he far surpassed all his predecessors in spiritual attainments (Debreczeny, 2009: 102-3). He was even known as Mu Tianwang, the heavenly King.



FIG. 4 Portrait of Mu Zeng in monastic robes.  
(After Rock [1947], plate 44.)

346 Image from Debreczeny (2009:104).

There is a portrait of Mu Zeng dressed in monastic robes, in contrast to his official portrait as a Chinese official, which suggests he may have even become a monk. Debreczeny (2009:104) writes that: while



his robes are Chinese, the Amitayus Buddha is painted in a Tibetan style, alluding to his practice of Tibetan Buddhism.



347 Xu Xiake (Chinese: 徐霞客 1587—1641), a Chinese travel writer and geographer of the Ming Dynasty

Lijiang culture was deeply influenced by both Chinese and Tibetan culture. Many of the Mu Kings including Mu Zeng could write Chinese poetry and were influenced by Confucianism. For example, in 1639, Xu Xiake (徐霞客), a famous Chinese travel writer of the Ming Dynasty, came to Lijiang and was warmly welcomed by Mu Zeng.

The 10th Karmapa's exile from Gelugpa/Mongolian slaughter and takeover, and patronage of the Mu Kings Zeng and Yi



348 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje (1601-1674). Statue said to have been created by the 10th Karmapa himself.

According to historical sources, the 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje (1601-1674) first received gifts and invites to Lijiang from King Mu Zeng from the time of his enthronement as a young boy. After receiving

the second invitation, he set out to go there but was held back by the increasing tensions between the Tibetan King in Tsang and the Gelugpa sectarian monasteries such as Sera and Drepung.

In 1642, the Mongolian military invasion of Tibet (at the instigation of the Gelugpas) led to a violent takeover of Central and Eastern regions of Tibet (Kham and Tsang) during which thousands of Karma Kagyu monks were slaughtered at the Kagyu encampment and their monasteries and shedras destroyed or converted.

During that time period approximately between 1645-1649, the Karmapa was invited to the Baisha Town Palace, by Mu Zeng's heir and son, Mu Yi (whose Tibetan name was Chimey Lhawang) who became the greatest supporters and patrons of the 10th Karmapa, where he stayed for many years due to the Mongolian invasion.

When a Mongol splinter force of 300, 000 arrived in Lijiang to attack the Karma Kagyu monastics and Karmapa there, they were defeated by Naxi troops offered as protection by the Mu King. However, the 10th Karmapa refused their subsequent Naxi Kings offer for them to send troops to defeat the Mongolian army in Tibet, as he did with the Tibetan King of Tsang. He was criticised for doing this at the time, as it led to the complete takeover of Tibet and the Tibetan Buddhist lineages by the Mongolians who installed the Dalai Lama (a Mongolian name) as both the spiritual and political ruler of Tibet by force.

The Mu King Yi offered to restore the Karmapa encampment to its full former glory and Karmapa used it as his main base for over 15 years, while also making secret excursions there to bring important Karma Kagyu tulkus to the area, such as the 5th Pawo and 6th Tai Situpa. He ordained 1000 Naxi people as monks, and recognised the 6th Gyaltsab Rinpoche, Norbu Zangpo (his son, whose mother was a local Naxi woman).

Certainly, it is clear the 10th Karmapa had a huge impact on the region, spiritually and culturally, and it was reported the 10th Karmapa was in Lijiang for the 1660 New Year celebrations with the Zhamar, Tai Situ, Pawo, Phagmo Zadruga, Zhagom and other Karma Kagyu incarnations at the invitation of King Mu Yi.

## B) PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE TO TASHI NAMGYEL LING (ZHIYUN) MONASTERY

### Getting There from Lijiang



349 Location of Zhiyun Temple to central Lijiang.

Of the five main Karma Kagyu monasteries in the Greater Lijiang area, one of them is Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si 指云寺). It was built in 1727 during the Qing Dynasty and was made up of



thirteen different structures. However only six structures remaining intact today. In terms of the founding of Zhiyun Temple, I did not find much research on it, however a Chinese tourist site states that:

"A Tibetan Buddhist Master was honourably invited to give instructions, when he was traveling across Lijiang, by the locals who found it difficult to choose a construction site for a Buddhist monastery. After observing around the surroundings, he (the master) raised his Buddhist stick to point at a colourful cloud in the west. Therefore the place right under the cloud was determined for the temple which was then named "Zhiyunsi" (Zhiyun Monastery)."

However, this story sounds more like the founding of the earlier Karma Kagyu Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si) temple, which I will write about in the next post.

Getting to the temple is about half an hour by car from the centre of Lijiang, and located near the Lashi Reservoir. It was a cloudy and rainy day when I visited yet as the taxi approached the monastery, I could see it in the distance with a white stupa (see photos).



*350 View of the Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery and white stupa on the way there by car. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).*



*351 On the way to the Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) by car.*



352 On the way to the Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) by car.

### The first courtyard, old trees and art works

Entrance was free to the temple and there were no security guards at the gate. The main entranceway to the Zhiyun temple was a gate with the name *Shargyel Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling* written in Tibetan at the top. In the past, the Monastery complex had altogether 13 Buddhist halls of which only 5 are surviving.



353 Entranceway to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si), Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





354 Entranceway to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si), Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



355 There was a big prayer wheel there with artwork on the walls surrounding it.



356 Artwork at the entrance-way to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling/Zhiyun Temple, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



357 Artwork at the entrance-way to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si), Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





358 Artwork at the entrance-way to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si), Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

This entrance led to a second courtyard and entrance gate, and art murals on the walls. In particular, there was a vivid one of the main Kagyu forefathers of Marpa, Milarepa and Gampopa: (see photo):



359 Courtyard at the Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





360 Artwork at the entrance-way to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



361 Artwork at the entrance-way to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple., Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





362 Artwork at the entrance-way to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

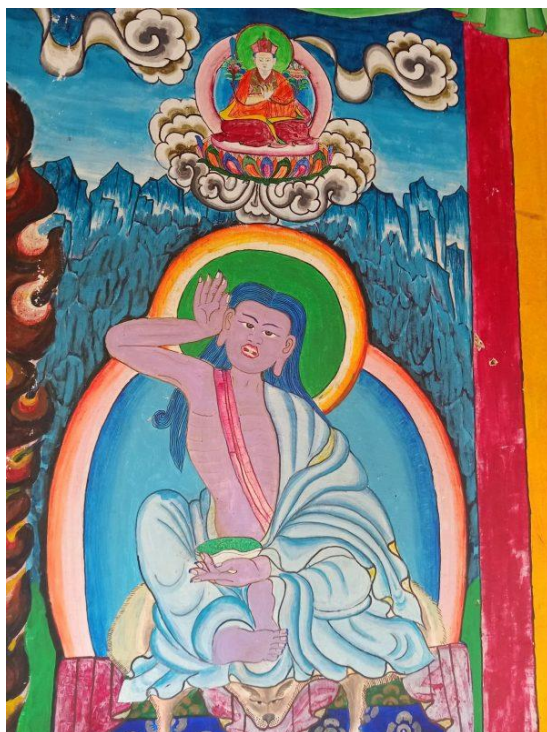


363 Artwork at the entrance-way to Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





364 Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



365 Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



In the courtyard of the temple, there are said to be five different kinds of big trees, such as the Cherry tree, Plum tree, Ginkgo tree, Mulberry tree and the Chinese Scholar tree. All of which are more than 200 years old. There is a big ginkgo tree at the entrance of the temple:



366 Huge old tree in the courtyard at the entrance way of Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



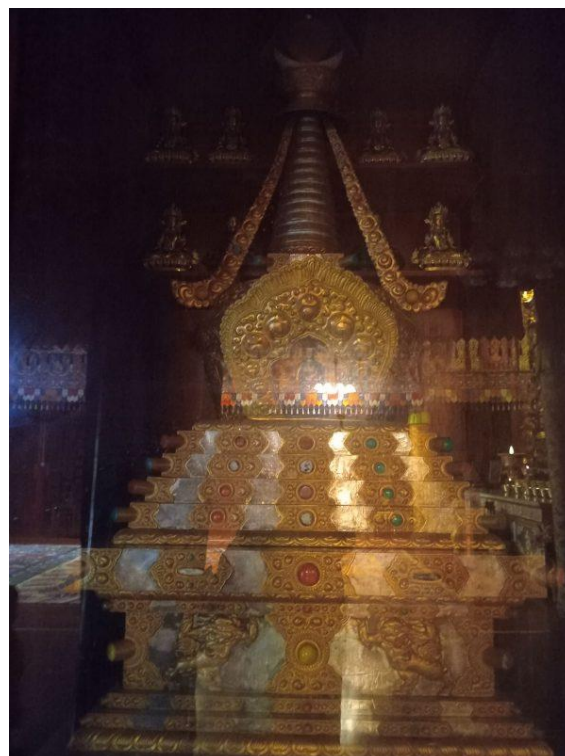
367 Old Ginkgo Tree in the courtyard at the entrance way of Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



In the second courtyard area was a small temple with statues of the Karmapas and Tai Situpas, and photos of the 17th and 16th Karmapas:



368 Second small temple in the second courtyard. Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

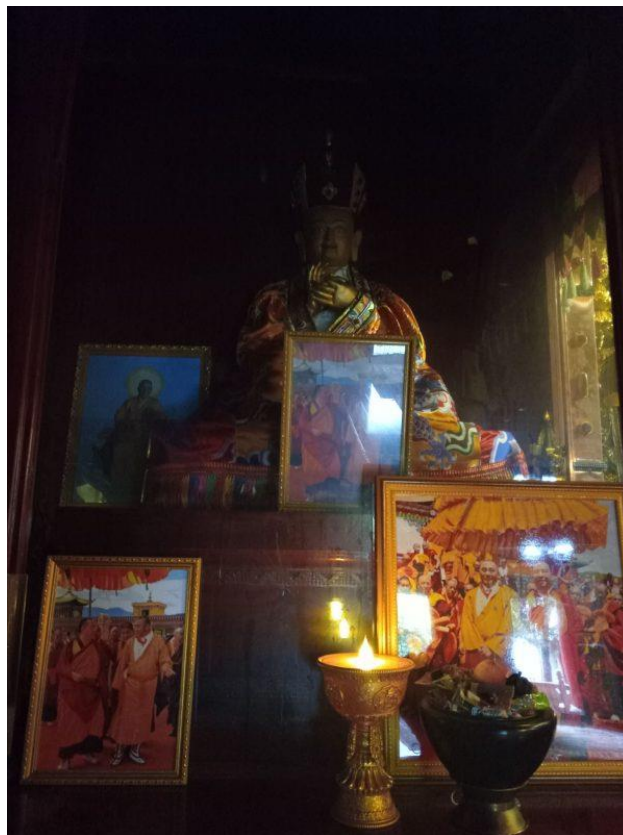


369 Golden stupa in small temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





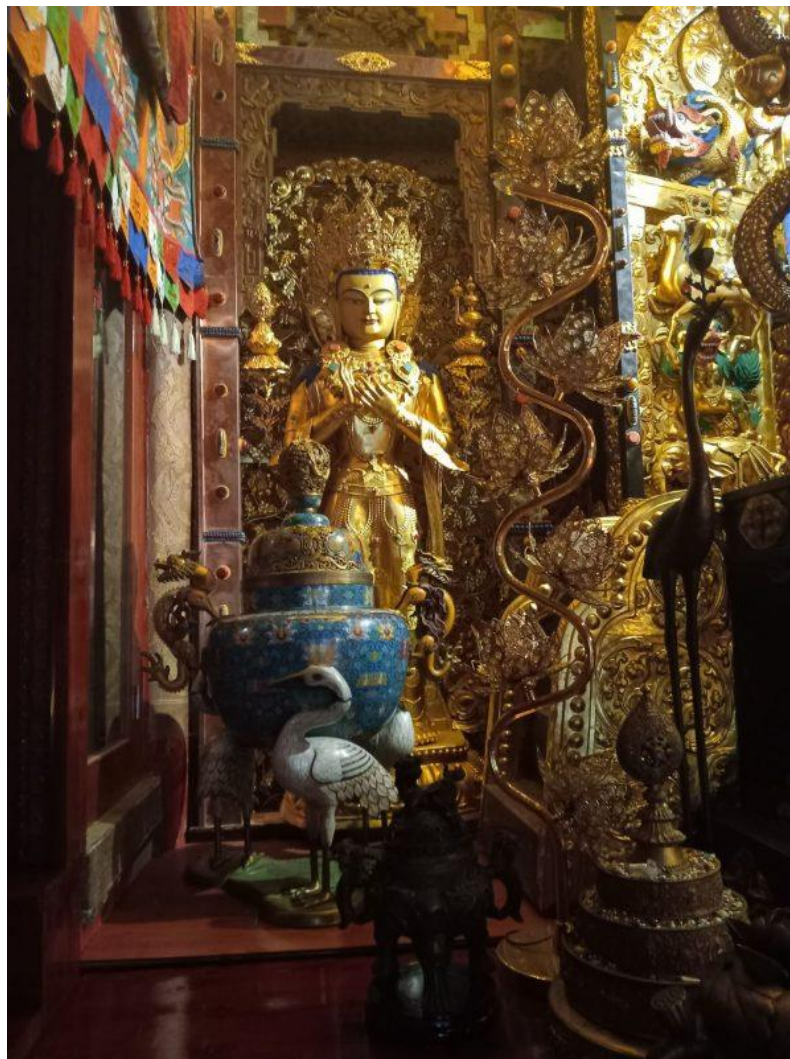
370 Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



371 Gyalwang Karmapa statue in small temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



372 Tai Situpa statue in small temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



373 Statue in small temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex.





374 Statue in small temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



375 Statue in small temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



376 The Tibetan abbot of the temple, a student and tulku of 12th Tai Situpa, Jang Drungpo Rinpoche.

### Lion-Faced Dakini and Karmapa Khyenno wall art

I then walked northwards from there towards the main temple. On the way were some walls painted with drawings of Lion-Faced Dakini and Guru Padmasambhava, with the words in Tibetan above: 'Karmapa Khyenno' (see photos). This was thrilling to see because I have a strong connection with that yidam goddess too:



377 Lion-faced Dakini (Senge Dongma) with the words 'Karmapa Khyenno' in Tibetan above, at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).]



378 Lion-faced Dakini (Senge Dongma) with the words 'Karmapa Khyenno' in Tibetan above.

Dakini Publications (2024)





379 Lion-faced Dakini (Senge Dongma) with the words 'Karmapa Khyenno' in Tibetan above.



380 Lion-faced Dakini (Senge Dongma) with the words 'Karmapa Khyenno' in Tibetan above.



381 Wall art at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



382 Steps leading up to the main Guru Rinpoche temple. at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





383 Steps leading up to the main Guru Rinpoche temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



384 A huge Guanyin/Bodhisattva of compassion statue at the second entrance gate at the foot of the stairs leading up to the main Guru Rinpoche temple, at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery complex. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



385 View from the top of the Tashi Namgyal Ling/Zhiyun monastery, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



386 View from the top of the Zhiyun monastery, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



387 Entranceway gate to the main temple at the Tashi Namgyal Ling/Zhiyun monastery, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



### The main temple: Guru Rinpoche statue

After walking up the steps, I entered the main temple and was alone there, other than a female cleaner and two young children. Inside was a stunning and huge Guru Rinpoche statue as the centre-piece, with photos of both the 16th Karmapa and the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje placed on it, as well as photos of the previous and current Panchen Lama.



388 Guru Padmasambhava statue in the main temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



389 Guru Padmasambhava statue in the main temple at Tashi Namgyal Ling/Zhiyun monastery, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photos of the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa and the Panchen lama, former and present are displayed too. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

The artwork murals on the temple were amazing. Huge expertly crafted artwork images of many Karma Kagyu yidams and lineage masters, such as Karmapas and Tai Situpas. Vajravārāhī, Chakrasamvara, Red Avalokiteshvara, the Dharma protectors Mahakala and Remati, Kurukulla, Green and White Tara, which are shared here.



390 Chakrasamvara artwork on the walls of the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



391 Vajravārāhī and dakinis artwork on the walls of the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





392 Red Chenrezig (Gyalwa Gyamtso) artwork on the walls of the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).







393 artwork on the walls of the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



394 Thangkas and artwork on the walls of the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





395 Thangkas and artwork on the walls of the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



396 Thangkas and artwork on the walls of the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





397 The main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



398 Statues in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



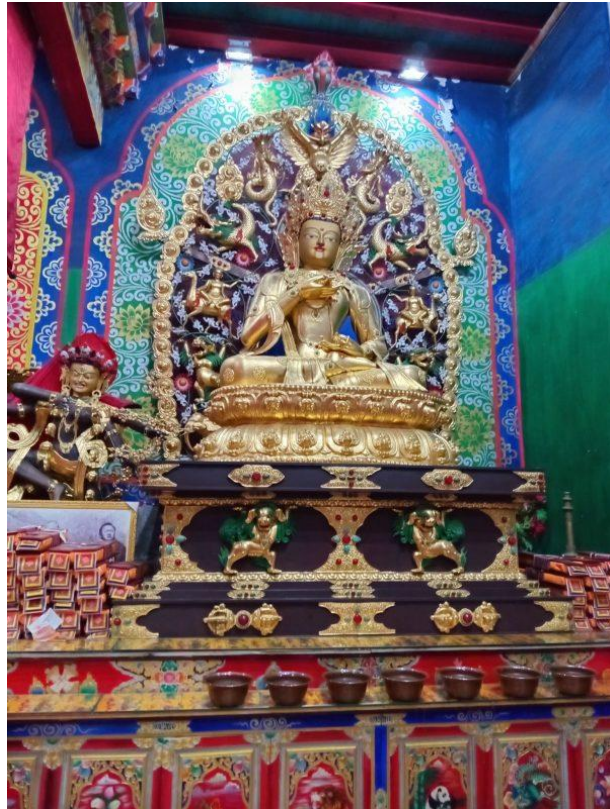


399 Statues in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



400 Statue of Kurukulla in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





401 Vajrasattva statue in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



402 Stunning art mural of Kurukulles, with Marpa Lotsawa above in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





403 Stunning art mural of Kurukulles, with Marpa Lotsawa above, in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



404 Stunning art mural of Vajravārāhī with Tilopa and Naropa above in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





405 Stunning art mural of Guru Padmasambhava in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



406 Stunning art mural in the main temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





407 Stunning art mural of Green Tara with Karmapa and Tai Situpa above in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



408 Stunning art mural of Mahakala with Karmapa figure above in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





409 Stunning art mural of Mahakala with Karmapa figure above in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



410 Stunning art mural of Protector, Rangjung Gyalmo (Remati) in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





411 Guru Padmasambhava close-up in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





412 Guru Padmasambhava close-up in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



413 in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





414 In the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



415 in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





416 in the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



417 In the main Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





418 Photo of the Chinese-picked Panchen Lama was in the main temple room.



## 2nd Karmapa cave and naturally-arisen ringsel

On leaving the main temple, I asked a monk there where the abbot was. Another monk was called who spoke Tibetan and Chinese, and he kindly offered to show me round the rest of the monastery, in particular, to see a rock with naturally-arisen ringsel (relics) where the 2nd Karmapa was said to have visited and meditated previously and left a handprint. The monk was wearing only a vest, so I asked him if he would mind putting something to cover himself, which he did.

A youthful looking Chinese layman also accompanied us, who told me he was a student of Buddhism there. His English was quite good, but he spoke no Tibetan. I wondered if he was actually a student or not though, or someone keeping an eye on the place (and me the foreigner) ha ha.

The first place the monk guided us to was a rock temple, housing a huge centre rock piece, with naturally-arising letters and ringsel on the outside:



419 Tibetan prayer flags outside a sacred cave temple at Tashi Namgyel Ling, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



420 Inside a sacred cave temple with naturally arisen letters and ringsel (relics on the central rockpiece) at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





421 Inside a sacred cave temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



422 Inside a sacred cave temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



423 Inside a sacred cave temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



424 Sacred naturally arisen relic/ringsel substances





425 Inside a sacred cave temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



426 Inside a sacred cave temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



427 Inside a sacred cave temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



428 Inside a sacred cave temple at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

The monk then led us outside away from the cave to a place nearby where local historians said the 2nd Karmapa had left a handprint:





429 2nd Karmapa handprint in rock at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



430 Rock art at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



Rock art of Guru Padmasambhava and 2nd Karmapa at a place where it is said the 2nd Karmapa visited and left a handprint, at Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) temple , Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).[/caption]

When we returned from the cave to the first entranceway/exit of the main temple, another monk was there who I was told was the abbot of the monastery. I asked him in Tibetan where he came from and he replied he was a Gelugpa Geshe from Drepung. I was surprised to hear that as the monastery is historically Karma Kagyu and all the photos, thangkas and artworks are Karma Kagyu. I asked him why he was the abbot and not a Karma Kagyu Khenpo. He smiled and did not respond.

After an amazing afternoon at the temple and cave, I took a taxi back down the hill and stopped at Baisha ancient town for a couple of hours. As it had been raining a rainbow appeared and the sunset was particularly stunning that day. here are a couple of photos I took:



*431 Down in the Baisha ancient town after visiting Tashi Namgyal Ling temple*





432 A rainbow appeared after a rainy afternoon, in the Baisha ancient town after visiting Tashi Namgyal Ling temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



433 Leaving Baisha ancient town alone during sunset after visiting the Tashi Namgyel Ling temple. Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



434 Leaving Baisha ancient town during sunset after visiting the Tashi Namgyel Ling temple. Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



435 Leaving Baisha ancient town during sunset after visiting the Tashi Namgyel Ling temple. Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo; Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

## Sources

Debreczeny, Karl (2009), *Dabaojigong and Ming Sino-Tibetan Painting in Lijiang in Buddhism Between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Wisdom Publications).



## Chapter Eight

VISITING NO-HIGHER LAND (OG-MIN LING/FUGUO SI 福國寺) MONASTERY : 17th Century founded, ‘mother’ Karma Kagyu monastery in Lijiang, Og-Min Ling, its historical background and contemporary state (China/Tibet pilgrimage, part 8)

“Before its being built, it was reported in Chinese sources, that prior to its founding, the 6th Zhamarpa, Chokyi Wangchug, had been given the land by the Mu Naxi King after he pointed to it and said that would be a good place to build a monastery. Six Naxi disciples whom the 6th Zhamarpa had taken with him to be educated in Tibet, returned later and founded the Og-Min Ling (Fuguo-si) temple.”

“There were five Karma Kagyu monasteries in Balung, with eight-hundred monks, all disciples of “Gema Sibao lama” – that is, Situ Penchen. The adherents of the Karmapa sect were mostly Moso – that is, local Naxi (not Tibetans). It also records that among them strife became daily more common, as the Yellow lamas (Gelugpa) oppressed them considerably.”

### Introduction

Chapter 6 is about my visit to the fourth main Karma Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Lijiang area, *Og Min Ling* (Fuguo Si 福國寺), said to have been originally founded in 1601. This monastery is also not far from the centre of Lijiang, and quite near the ancient town of Baisha, where one of the earliest Buddhist temples in that region, Dabaojigong is also situated.

The Og-Min Ling monastery is said to be the first ‘mother’ and oldest temple of the five remaining Karma Kagyu ones in that area, originally founded between 1621-1627, by the joint efforts of the Mu Naxi Kings, 6th Zhamarpa, six of his Naxi disciples, and the 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje. The monastery was visited several times by the 8th Tai Situpa, who wrote about it in his Karma Kagyu historical text and biography of 10th Karmapa, the *Moonstone Mala* (more on that below).

It was reported to have been the largest monastery in Jang area at that time, but destroyed in 1864 (not sure of the reason why) and rebuilt in 1882. It was then destroyed again during the Cultural Revolution. In 2007, it is said that the 17th Sharnor Drungpa Rinpoche (Dongbao Zhongba 東寶仲巴呼圖克圖, 1967-) restored it to its current state. He was recognized by the 12th Tai Situ Situpa in 1991 and his official residence is Zhiyun si. The first Sharnor Drungpa (considered the thirteenth in the lineage of Namkha Gyatso, b. 1146) was a contemporary with 8th Tai Situ Penchen. The 17th Drungpa Rinpoche’s photo was in all the main Karma Kagyu monasteries I visited in Lijiang. He has been involved with the Buddhist Association of China (BAC) since 2015, and is vice president of the Yunnan BAC. Interestingly though, this monastery did not have many visual depictions of the Tai Situpas as in the other large Karma Kagyu monasteries, such as Wenfeng and Zhiyun Si.

The statues of the Karmapas, and the artwork in the shrine rooms/halls were some of the most stunning I have ever seen. In particular, there was a fabulous painting of the Karmapa’s main protector, Mahakala with consort of Remati (Rangjung Gyalmo) on a horse (see photo here).

I was also told by one Tibetan Buddhist monk there, whom I briefly spoke to in Tibetan, that the upper quarters of the first main hall, used to be the room of the 10th Karmapa's *nama* (wife). I was not surprised to hear this as I have recently been reading about how after the 10th Karmapa was forced to flee from Tibet from the murderous Mongolian armies, and Gelugpa oppression, he is said to have taken as a consort of a local Naxi woman, who had a son, who was subsequently recognised by the 10th Karmapa as the 6th Gyalsab Rinpoche, Norbu Zangpo [1].

However, when I tried to visit upstairs (after seeing some Han Chinese tourists going up there) another monk (who was guarding the first main hall) stopped me and insisted that there was no wife/consort of the Karmapa and never had been. He seemed quite annoyed by it (and me). I told him that another monk at the monastery had just told me this, and also that research shows that the 10th Karmapa had a consort. But he was not having any of it, and proceeded to follow me around the monastery suspiciously from that moment on. I had been planning on staying longer there for lunch, but I left early as his conduct towards me seemed a tad excessive (and even potentially hostile). Perhaps it was also because I was a lone, foreign female too (and an easy target). Nonetheless it is a beautiful place to visit, and was overjoyed to have been able to visit there.

Below is a little historical background to the monastery and some photos I took while there. It is an inspiring and beautiful place to visit. Just don't mention the 10th Karmapa's consort! ha ha ha

Dedicated to the long-life of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, and the Karma Kagyu lineage and activities, may they flourish in Tibet, China, India and Asia!

Music? [\*Prayer to the Glorious Karma Kagyu lineage\*](#), by its holder, 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje and [\*I Believe in You\*](#) by Neil Young.



## The founding of the 17th century Tibetan Buddhist temple, Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si) temple by the 6th Zhamar and 10th Karmapa

As I wrote about in [part 7 \(visiting Tashi Chophel Ling monastery\)](#), in the 17th Century, the Mu Naxi Kings of Lijiang were crucial in their support (and following) of the Karmapas and Karma Kagyu, particularly the 10th Karmapa after the violent and devastating Mongolian army-invasion of Tibet, with the Gelugpa support.



436 6th Zhamarpa, Chokyi Wangchug (1584-1630) said to have been given the land by the Mu King on which Og-Min Ling was built

Debreczeny (2009:121) writes that during the time of the 10th Karmapa's taking refuge from the Gelugpa violence in the Jang area:

“..he established numerous temples, including Gyalwa Rignga (Dabaosi), which he named “Potala” [known as Fuguo Si].

Fuguo si (also known as Jietuolin) was founded circa 1621-27 by the greatest of the Kings of Lijiang, Mu Zeng, with six Naxi disciples of the Sixth Zhamar. Although Tibetan sources, including that of 8th Tai Situ Penchen, refer to this temple as *Og Min Ling*, Chinese sources say it was founded in 1627 and bestowed the name *Fuguo Si* by the Emperor Xizong (r.1621-1627).

Before its being built, it was reported in Chinese sources, that prior to its founding, the 6th Zhamarpa had been given the land by the Mu King after he pointed to it and said that would be a good place to build a monastery. Six Naxi disciples whom the 6th Zhamarpa had taken with him to be educated in Tibet, returned later and founded the *Og-Min Ling* (Fuguo-si) temple. Although Debreczeny states that the 10th Karmapa may well have overseen its construction, expansion and re-consecration, as it became a large temple complex over time (Debreczeny, 2009:145:n. 59 and n.68).

The 8th Tai Situpa's visits to Og-Minling and his amazing cultural and social impact on the Lijiang area, despite increasing Gelugpa oppression and violence in the area



437 Artwork of the Tai Situpas at the Karma Tashi Namgyel Ling (Zhiyun Si) monastery, Lijiang, Yunnan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024). For article about that monastery, see [here](#).

After the 10th Karmapa passed away, the 8th Kenting Tai Situpa Penchen visited the region three times and was very interested in the life-story of the 10th Karmapa, which he documents in his historical text, *The Moonstone Mala* (as mentioned in previous posts about this region). Debreczeny (2013: 207) writes:

“While in Lijiang proper, Situ stayed twice at Okmin Ling (Fuguo si 福國寺)... During Situ's second stay at Okmin Ling during his 1730 tour, Situ gave transmissions for the monastic liturgy as well as complete ordination vows to about one hundred monks. Such large numbers \_of monks taking the ordination at the same time in a single monastery suggest a large base of support for Tibetan Buddhism in Lijiang.

The only available photograph of an Okmin Ling wall painting before its destruction during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) shows it belonged to Pelpung's distinct artistic idiom, the new Karma Gardri style, reflecting the monastery's status as a Situ cultural satellite. This painting is from one of the protector chapels where Situ probably performed the ritual propitiation to guardian deities (the “amending and restoring” liturgy) in the spring of 1730. However, the wall painting probably dates to after Situ's time, possibly to the 1882 restoration.”

In terms of the impact that 8th Tai Situpa had on the Jang region, after 10th Karmapa's passing:

“Balung became a major Karma Kagyu stronghold in Yunnan. The local Chinese gazetteer of Balung, the *Weixi Travel Record* (*Weixi wenjian lu* 維西聞見錄), written about 1769 (that is, only ten years after Situ's last visit and still during his lifetime), recorded Situ's impact on the area. It states that there were thirteen sects of the “Red Lama Church,” and of these only the Karma [Kagyu] was found in Weixi. There were



five Karma Kagyü monasteries in Balung, with eight-hundred monks, all disciples of “Gema Sibao lama” – that is, Situ Penchen. The adherents of the Karmapa sect were mostly Moso – that is, local Naxi (not Tibetans). It also records that among them strife became daily more common, as the Yellow lamas (Gelukpa) oppressed them considerably. This same text also recorded that a high-ranking disciple (gaodi dizi 高第弟子) of Situ Penchen, the Shan Zhishi lama (善知識喇嘛), was reincarnated in Weixi.”

Interestingly (and possibly the subject of another post), Debreczeny (2013) notes that historical sources describe how the 8th Tai Situpa not only studied the Chinese language but was even asked to compose a Noble Tārā sadhana in Chinese by the local Chinese governor of Lijiang [2]:

“One particular instance found in Situ’s account of this meeting with the governor that not only suggests this close relationship but also implies a broader cultural dialog, is this governor of Lijiang urging Situ to compose a Tārā front generation visualization sādhana in Chinese. Thus it would appear that by at least Situ’s second visit, he had at least a working knowledge of Chinese.”

In addition, the 8th Tai Situ was responsible for stopping the practice of sacrificing animals in the region [3].

Moreover, considering the [17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje’s 2024 teaching on the parinirvana and remains of the Arhat Mahākāśyapa](#) at the Kukkuṭapādagiri Indian mountain, it was interesting to read that there is a mountain in the Lijiang area, also said to contain Kāśyapa’s relics that Tai Situ visited (Debreczeny: 2013):

“Passing beyond Lijiang, Situ went on to his stated objective, Chicken Foot Mountain, a popular pilgrimage site for local Tibetans and Naxi located midway between Lijiang and the ancient capital of Yunnan, Dali (大理). The mountain is named for Kukkuṭapādagiri near Gaya (India, believed to be the abode of the Arhat Kāśyapa. Situ recorded his itinerary on the mountain, which can be traced on local pilgrimage maps.”

Situ was invited to numerous chapels in the area, and presumably collected or consulted source materials for the 1621 Lijiang Kangyur/Tripitaka by the Sixth Zhamar for use in his own impending editing project. Immediately upon his return, Situ began work on editing the Dege Kangyur edition and completed it in 1733, just three years after returning from Lijiang.

### Getting There: near Baisha Ancient Town

The monastery is about a half hour’s drive from the centre of Lijiang and is near the Baisha ancient town (which was formerly the capital of Lijiang). It was a beautiful old town to stroll around in and watch the world go by with a cup of coffee at the many lovely cafes and restaurants there, and slightly quieter than the Lijiang ancient town area.



438 Location of Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si) in relation to Lijiang centre.



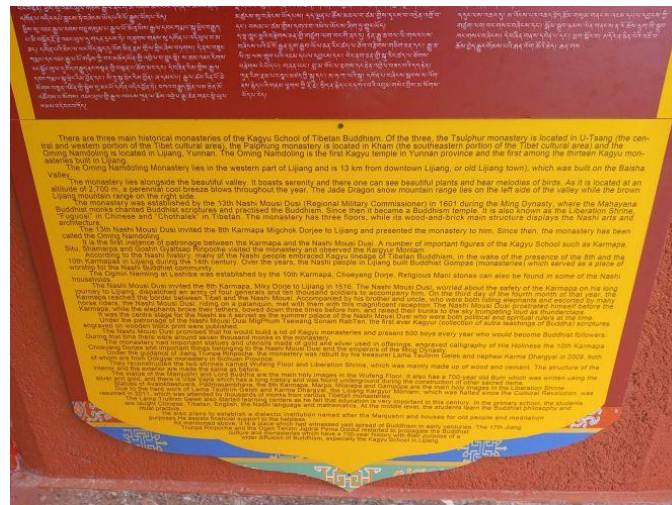
439 Map of Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

As you can see from the map at the monastery, there are two main temples after walking through the entrance-way. The first hall contains a stunning thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara statue, as well as one of Karmapa and photos of the 17th Karmapa and the main Karma Kagyu Rinpoche in the Lijiang area, Sharna Trungpa Rinpoche. There is also a golden relic stupa, although I do not know whose relics are contained within it.





440 The sign at the entrance gate at Fuguo Si, reads Og-Min Ling in Tibetan. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



441 Information about Og-Minling (Fuguo Si) in English. It mentions the 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

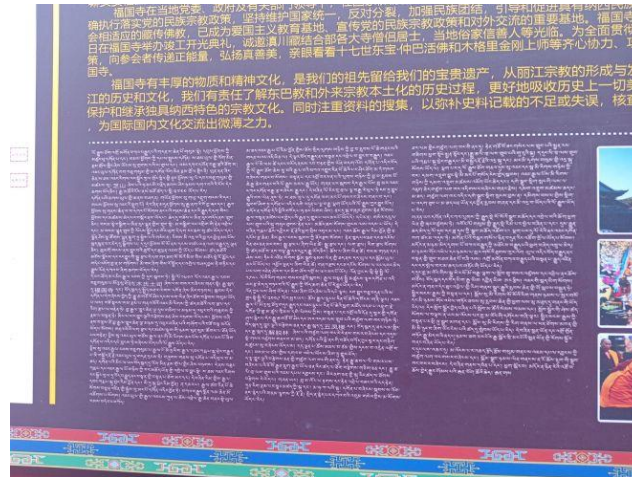


442 Artworks near the entrance gate of Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



443 Artworks near the entrance gate of Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





444 Information in Tibetan near the entrance gate of Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).



445 Thar-Chog-Ling (Liberation Hall) the first main temple at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin



446 Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara statue at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). A photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is prominently displayed on it, as is that of 17th Sharna Trungpa Rinpoche. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



447 Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara statue at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). A photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is prominently displayed on it, as is the photo of the 17th Sharna Trungpa Rinpoche. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





*448 Karmapa statue in first main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). A photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is prominently displayed on it. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*







449 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). A photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is prominently displayed on it. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



450 Golden relic stupa at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





451 Buddha statues at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



452 Guru Rinpoche statue at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





453g-Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



454 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





455 Noble Tārā statue at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



456 Marpa Lotsawa statue at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



457 Information about the 3rd Karmapa, Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



458 Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara statue at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). A photo of the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is prominently displayed on it, as is the photo of the 17th Sharna Trungpa Rinpoche. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

Going back outside, I walked around the grounds a little before going up to the second main temple.





Grounds around the first main temple at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



Grounds around the first main temple at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



Steps up to the second main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).



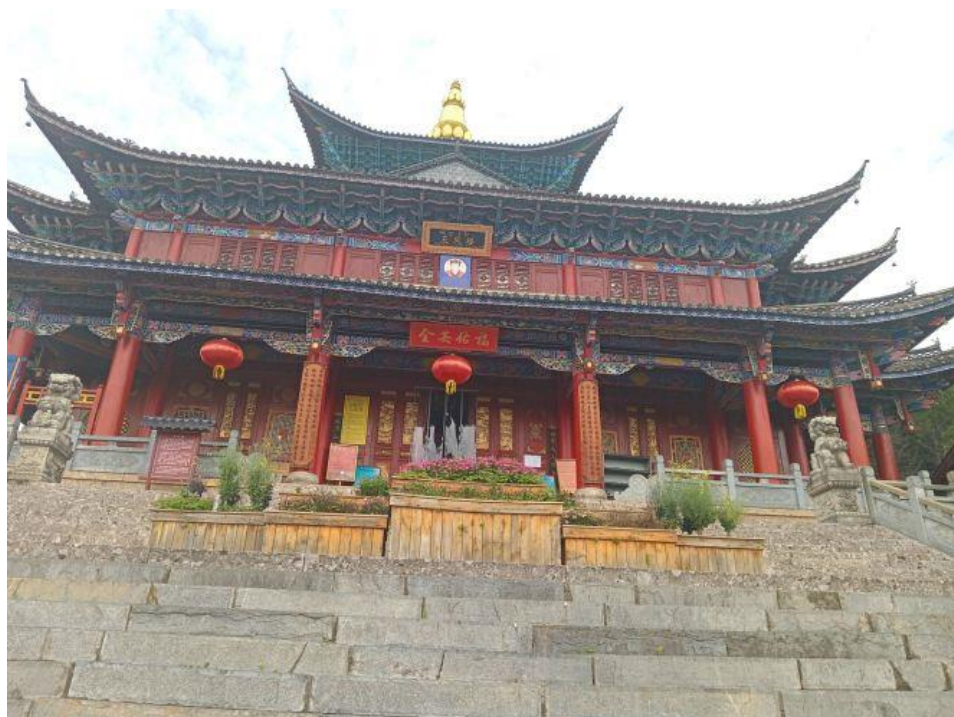
*459 Prayer wheels at the first main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).*





The second main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

I then walked up to the second main hall which is called the Five Buddha Family Hall (see photos). There was an image of the Karmapa just below the entrance door sign.





The second main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).



View from the second main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).



he second main shrine hall Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).





Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).



View from the second main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).



View from the second main shrine hall at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si).



Gyalwa Gyatso artwork in second main shrine hall, Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





460 Gyalwa Gyatso artwork in second main shrine hall, Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



461 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





462 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



463 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





464 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



465 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



466 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



467 The grounds of Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





468 Inside the tea-room/cafe at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



469 Inside the tea-room/cafe at Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





470 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



471 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





472 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



473 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



474 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



475 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





476 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



477 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



478 Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

As I left the monastery, I saw an old tree signposted outside (see photo).



Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)\



Old tree outside the main entrance of Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)



Og-Min Ling (Fuguo Si). Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

### Sources

Debreczeny, Karl, 2013, [\*Si tu Pan chen's Artistic Legacy in 'Jang\*](#). Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies

Debreczeny, Karl. 2009. "Dabaojigong and the Regional Tradition of Ming Sino-Tibetan Painting in Lijiang." In *Buddhism between Tibet and China*, edited by M. T. Kapstein, 97–152. Boston: Wisdom.

### Endnotes

[1] For example, Debreczeny (2013: 206) writes that: "As Situ approached Lijiang in 1730, he stayed in "the [former] Gyeltsap's paternal home," which is likely an indirect way of saying that he visited one of the homes in exile of the Tenth Karmapa. This is because in 1660 the Karmapa had fathered a child with a local woman from Gyeltang, whom he then recognized as the Sixth Gyeltsap, Norbu Zangpo. This would also have been an opportunity for Situ to examine paintings by the Tenth Karmapa, as we know from Situ's biography of the Karmapa that he gave the Gyeltsap's mother paintings he had made in 1661."

[2] Other evidence of Situ's translating abilities include:

" According to Situ's portrayal in his own diaries, the kings of Lijiang were cultivated and educated practitioners and patrons. Situ recalls that the most famous of them, Mu Zeng, composed praises to Tārā in Chinese, which Situ translated into Tibetan." (2013: 207)

and "in volume seven of his collected works, which includes a praise poem translated from Chinese previously discussed. The colophon records that it was composed by the dharmarāja of Jang Satam, Sönam Raptan, and translated in Likyang Hüyül from a Chinese manuscript into Tibetan.

Situ was also interested in Chinese systems of astrology, astronomy, and medicine and seems to have translated some of those texts as well. Situ does not appear to have been fluent, as he also relied on translators at times, including his aforementioned nephew, Sampel, but even a basic knowledge of Chinese would have given him access to a wide range of information on Chinese painting, including printed copy books and painting manuals, which were both widely circulating in China by the eighteenth century. Situ does not mention that he studied Chinese or how he learned it, but the same is true for his learning Nepalese, which he clearly had. In such a multiethnic area as the Tibetan frontier with Sichuan and Yunnan, conversance in various languages such as Tibetan, Chinese, and even Naxi was part of daily life, as reflected in the many foreign language transliterations recorded in Situ's own writings." (Debreczeny: 2013: 215).

[3] "As Situ passed through Naxi areas on the road back toward Pelpung in 1739, he adds that he stopped the practice of blood sacrifice in ten villages.<sup>128</sup> Eliminating the ritual taking of life was a constant struggle for Tibetan lamas in border regions, where local indigenous religious practice, like the Dongba (東巴) in these Naxi regions, often included animal sacrifice. While many local deities and other aspects of indigenous ritual life were often incorporated into Tibetan Buddhist practice in the conversion of a region, the taking of life, or the "red sacrifice," was strictly forbidden but often reasserted itself if there were no prominent Buddhist teachers in the region." (Debreczeny: 2013: 235).



## Chapter Nine

VISITING PHUNTSOG DARGYE LING (PUJI SI 普濟寺) AND RE-VISITING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF THE 8TH KENTING TAI SITUPA: A historical and pilgrim's account of the 18th Century Phuntsog Dargye Ling (Puji Si) monastery, the ongoing persecution of Karma Kagyu monasteries in Lijiang by violent Mongol-Gelug forces, personal pilgrimage observations

“The principle of self-defence, even involving weapons and bloodshed, has never been condemned, even by Gandhi.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“*Every war* when it comes, or before it comes, is represented not as a *war* but as an *act* of self-defence against a homicidal maniac.” –George Orwell

“One need not destroy one's enemy. One need only destroy his willingness to engage.”  
-Sun Tzu (*Art of War* 孫子兵法;)

“Generally, what they have done grievously wounds the teachings of the Buddha, and in particular it is a great disgrace to the matchless Tsongkhapa and his followers. That is all I thought (when seeing it), but I did not show a displeased face or think of responding.” –8th Tai Situpa writing about the attacks of Mongol/Gelugpa ‘soldiers’ in the Jang region

### Introduction

The fifth and final Karma Kagyu monastery I visited in Lijiang, Yunnan was Phuntshog Dargye Ling (Puji Si 普濟寺). First built in 1771 by Dian Seng (典僧) of the local aristocratic He family (He shi 和氏) of Puji village and nephew of the founder of [Zhiyun si](#), Dian Seng was studying Tibetan language at [Fuguo Si](#), when he met 8th Kenting Tai Situpa, Chokyi Jungne (1699-1774) there, who praised his ability and recognised him as an arhat (more on that below).

The Phuntshog Ling monastery was a smaller (and a very low-key) monastery to the east of Lijiang town, in the Gucheng district. I could not even find it listed as a place on Google Maps, other than the name Puji. As a solo female foreigner, when I arrived there was no-one there at all as it was closed. I also faced some challenges entering and leaving the monastery (including a Han Chinese woman ‘visitor’ in lay clothes demanding to see my passport) but a Tibetan-speaking monk resident there was very kind to me and helped me see the monastery. The main shrine room contained artworks, statues and photos of the Karmapas and Tai Situpas, as well as the main Karma Kagyu Rinpoche in that region, 17th Drungpa Rinpoche (recognised in 1991) by the current 12th Tai Situpa) who has done an amazing job of maintaining the monasteries as places of spiritual meaning and practice.

In this chapter, I first share a little historical background, based primarily on the excellent research of Karl Debreczeny (2013) (see sources below). The 8th Tai Situpa, if you recall from other articles, was extremely influential in this region despite all the violence and conflict the Karma Kagyu had faced, and even managed to make an extremely important edition of the Kangyur, the Derge one (based on the previous Jang/Litang edition created by the 6th

Zhamarpa with the assistance of the Naxi Mu Kings). The Litang edition of the Kangyur was stolen and sealed up by Gelugpa ‘soldier’ monks.

In particular, I share some of 8th Tai Situpa’s words (translated by Debreczeny) about his experience during his three visits to Lijiang and to these Karma Kagyu monasteries, which he helped to preserve and maintain after the 10th Karmapa’s passing away. In fact, it is said both the 11th Karmapa and 12th Karmapa, Jangchub Dorje (1703-1732) died at very young ages, in their twenties. For example, the 12th Karmapa (teacher of the 8th Tai Situpa) and 8th Zhamarpa (1695-1732) Chokyi Dondrub (a major Karma Kagyu ‘heart son’), both died at young ages in highly suspicious circumstances on the Chinese border en route to meet members of Manchu imperial family. Two Gelugpa monastics claimed to have murdered them (using ‘black magic’ tantric techniques) [1].

The 8th Tai Situpa speaks of his feeling ‘sad and depressed’ by the continuing persecution and violent attacks by ‘bandits’ (Mongolian soldiers and Gelugpa monks), which they had to fend off physically in self-defence. Thus proving that the Gelug-Mongols even tried to destroy/convert the Karma Kagyu monasteries after the Karmapas had escaped into exile in that region. The Mongolian-Gelug alliance seemed intent on destroying or converting every Kagyu monastery in the region, as well as looting all their treasures, including gifts given by Chinese emperors to the Karmapas [2]. Not aligned or consistent with the Buddha Shakyamuni’s teachings on love and compassion at all! The idea that this was some grand unification strategy by the Mongolians/Gelugpas for benefiting Tibet and Tibetans is simply not backed up by historical accounts and facts regarding property and texts.

I also felt rather depressed and sad when researching the history and reading 8th Tai Situpa’s biography of the 10th Karmapa, and personal account of the violent attacks on them by Mongol-Gelugpa sectarian monks and soldiers, forcing their own monks and locals to defend themselves physically. Thus, the common Tibetan exile narrative that the Gelugpa/5th Dalai Lama stopped a ‘civil war’ in Tibet is a false one (also propagated by Gelugpa biased Western and Tibetan scholars). It was a Mongolian military invasion, by a foreign army instigated and started by the aggression of the Gelugpa administrators. The 10th Karmapa refused to fight back with the armies of the King of Tsang, which then led to the deliberate execution by the Gelugpas of the Tibetan King and mass destruction and murder of Karma Kagyu monastics and institutions.

However, as Martin Luther King Jr said, in the opening quote, self-defence is justifiable and is not equivalent to unjust violence, or an act of war. This is why it is so important that history accurately records who started the violence and division and why, and what they achieved and did after their ‘victory’.

Strangely, considering their publicly professed concerns about justice, civil liberties, love and compassion. there are no statements by the 14th Dalai Lama or any Gelugpa Geshe or scholar about the Mongol invasion and what they did in Tibet and to the other lineages with any kind of regret, compassion or need for reparation, apology or restitution. Instead, the Gelugpas seem intent on maintaining Gelug power in exile and globally in Tibetan Buddhism and returning to their grand palace, Potala. The media propaganda machine has succeeded in convincing Tibetans and westerners that is the best and right thing, but the facts speak differently. It is a failed political policy of the last six decades and the Chinese show no signs of wanting to speak to the Gelugpa/CTA representatives in exile.



Sun Tzu wrote in the *Art of War* (孫子兵法 🙄) “One need not destroy one’s enemy. One need only destroy his willingness to engage.” The understandable and commendable ‘unwillingness to engage’ of the Karma Kagyu and Karmapas as Buddhists in violent retaliation (other than in desperate self-defence) led to their ‘defeat’ in terms of material objects and political power. However, eventually it also led to the ‘defeat’ of the authoritarian ruling Gelugpas (and all Tibetans) with the ensuing Qing dynasty rule in Tibet, followed by absolute Chinese political power there. Thus showing that the violent Gelugpa religious sectarianism not only goes against the Buddha’s fundamental teachings but also never ends well.

In any case, the fact these Karma Kagyu monasteries are still standing and functioning is a message of hope and heroism, in particular the heroic courage of those who refused to ‘attack back’ with violence, such as 10th Gyalwang Karmapa and 8th Kenting Tai Situpa. When one looks at their legacy not only in the Jang region, but in Tibet and globally, in their texts, Kangyur editions, and unparalleled masterpiece artworks in Tibetan artistic history, it should not take a ‘genius’ to be able to see who the aggressors/political warlords in Tibet were (and are) and who are the enduring, worthy heroes and ‘victors’.

I dedicate this article to the memory of all those who were unjustly murdered in the Mongol-Gelug aggression, and to the memory of the executed Tibetan King of Tsang, and the pacifist and great artist, 10th Karmapa, Choying Dorje. May the Buddha’s teachings on love, compassion and non-violence endure, and may all those in the robes of religious men (who do the opposite) be swiftly eliminated and brought onto the Buddhist path!

Music? [Jamgon Tai Situpa](#) by Tenzin Kunsel, and [Masters of War](#) by Bob Dylan: “I just want you to know I can see through your masks.....You hide in your mansion, while the young people’s blood flows out of their bodies, and is buried in the mud.”

Written and compiled by Adele Tomlin, 24th August 2024.

## Historical Background: Ongoing Suppression of Karma Kagyu by Gelug ‘soldier’ monks and 8th Tai Situupa’s visit there

In terms of the history of this Karma Kagyu monastery, it was built in 1771, before the 8th Tai Situupa passed away in 1774 at the age of 75. Debreczeny (2013: 243) writes that during his last visit to the Jang region, the 8th Tai Situupa performed many rites to end the violent suppression and conflict in the Yunnan region. In particular, it is noted how Chinese the Jang region has become since the Naxi Mu Kings were disposed and the Qing dynasty (with the support of the 5th Dalai Lama/Gelugpas) became very dominant in the region [3]:

“Situ’s last involvement with Lijiang is recorded in 1772, just two years before he died, when he sent sculptors from É (Epé lhapzo) to Lijiang to erect a large statue, or great deity (lhachen). From this same passage we also learn that Situ explained the preliminary practices for mahāmudrā to people from Jang, among others, presented a banquet to those such as the guardians of all Lijiang (Jangkün kyong), and presented them with such things as a clay sculpture with consecration relics (zungzhuk). This monumental sculpture was probably intended for Püntsok Ling, known locally as Puji si (普济寺), the last of the five major Karma Kagyü monasteries to be built just the year before, in 1771, six kilometres west of Lijiang.

According to a Chinese text engraved on a wooden tablet (mu bei 木碑) that used to hang in the main incarnation’s quarters, the *Record of the Great Lama of Puji si* (*Puji si da lama jilue* 普濟寺大喇嘛紀略), the monastery was built by Dian Seng (典僧) of the local aristocratic He family (He shi 和氏) of Puji village and nephew of the founder of Zhiyun si.”



479 145 Situ Penchen Chökyi Jungné (1700-1774) (detail). Kham Province, Tibet; late

According to this record, Dian Seng was studying Tibetan scriptures with his uncle at [Fuguo si](#) when Situ Penchen arrived, and Situ was so impressed with Dian Seng that he



recognized him as an incarnation of an arhat, incorporating him into the Tibetan incarnation system in his middle age. After Situ's praise, Dian Seng built a small temple (Puji si) on a mountain behind the village and became very popular, with many followers. Presumably it was the main hall in this temple where Situ sent artists to build the monumental sculptures.

Three years after Dian Seng died at age eighty, Situ Penchen recognized his reincarnation in a boy in the same family, and, after being sent for education in Tibet, he returned to Puji si to become abbot, where he significantly expanded the temple into a large monastery, building monastic quarters and other structures, and established a new monastic discipline (probably a reference to another monastic customary which Situ authored for this local institution) before his death in 1837. This local Chinese record clearly demonstrates Situ's continued direct involvement in Lijiang long after his final departure."

#### Continuing persecution by Mongol-Gelug forces during Situpa's visits



*480 Naxi Mu King De, a major sponsor and supporter of the Karma Kagyu in Lijiang and of the 8th Tai Situpa Penchen, even after the Mu Kings had lost their power to the Chinese Qing dynasty in that region.*

However, during that time 8th Tai Situpa's movement is a lot more restricted, "as Situ now needs an order permitting him to travel north back to Balung toward home. During this trip Situ starts being accompanied by local as well as Chinese officials with military escorts, makes note of troop movements, and in Pongtsera encounters another Chinese military campsite. Finally, Situ is himself caught in the midst of a battle and siege near Gyeltang, close to the Yunnan-Tibet frontier. The conflict began while Situ was staying with a regional officer, when so-called "bodyguards" (kakma; literally "ruffians") of Nazangpa arrived:

"The army of Nazangpa arrived, and although five-hundred soldiers of [local] monks and laymen (benkyé) surrounded and attacked, they were unable to defeat them. I made ritual dough sculpture offerings to [the protector deities] Mahākāli and Mahākāla. The

following day, the fighting was stopped by Chakdū Kukyé, Chömpel, and others. The gunmen [of Nazangpa] fled. They made a [fortified] military encampment. As many border people gradually gathered [at the] fortress, I granted an audience. A few people of Yunnan Province and adjacent areas, the envoy of the governor of Ba, commanders, treasurers, and others having arrived, met. There was a letter [written by] the governor (depa), Ruyön commanders, and the chief of the town (drongpön). The Naxi governor of Barpa, regional commanders (dingpön), and others having discussed it, thirty tael (sang) of silver and [other] property were given to reimburse the Nazangpa for the things that were lost. They (the Nazangpa) having built a bridge across the water, left.”

On this occasion, uncharacteristically bitter feelings come forth regarding sectarian violence in Kham, which depresses Situ:

“Today I made ritual dough sculpture offerings to the protector deities and prayed to the deities and dākinī (khandro) to stop at once fighting among monks, wicked behaviour which undermines laymen’s faith. And I became depressed, thinking that [many uneducated local monks], greedy for the faith offerings of the faithful laypeople, stingy ones with [only] the [outer] appearance of a monk (sermowa), squabbling over monastic wealth (kor)– whichever tradition they belong to – and, in particular who, never mind understanding the basic tenets of Buddhism, have never even seen the good behaviour of the Gelugpa monks of central Tibet, and having merely heard only the names Kagyü and Gelug take that to be a religious tradition and [proceed to] commit bad deeds that monks should refrain from, bearing weapons aloft, committing such actions as monks waging war on other monks. Generally, what they have done grievously wounds the teachings of the Buddha, and in particular it is a great disgrace to the matchless Tsongkhapa and his followers. That is all I thought (when seeing it), but I did not show a displeased face or think of responding.”

Debreczeny notes (2103: 240) that:

“Situ rarely expresses his feelings in his diaries as in this passage, and seldom were such plain feelings about sectarian fighting discussed in Tibetan sources. Based on the context of this passage, it would appear that Nazangpa is probably a Mongol prince with militant Gelug ties who invaded the area, as there were many such incursions by combined forces of Mongol and Tibetan Gelug partisans that forcibly converted, harassed, or destroyed local Kagyü institutions, as reflected in contemporary local gazetteers such as the one from Balung (the *Weixi Travel Record* written in 1769) quoted above and the Muli Chönjung.

The monks (bendé) of Gyeltang Kagyü monastic institutions and the local lay communities (kyé) banded together to defend themselves against the armies of Nazangpa, both of which fielded soldiers in this shameful display of violent sectarianism. Situ’s biography makes it clear that soldiers of the monastic communities are involved here, and it is the “monastic assemblies that wage civil war against [other] monastic communities” that especially sadden and depressed Situ:

“Ruffians of Nazangpa, etc., and soldiers of the monastic community bearing weapons etc, who appeared, having gone on the offensive were overcome/beaten back. Situ became sad and depressed thinking that the



teachings of the Victorious One (Buddha) will never remain, as soon as he encountered those possessing the actions which turn away the faithful, [such as] the transgressions of a large force which wield weapons such as rifles, monastic assemblies which wage war against [other] monastic communities.”

Throughout Situ tried to maintain a Buddhist equanimity and succeeded in maintaining a calm deportment, resisting temptation to respond through harmful or violent rituals, but he still confessed being deeply saddened in the end.”

The White Tara ‘protection from fear of enemy armies’ paintings by 8th Tai Situpa and artistic legacy at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si)



481 White Tārā Protectress from the Eight Fears. Kham Province, Tibet; 18th century. Rubin Museum of Art (HAR 997).



482 Protection from Fear of Enemy Armies (detail)

Debreczeny (2013: 241) interestingly notes how these events also affected his paintings:

“Altering well-established iconographic conventions to meet the needs of his troubled times. For instance, in this composition of “White Tārā Protectress from the Eight Fears”, a theme received from ancient India reflecting the cultural concerns of that time

Dakini Publications (2024)

and place, Situ has changed the bottom left scene, replacing “Protection from Fear of Lions” with a more relevant and pervasive predator, “Protection from Fear of Enemy Armies”.

This “Fear of Enemy Armies” is not a pure invention of Situ but comes out of a larger set of sixteen fears. The long-life goddess White Tārā was of special significance to Situ, who is recorded to have painted her many times, starting a few years after this violent encounter: in 1762, 1763, 1764, 1766, 1768, 1769, 1772, and 1773.” [4]

### 18th Century Artworks at Puji Si

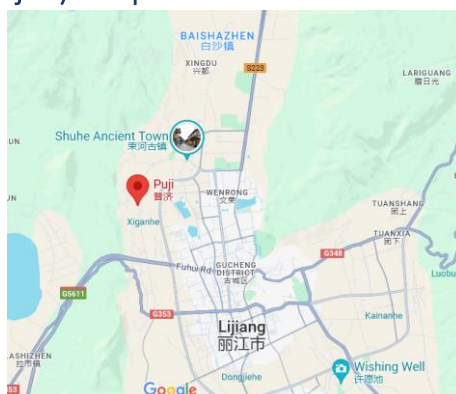
In terms of Tai Situpa’s artistic legacy at Puji si, Debreczeny (2013) writes that most did not survive the Cultural Revolution destruction by the Chinese communists, however:

“Most intriguing among the few painting remnants to survive the Cultural Revolution at Puji si are two wooden panels in an alcove to the left of the main hall across from the caretaker’s quarters; they depict narrative scenes related to Padmasambhava coming to Tibet to convert the land. The architecture within these scenes, however, closely resembles local Naxi temples, and Padmasambhava’s notched red hat resembles Situ’s famous badge of office, so that a visual conflation of the taming of the two lands, Jang and Tibet, and the establishment of temples by these two saints seems to be made here.”



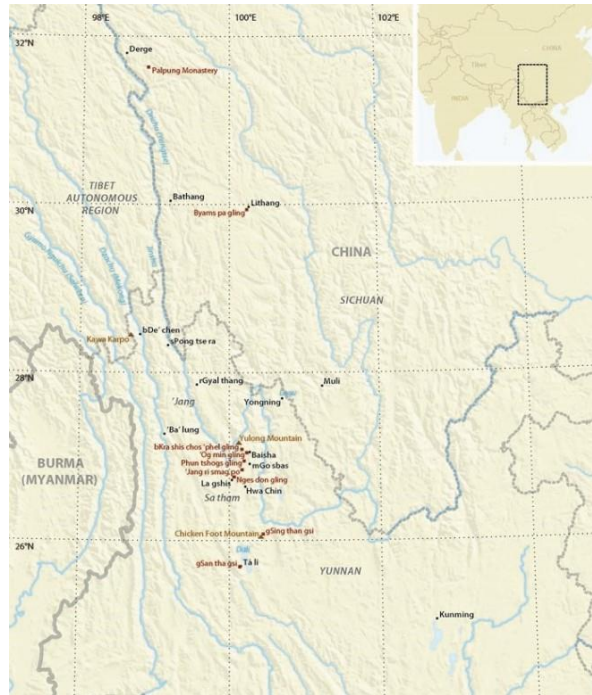
483 *The coming of Buddhism to Tibet (detail). Painting that survived the Cultural revolution at Puji si, Lijiang, Yunnan, China. Painted wooden panel. Photograph by Karl Debreczeny (2013).*

### Getting to Phuntshog Ling (Puji Si) and personal observations and challenges



484 *Map of Puji Si temple just north of Lijiang Town Centre.*





485 Map of the five main Karma Kagyu monasteries in Lijiang, Yunnan, including Phuntsog Ling. From Debreczeny (2013)

When I arrived at the Phuntsog Dargye Ling monastery by taxi (it takes about twenty minutes to drive from the centre of Lijiang) around 5.30pm, the main doors were shut and locked. As I was discussing with the Chinese taxi driver in Chinese whether to leave or stay (no internet connection there on my phone, so had to non-verbal hand gestures mainly), an adult monk came out of a side gate with a young Chinese woman. I greeted him and he spoke Tibetan which was a relief. He told me the monastery closed daily at 5pm and that he was going to walk the woman down to the local village. I informed him that I had come a long way and might not be able to come back the following day and asked if he would let me go inside to see the temple and take a few photos for half an hour. He kindly agreed and the Chinese woman went off to the bathroom while he did.



486 Village on the way to the Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) temple. It was an overcast day. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



487 Closed entrance door/gate to Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

Once the monk had opened the main doors, I went to have a look around in the first main courtyard (see photos below). When we got to the main shrine room, I prostrated, took some photos and then asked the monk if I could meditate in the main shrine room for a few minutes, and he agreed but then the Chinese woman (suddenly turned up) and intervened and told me (in English) to leave the monastery. I asked her why and she said because it was closed and I should not be there. Although, she was correct, I told her I just wanted to meditate a little there. She then demanded to see my passport, which was strange because I had no idea who she was and she did not seem to be a policewoman or official. I asked her why and she told me she worked there (she did not speak Tibetan). I then asked the monk (in Tibetan) why she was asking for my passport and if she was a worker there, he said he did not know her well, that she did not work there and was a ‘volunteer’. I then relayed this information back to her in English to which she then reacted with greater hostility and threatened to call the police. It was rather bizarre and excessive considering the monk himself had agreed I could visit the monastery and I was not causing anyone any harm by being there either.

At this point, the woman’s conduct started making the monk look uncomfortable too, and her excessive reaction and threat was enough to make me want to leave. However, I was happy that due to the monk’s kindness and understanding, I was able to see the fifth main Kagyu monastery in the area. Although it was much smaller and not as grand as the others. I would have liked to have stayed longer but causes and conditions did not permit it.

When I left the main gateway, I was totally alone there was no internet signal, the sun would be setting soon too, so I had no choice but to walk a long way down alone. However, as if by the blessings of the Buddhas, a car arrived with four Chinese tourists, who did not speak a word of English, who kindly agreed to take me to the nearest village below the temple so I could then get the bus to Lijiang. “On the road” challenges as they say! Here are some photos with descriptions of what I was able to visit there.



## First courtyard



488 The Tibetan name above the entrance door, reads Tashi Phuntshog Dargye Ling. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



489 Inside the first courtyard of Phuntshog Ling (Puji Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July



*490 Statues inside the first courtyard of Phuntshog Ling (Puji Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)*

Statues inside the first courtyard of Phuntshog Ling (Puji Si) temple. Photo: Adele Tomlin  
(July 2024)





Trees in the first courtyard at Puji Si monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)

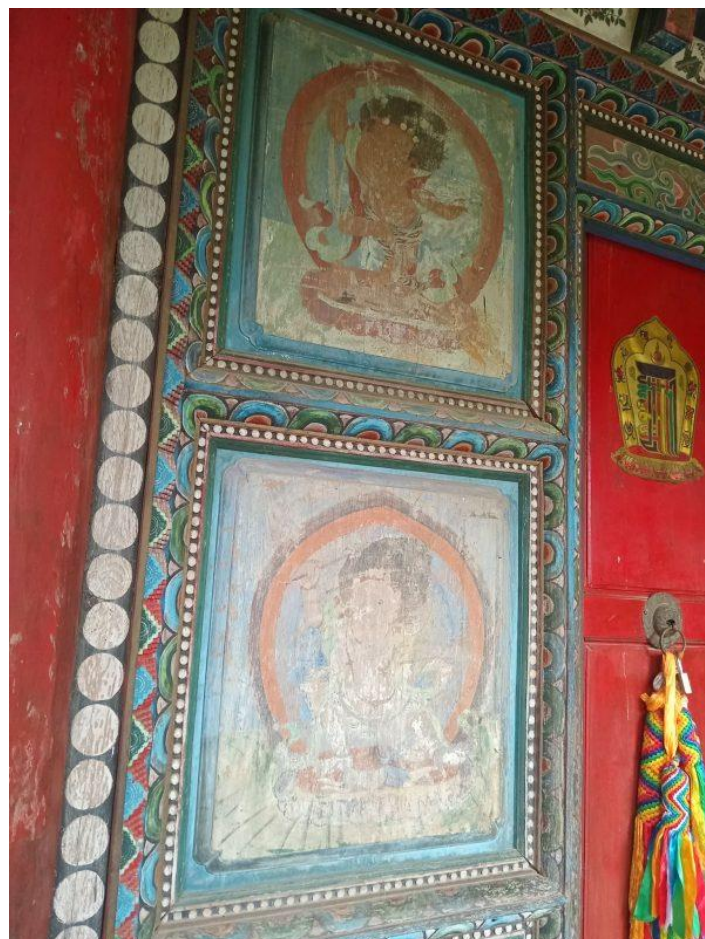


Trees in the first courtyard at Puji Si monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

I then saw some art murals which were either very old, destroyed or about to be restored, I took some photos of them, and I did not see these mentioned in Debrezcceny's research:



Old (or destroyed) art murals at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



Puji Si monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





Puji Si monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



Puji Si monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

### The main shrine room at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si)

The small shrine room had statues of both the Karmapa and Tai Situpa, and also some old looking thangka images behind them, which I was unable to get a closer look at. Here are some photos I took.

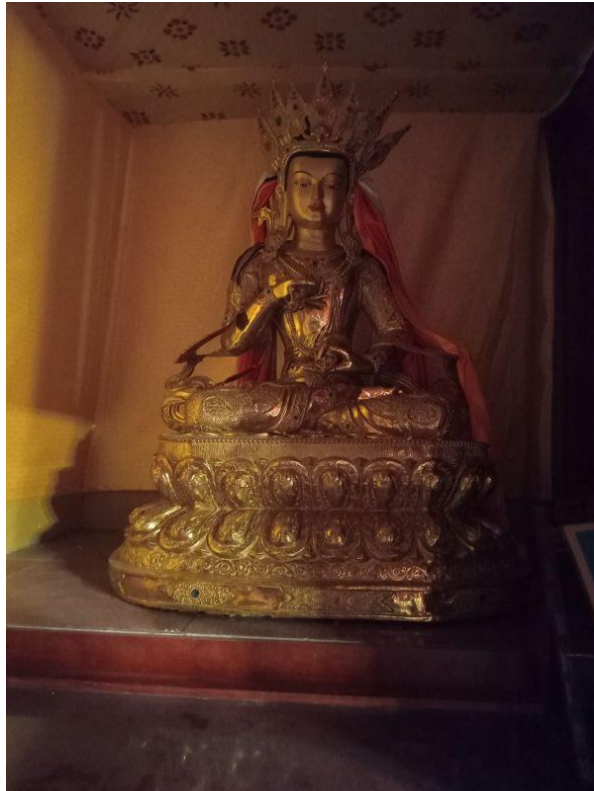


Karmapa statue at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



Statues and thangka paintings behind them at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024)





Statue at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



Statues at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



2nd Karmapa, Karma Pakshi statue at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



Thangkas of the various Karmapa incarnations at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





491 Mahakala Berngachen (Black-cloaked) statue, protector of the Karma Kagyu at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



492 White Tara statue at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



493 Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).



494 Statues at Phuntsog Ling (Puji Si) monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).





495 Thangkas of Karmapa and Tai Situpa at Puji Si monastery. Photo: Adele Tomlin (July 2024).

## Endnotes

[1] “The Twelfth Karmapa and Eighth Zhamar died under questionable circumstances on the Chinese border en route to meet members of Manchu imperial family. Two Gelug lamas of the Kokonor area heavily invested in the Qing court, the Changja and Tukwan incarnations, claimed to have caused their deaths by use of magic, in order to deny them access to the most powerful patrons of the time. Tashi Tsering, “Situ Panchen: His Contribution and Legacy,” Lungta 13 (Winter 2000).

[2] For example (Debrechzeny 2013: 204:n 30):

“In 1698 the printing blocks of the Lijiang edition were taken to Jampa Ling, a Gelukpa monastery in southwest Sichuan, by a Mongolian army led by Dargyel Boshoktū, a grandson of Gūūshi Khan. Later this edition was known as being printed in Litang. See Imaeda, “L’edition du kanjur Tibetain de ’Jang sa-tham,” 176. Similarly, other Kagyü works, such as the blocks for the collected works of the Eighth Karmapa and the Second Pawo, were removed to prevent their teachings from spreading. Such acts occurred all over central Tibet and Kham. See Yu Haibo余海波 and Yu Jiahua余嘉华, *Mushi tusi yu Lijiang*木氏土司与丽江 [*Mu Family Chieftains and Lijiang*] (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 2002), 169; Tashi Tsering, “Situ Panchen: His Contribution and Legacy,” 5.

“At Drepung [monastery] all the receptacles of the three bodies of Ganden Phodrang and, in particular, the statues of Tonpa and the Sixteen Arhats in black Akaru wood, given by the Ta ming emperor to the Karmapa, are inside a multi-storeyed wooden house placed in a rocky landscape...” (Tashi Tsering 2013: 129: n.4).

Other contemporary scholars, such as Dr. Cecile Ducher, have been writing about the discovery of many Tibetan Buddhist texts sealed up and banned by the Gelugpas in places such as Drepung monastery including the collected works of the 8th Karmapa, Jonang and Nyingma.

Why were they banned and sealed up? It seems for political and also philosophical reasons too. They did not want people studying the Shen-tong (empty-of-other) Madhyamaka view, which was actually a predominant view, along with Svatantrika Madhyamika and Cittamatra Madhyamaka, in Tibet at that time (for more on that, read the Introduction to my book [\*Tāranātha's Commentary on the Heart Sūtra\*](#)).

[3] “One is not only struck by the numbers of such encounters with Chinese but also the more frequent references to Chinese material culture. This may reflect a larger trend of social change in southwestern China – a massive influx of ethnic Chinese settlers, merchants, and soldiers. In the early eighteenth century, when Situ first traveled south, the Chinese were a minority in Yunnan, but a little more than a century later, they became a majority. Also, Situ’s abrupt and terse statements reveal that he was suddenly told that he had to leave just after arriving, suggesting a tension and uncertainty in the air, even within Lijiang at the time. For instance when Situ returned to Ngedön Püntsoḳ Ling to dedicate the monastery, the Qing imperial army arrived:

“Putsu Hermitage offered tea and I went to Lashi Monastery. I performed the donning the hat ceremony together with the dedication ceremony (for the monastery). I gave instructions on meditation. To the monks I gave general teachings and initiations. I resided at Dhuloka. I gave explanations on mahāmudrā. [While I was] together with the governor of Satam (Lijiang proper) and [monks of] Gyiling Si, the army arrived at Lashi. We discussed such things as the lamas of Okmin Ling.”

[4] White Tārā is primarily associated with long life and removing of sickness. In this context Tārā is also known for protecting from eight fears, which are: protection from snakes (top left), fire (mid L1), elephants (mid L2), drowning (top R), bandits (mid R1), ghosts (mid R2), tyrants/imprisonment (bottom R), and usually lions.

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