

Tibetan Nonsectarianism (ris med)

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Entry tags: Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist Traditions, Mahayana Buddhism, Religious Group

Tibetan nonsectarianism (ris med) describes a religious orientation in which the various philosophical and practice lineages of Tibetan Buddhism are understood as uniformly efficacious rather than as mutually exclusive competitors. Although many Tibetan Buddhists throughout history have adopted such an orientation, the concept was theorized most sophisticatedly in Kham and Amdo from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, a period notorious for its political upheaval. Scholars have generally cited Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye Yonten Gyatso ('Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros Mtha' yas Rgya mtsho, 1813-1899), Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo ('Jam dbyangs Mkhyen brtse'i Dbang po, 1820-1892), and Orgyen Chokgyur Lingpa (O rgyan Mchog gyur Gling pa, 1829-1870), as three of the most important proponents of nonsectarianism as a self-consciously distinct, rather than implicit, orientation. All three were in close contact with one another and devoted their lives to reviving and preserving Tibetan Buddhist practices and teachings they feared were on the cusp of extinction, either due to active political suppression or popular indifference. The nonsectarian approach proved especially important in the late twentieth-century for Tibetan Buddhist teachers who had been forced into exile and sought to articulate a quasi-unified Tibetan Buddhist tradition that would be intelligible to the international world, and nonsectarianism has found a prominent place in the writings of modern luminaries as diverse as Kalu Rinpoche (Kar lu Rin po che, 1905-1989), Chogyam Trungpa (Chos rgyam Drung pa, 1939-1987), and the present Dalai Lama (Bstan 'dzin Rgya mtsho, 1935-present). There is not widespread agreement, either among scholars or Tibetan Buddhist teachers, about the precise use of nonsectarianism in the writings of the teachers mentioned above or in contemporary discourse. Indeed, the category is just as broad as "pluralism" or "ecumenicism." Jamgon Kongtrul was primarily concerned with the "eight chariots of accomplishment" (sgrub brgyud shing rta chen po brgyad) while contemporary teachers are more likely to emphasize the nonsectarian orientation with respect to the Nyingma, Kagyu, Gelug, and Sakya schools. Some argue that nonsectarianism is inclusivist, and was used by teachers of Kham and Amdo to subtly assert the superiority of their own local practices, while others believe nonsectarianism should be genuinely pluralistic, wherein the Tibetan Buddhist schools are treated as coequal. Some argue that nonsectarianism implies that a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner can draw on whichever practices would be useful to them individually, while others argue that one should follow exclusively a single lineage in one's own practice while respecting all others. These different readings have unsurprisingly yielded many different translations of ris med into English, of which "nonsectarianism" is the most common, but "ecumenicism," "universal," "without bias," "impartial," "an ecumenical approach," "eclecticism," "nonpartisan," and "nondiscrimination" have also been used. A further point of ambiguity is whether Tibetan nonsectarianism was exclusively an elite discourse in the nineteenth century, or if it included popular elements as well. Although Jamgon Kongtrul, Khyentse Wangpo, and Chokgyur Lingpa were all elite monastics, they sought to popularize practices that had henceforth been aimed primarily at fellow elite practitioners.



Date Range: 1840 CE - 1920 CE

Region: Kham and Amdo

Region tags: Asia, Amdo, China, Tibet

Nonsectarianism (ris med) in Eastern Tibet

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Gayley, Holly, and Schapiro, Joshua, eds. *A Gathering of Brilliant Moons: Practice Advice from the Rime Masters of Tibet*. United States: Wisdom Publications, 2017.
- Source 2: Gardner, Alexander. *The Life of Jamgon Kongtrul the Great*. United States: Shambhala, 2019.
- Source 3: Mathes, Klaus-Dieter, ed. *Nonsectarianism (ris Med) in 19th- and 20th-Century Eastern Tibet: Religious Diffusion and Cross-fertilization Beyond the Reach of the Central Tibetan Government*. Netherlands: Brill, 2021.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jamgon-Kongtrul-Lodro-Taye/TBRC_P264
- Source 1 Description: Alexander Gardner's thorough biography of Jamgon Kongtrul Yonten Gyatso in the Treasury of Lives database.
- Source 2 URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kxd_VOH1aI
- Source 2 Description: Ringu Tulku's 2006 lecture on ris med delivered in Brussels.
- Source 1 URL: https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jamgon-Kongtrul-Lodro-Taye/TBRC_P264
- Source 1 Description: Alexander Gardner's thorough biography of Jamgon Kongtrul Yonten Gyatso in the Treasury of Lives database.
- Source 2 URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kxd_VOH1aI
- Source 2 Description: A recording of a lecture delivered in 2006 by Ringu Tulku, an influential Buddhist teacher and scholar, on the "ris med approach."

Relevant online primary textual corpora (original languages and/or translations):

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.tsadra.org/digital-media/bilingual-library/>
- Source 1 Description: The Tsadra Bilingual Library contains an incredibly useful bilingual edition of Jamgon Kongtrul's entire Treasury of Knowledge. Requires app download.
- Source 2 URL: <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW20880>
- Source 2 Description: High-quality scans of Jamgon Kongtrul's Autobiography.
- Source 3 URL: <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW00KG09825>
- Source 3 Description: Kongtrul's non-sectarian history of how Buddhism came to Tibet.

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: Although the nineteenth-century practitioners of nonsectarianism were tangentially aware of Islam, Christianity, and Chinese religions, they interacted most directly with Bon (Bon), which held both popular and institutional sway in nineteenth-century Kham and Amdo. Whether or not the nonsectarian approach extended to Bon practitioners was debated among authors who advocated a nonsectarian approach. For instance, Jamgon Kongtrul suggests in some of his writings that Bon is a valuable tradition that can be respected even in Buddhist terms; in other writings he argues that it is a deceptive tradition that Buddhists should oppose.

↳ Is the cultural contact competitive:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, insofar as the Buddhists and Bonpos were at times competing for the same rituals and practitioners. However, the nonsectarian authors tended to take a more generous view of Bon than did other Buddhist authors at the time.

↳ Is the cultural contact accommodating/pluralistic:

– Yes

Notes: The greatest success of the nonsectarian movement was in bringing together the different Tibetan practice schools such that they began to think of themselves as a unified tradition rather than religious competitors. With respect to Bon, the nonsectarian authors tended to take a more generous view of Bon than did other Buddhist authors at the time, although not invariably. The nonsectarian was at its core a call for greater accommodation and pluralism of religious groups different than one's own within certain limits.

↳ Is the cultural contact neutral:

– No

Notes: The Buddhists in eastern Tibet had far greater political, social, and institutional power than did Bonpos at the time.

↳ Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– No

Notes: Or, at least, not along religious lines. Although there was significant violence in Kham and Derge during this period, particularly when Gonpo Namgyel, the chieftain of Nyarong, conquered much of Kham from the 1840s-1865, Yudru Tsomu and others scholars have shown convincingly that his motives arose primarily out of his anger at the political treatment of his family and clan, and less over doctrinal or religious concerns.

↳ Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– No

Notes: No, excluding the invasion of Gonpo Namgyel mentioned above, which I treat as an inner-Kham struggle. Although the nonsectarian authors struggled against the Lhasa occupation of Derge and other areas in Khams in the late nineteenth century, their protests never erupted into violent conflict.

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Notes: The designation of certain nineteenth-century scholars and teachers as "nonsectarian" is an ex-post-facto scholarly designation before nonsectarianism truly became a self-aware movement in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it is one that is consistently applied by both Buddhist and secular historians. However, there was no formal process or system for designating oneself as a practitioner of nonsectarianism, only an informal network of associations.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– No

Notes: The nonsectarian authors actively propagated their position and sought to expand their ideological influence, but they didn't recruit new members insofar as there was no formal group or denomination for which people to join. Rather, they were trying to effect a paradigm shift in how different Buddhist traditions of practice regarded one another.

Does the religion have official political support

– Yes

Notes: Although Buddhist teachers who championed nonsectarianism could be found throughout the Tibetan Plateau, the concept received its greatest institutional support in the Kingdom of Derge, a small functionally-independent principality nestled between central Tibet and Qing territory. The Derge royal family propitiated Jamgon Kongtrul, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, and Chokgyur Lingpa, including by funding the printings of many of their works on nonsectarianism.

↳ Are the priests paid by polity:

– Yes

Notes: Among other sources of revenue. The Derge royal family propitiated many of the monasteries associated with nonsectarian luminaries, as well as sponsored the printings of their works at considerable cost to the state. The royal family would also pay teachers to perform specific rituals, e.g. of healing, prosperity, or defense.

↳ Is religious infrastructure paid for by the polity:

– Yes

Notes: Among other revenue sources. Monasteries and nunneries were funded primarily through offerings, donations to the institution, and state funding, as well as labor carried out on monastic lands.

↳ Are the head of the polity and the head of the religion the same figure:

– No

Notes: No, not in eastern Tibet, although the highest lamas were also influential political figures.

↳ Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:

– No

Notes: Not officially, but important Buddhist teachers were also important political figures. Sometimes individual teachers would also hold political offices (e.g. as a ritual specialist), but the two roles were broadly distinguished.

↳ Is religious observance enforced by the polity:

– No

Notes: Except insofar as a portion of required taxes were contributed to the monastic institutions.

↳ Polity legal code is roughly coterminous with religious code:

– No

Notes: The secular laws of Derge and other Tibetan polities were deeply informed by Buddhist values and categories, but there remained a distinction between the secular laws of state and those of the monastery.

↳ Polity provides preferential economic treatment (e.g. tax, exemption)

– Yes

Notes: Large monasteries were empowered to levy their own taxes and profit from the work performed on monastery lands. In Derge, monasteries with powerful teachers were supported by the state.

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

Notes: Tibetan nonsectarianism, particularly as articulated by Kongtrul, was incredibly expansive, and included almost all Tibetan Buddhists. As with theories of liberal tolerance, nonsectarianism encountered theoretical difficulties in its own intolerance of intolerance, but there was no conception of apostasy in the sense for formally dispelling someone from the sangha on ideological grounds.

Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The initial proponents of nonsectarianism were elite philosopher-monks who sought to induce a larger shift in the Tibetan understanding of the relationships among different Buddhist groups. In this sense, the number of people actively theorizing the concept was perhaps quite small, but their impact was significant and eventually felt throughout the Tibetan world. Because the nonsectarian writers were seeking to effect an intellectual shift and did not actively demarcate a movement, it is difficult to capture the extent of their influence in numerical terms.

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region)

population, numerical):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The initial proponents of nonsectarianism were elite philosopher-monks who sought to induce a larger shift in the Tibetan understanding of the relationships among different Buddhist groups. In this sense, the number of people actively theorizing the concept was perhaps quite small, but their impact was significant and eventually felt throughout the Tibetan world. Because the nonsectarian writers were seeking to effect an intellectual shift and did not actively demarcate a movement, it is difficult to capture the extent of their influence in numerical terms.

Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also “oral scriptures” (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– Yes

Notes: The Tibetan Buddhist canon is divided into the Kagyur (bka' 'gyur), which nominally contains the words of the Buddha, and the Tengyur (bstan 'gyur), which contains later Indian commentaries, though in practice the division is not rigid. Both were compiled in approximately the fourteenth century, but neither body is closed or fixed. Although both bodies purport to contain Indian works, western historians treat many of the texts as authored or extensively revived by Tibetans. In addition to these two standardized bodies of scripture, many of the nineteenth-century authors who theorized nonsectarianism also accepted a body of scriptures specific to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism called the The Hundred-Thousand Nyingma Tantras (rnying ma rgyud 'bum). Most of these tantras were composed around the same time as those found in the Kagyur and Tengyur, and some tantras are found in both collections. The Nyingma Tantras represent less a systematic collection of specifically Nyingma tantras than an ad hoc compilation of scriptures rejected by other schools and hence excluded from the Kagyur and Tengyur, in part because many of the texts are treasure texts (gter ma) whose historical legitimacy is questioned by non-Nyingmapas.



Are they written:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, the Kagyur, Tengyur, and Hundred-Thousand Nyingma Tantras all exist in textual form. Sponsoring a printing of the entire canon was considered an especially meritorious act for those with the financial means to do so, especially rulers. The royal family of Derge, whence many of the nonsectarian teachers hailed, was famous for the quality and tolerance of its printing press, and they sponsored important editions of all three canons of scriptures.



Are they oral:

– Yes

Notes: Although the scriptures mentioned above were all written, there were also tantric teachings that were transmitted primarily or exclusively in oral instructions. Many of the tantric texts included in the above canons could only be rendered intelligible when accompanied by the oral initiation or commentary of an initiated teacher, and as such read more like lecture-aides or shorthand than systematic treatises. This meant that to receive many Tibetan tantric teachings, one had to seek out an initiated teacher from whom to receive the teaching in

addition to finding a relevant text.

↳ Is there a story (or a set of stories) associated with the origin of scripture:

– Yes

↳ Revealed by a high god:

– No

↳ Revealed by other supernatural being:

– Yes

Notes: Although there is no single story for how these scriptures came to the Tibetan people, the Tibetan genre of "dharma history" (chos 'byung) is designed to illustrate the Indian origins of various Buddhist teachings and explain how they entered Tibet. Some teachings were simply transmitted in textual form from Sanskrit or other Indian languages into Tibet, but some were brought personally by Indian teachers and tantric masters who traveled to Tibet. The phrase "supernatural" is slightly problematic in Buddhism, but many of these tantric masters were able to kill demons, perform miracles, cast hailstorms, and do other actions beyond the capacities of ordinary people.

↳ Inspired by high god:

– No

↳ Inspired by other supernatural being:

– Yes

Notes: See above.

↳ Originated from divine or semi-divine human beings:

– Yes

Notes: If we treat the Buddha as a semi-divine being, then this is true, as all the Tibetan Buddhist teachings were said to be attributable to the Buddha himself, generally as a historical figure, but sometimes in other capacities, like teachings revealed in dreams or through Buddhahood as a principle.

↳ Originated from non-divine human being:

– No

Notes: Although historians treat many of the scriptures as human- and specifically Tibetan-authored, the tradition itself would claim that all scriptures were authored or inspired by enlightened beings.

↳ Are the scriptures alterable:

– Yes

Notes: At the broadest level, the canons are not strictly closed, and their contents are constantly being renegotiated. Each printing of the Kagyur, Tengyur, and Hundred-Thousand Nyingma Tantras varies slightly in its contents. Individual texts are also gradually altered, sometimes intentionally and sometimes inadvertently, by scribes and editors across the centuries. Moreover, sometimes a scriptural commentary is written or revealed that will cast a new light on the interpretation of a given scripture.

↳ Are there formal institutions (i.e. institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders) for interpreting the scriptures:

– Yes

Notes: Monastic institutions train monks (and, less often, nuns) in scriptural interpretation and performance. In Tibet, monastic institutions serve as one of the prime transmitters of secular and religious knowledge alike, as well as sites of great political power.

↳ Can interpretation also take place outside these institutions:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, lay religious practitioners also engage the scriptures and offer scriptural commentaries, particularly with respect to tantra. However, the monastic institutions broadly define scriptural orthodoxy.

↳ Interpretation is only allowed by officially sanctioned figures:

– No

Notes: No, laypeople can also interpret the scriptures. Tantric practice in particular is associated with antinomianism and anti-institutionalism.

↳ Is there a select group of people trained in transmitting the scriptures:

– Yes

Notes: Wealthy monasteries often employ scribes or their own printing press for this purpose. Sometimes wealthy donors or political leaders would sponsor the copying or printing of a large body of scriptures as a merit-generating practice. Individual practice and monastic lineages would also transmit their own oral commentaries or teachings by which to interpret the orthodox scriptures. One of the main goals of the nonsectarian teachers was the preservation of scriptures they feared were on the verge of extinction.

↳ Is there a codified canon of scriptures:

– Yes

Notes: See above. Yes, although this codification is somewhat less strict in Tibetan Buddhism than in many other religions. At the broadest level, the canons are not strictly closed, and their contents are constantly being renegotiated. Each printing of the Kagyur, Tengyur, and Hundred-Thousand Nyingma Tantras varies slightly in its contents. Some Tibetan thinkers have argued that there should at least be a theoretically identifiable canon of genuine scriptures, while others value the canons' flexibility.

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– Yes

Notes: Tibet has a rich history of sacral architecture, including stupas, thangka paintings, prayer halls, and statues of important deities or bodhisattvas.

↳ In the average settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:

– I don't know

Notes: Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it would depend on the settlement. Every Tibetan settlement would have at least some sort of shrine. In communities large enough to have a monastery, the monastery's prayer hall would likely be the largest building in the town. Although it is difficult to put a percentage on the total area occupied by such monuments, one might fairly say that religious monuments often function as the epicenter of Tibetan settlements.

↳ Size of largest single religious monument, square meters:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: There are not in any large religious monuments that are associated with the nonsectarian tradition in particular.

↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: See above.

↳ Size of average monument, square meters:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: See above

↳ Height of average monument, meters:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: See above

↳ In the largest settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: See above

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes



Tombs:

– Yes

Notes: Tibetan stupas often contain the relics or remains of a great lama in their center. Following a sky burial, the flesh and viscera of the deceased are fed to vultures, while the bones are ground into a powder, mixed with tsampa barley, and placed at an auspicious site.



Cemeteries:

– No

Notes: Tibetans are more likely to dispose of bodies through cremation or sky burial than through burial in the ground.



Temples:

– Yes

Notes: Every monastery, including those occupied by the nonsectarian authors, would have had at least one temple, and most would have had far more.



Altars:

– Yes

Notes: Shrines are common in eastern Tibet, particularly to deities who protect the local monastery, people, and land.



Devotional markers:

– Yes

Notes: Even unoccupied areas of Tibet often include devotional markers, like prayer flags or shrines in remote mountain passes offered to the gods of the pass.



Mass gathering point [plazas, courtyard, square. Places permanently demarcated using visible objects or structures]:

– Yes

Notes: Many Tibetan temples have a large square outside their entrance that might be the largest gathering place in the town. Although the square is often used in religious ceremonies, it might also be used for quasi-secular gatherings.



Other type of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes [specify]: Although stupas are tombs in a certain sense, they deserve mention as their own form of monumental architecture. The merit associated with the holy object inside transfers to practitioners who circumambulate the stupa, and stupas often serve as a social and religious center for Tibetan towns.

Is iconography present:

— Yes

↳ Where is iconography present [select all that apply]:

- On persons
- At home
- All public spaces

Notes: Images of Tibetan deities are found almost everywhere--on the walls of stupas, in shrines, on the outside of stupas, in family shrines, etc.--often to generate blessings and/or protection. Tibetans might also wear an amulet with iconography around their necks, hence the "on persons."

↳ Are there distinct features in the religious group's iconography:

— No

Notes: Although Tibetan iconography broadly is quite distinct relative to other regions and forms of Buddhism, the nonsectarian masters themselves did not employ their own distinctive iconography.

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

— Yes

Notes: The nonsectarian masters, especially Jamgon Kongtrul and Chokgyur Lingpa, expended a great deal of time and resources sacralizing the land of eastern Tibet, both by writing pilgrimage guides and withdrawing termas (gter ma) like texts, statues, and medicinal pills that aid one in the journey to enlightenment and embedding eastern Tibet within a larger Buddhist cosmological framework.

↳ Are sacred site oriented to environmental features:

"Environmental features" refers to features in the landscape, mountains, rivers, cardinal directions etc...

— Yes

Notes: Different deities are often associated with different environmental features and need to be propitiated. For instance, gods of mountain passes need to be propitiated to ensure safe passage, earthquakes and floods are often attributed to agitated nagas (klu). Certain sites will appear as ordinary landscapes to average beings, but as Buddha fields or other sacred sites to highly realized Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Are pilgrimages present:

— Yes

Notes: Many of the nonsectarian masters spent large portions of their lives engaged in pilgrimage, sometimes to the traditionally holy sites of central Tibet, but also to sacred places in Eastern Tibet that the masters would reinscribe with new significance by revealing new treasures and treasure-texts hidden in their depths.

↳ How strict is pilgrimage:

– Optional (common)

Notes: Most ordinary Tibetans as well as Buddhist masters would visit local pilgrimage sites. Although it was common to consult a pilgrimage guide written by a previous Buddhist master explaining the significance of the site and how to engage, pilgrimages were relatively informal and could vary according to the needs of individual pilgrims.

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer “no” only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: In the sense that one exists in most Buddhist schools of thought; the nonsectarian teachers were not particularly distinctive on this point.

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

– Yes

Notes: The wording of this question fails to capture Buddhist categories, but broadly speaking “consciousness” is considered theoretically isolatable from other parts of the body.

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as non-material, ontologically distinct from body:

– Yes

Notes: In a very broad sense, yes. At some level one's karma and, in many Buddhist schools, consciousness, survive one's death while one's body does not.

↳ Other spirit-body relationship:

– No

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: Following Buddhist orthodoxy, one is reincarnated according to the karmic effects of one's actions.

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: There are six possible realms of Buddhist rebirth: God, demigod, human, animal, hungry

ghost, and hell. The former three realms are generally considered positive rebirths insofar as they facilitate enlightened practice, while the latter three realms are generally considered negative rebirths insofar as they do not.

↳ Afterlife in specified realm of space beyond this world:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, for the god, demigod, and hell realms.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined “above” space:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, for the gods and demigods.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined “below” space:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, for the hell realms.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined horizontal space:

– Yes

Notes: For humans, animals, and hungry ghosts.

↳ Afterlife located in “other” space:

– Yes [specify]: Certain enlightened or quasi-enlightened beings are said to be able to transcend these six realms altogether, although the understanding of their ontological status varies widely within Buddhism.

Reincarnation in this world:

– Yes

Notes: It depends how broadly “world” is conceived, but rebirth takes place within the present universe. In certain cases, one might be reborn into the very community in which one lived one's previous life.

↳ In a human form:

– Yes

↳ In animal/plant form:

– Yes

Notes: More often as an animal. Plants are generally considered sentient within Buddhist cosmologies, but their relationship to the six realms of rebirths varies widely.

↳ In form of an inanimate object(s):

– No

Notes: The Buddhist cosmology distinguishes "sentient beings" to whom one has an ethical obligation from inanimate objects, to which one does not. However, in certain Tibetan practices one might transfer one's consciousness into an inanimate object. Similarly, objects like "ground" or "mountain" that are generally not considered sentient in Euro-American cosmologies might have this sense in Tibetan ones.

↳ In non-individual form (i.e. some form of corporate rebirth, tribe, lineage. etc.):

– No

Notes: If I am understanding the sense of the question correctly, then no. However, tulkus (sprul sku) are able to control their own emanations and rebirths and so often incarnate in lineages. For instance, the famous Dalai Lama lineage is sometimes understood as representing fourteen distinct births of a single being, the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara (spyen ras gzigs).

↳ Reincarnation linked to notion of life-transcending causality (e.g. karma):

– Yes

Notes: The Tibetan understanding of rebirth is linked directly to one's karma.

↳ Other form of reincarnation in this world:

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: The bodies of highly realized masters were often said not to decay at the same rate or at all after their death. Many remained in a meditative posture even after dying. Portions of the corpse were often used as relics, often by preservation in a stupa that could then be circumambulated for karmic benefit. Similarly, the death of great teachers was often accompanied by great signs, for instance flowers coming from the sky, pleasant smells wafting through the air, or the sound of music.

↳ Cremation:

– Yes

Notes: Access to timber and fuel was somewhat easier than in central Tibet, and so cremation was a relatively common form of burial.

↳ Mummification:

– No

Notes: Although the bodies of some great masters were said not to decay of their power.

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: The bodies of some great masters were placed into coffins and held in the monastery. However, this was significantly less common than cremation and sky burials.

↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):
– No

↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):
– Yes

↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):
– No

↳ Corpse is interred some other way:
– No

↳ Cannibalism:
– No

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):
– No

↳ Feeding to animals:
– Yes

Notes: Corpses were often fed to vultures in a practice known as a "sky burial." The remaining bones would then be ground into a paste mixed with the Tibetan barley tsampa and taken to an auspicious site.

↳ Secondary burial:
– Yes

Notes: Sometimes the relics of a master would be moved from one holy site to another, but secondary burial was not a standardized ritual.

↳ Re-treatment of corpse:
– No

↳ Other intensive (in terms of time or resources expended) treatment of corpse :
– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Are grave goods present:

– I don't know

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: The funerals of great teachers were a significant communal event and required days of rituals celebrating their life and ensuring a good rebirth.

↳ As cenotaphs:

– No

↳ In cemetery:

– No

↳ Family tomb-crypt:

– No

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):

– No

↳ Other formal burial type:

– Yes [specify]: Sky-burial or cremation, see above.

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: The gods play an important role in Tibetan Buddhism in a variety of areas. Deities of the landscape must be propitiated in order for society to function smoothly. Gods also can be propitiated to help individuals--e.g. with illness, fertility, economic success, etc. Deities also guide one through complex meditations that can lead to enlightenment; much of the nonsectarian project was concerned with restoring rituals that were feared to be on the cusp of extinction, and elevating deities local to Eastern Tibet at the expense of the orthodox ones promoted by Central Tibetan institutions.

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– No

Notes: Not in the sense of a monotheistic god who is ontologically distinct from its creation.

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: According to Buddhist cosmology, every being has been trapped in samsara for such a long period of time that all beings, including gods, have previously taken rebirth in every realm, including that of humans. However, this dimension of the gods is not stressed in everyday life.

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– No

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– No

↳ Previously human spirits have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– No

↳ Human spirits' knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– No

Notes: The gods are, if not fully omniscient, at least functionally omniscient with respect to human affairs. However, some gods might be concerned primarily with the affairs of the area in which they reside, particularly when they are linked to a particular geographical area or feature, like a mountain pass.

↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits' knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

— Yes

↳ Human spirit's can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):

— Yes

Notes: This makes the gods and spirits particularly useful as meditation guides.

↳ Human spirits know your basic character (personal essence):

— Yes

Notes: In Buddhism there is no essence to know, but many can see your karmic stream.

↳ Human spirits know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

— No

↳ Human spirits have other form(s) of knowledge regarding this world:

— No

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

— Yes

Notes: This is precisely why they are valuable to propitiate. The gods can both reward and punish according to whether they are appeased or offended.

↳ Human spirits can reward:

— Yes

↳ Human spirits can punish:

— Yes

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

— Yes

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

— Yes

Notes: As mentioned in the broader answer above, although the gods were technically humans in a former life, this aspect of their experience is rarely emphasized.

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

— Yes

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

— Yes

Notes: Buddhist deities often have both a compassionate and a wrathful form, so that even the wrathful form is working to oppose the foes of the dharma and is not intrinsically wrathful. However, non-Buddhist deities might be malicious in their own right and work to thwart human flourishing.

↳ Human spirits possess hunger:

— Yes

Notes: Gods do not generally possess hunger, although they can be propitiated through food offerings. Hungry ghosts, however, are defined by their hunger, condemned to wander the earth perpetually hungry.

↳ Human spirits possess/exhibit some other feature:

— No

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

— Yes

Notes: Especially when given offerings or otherwise propitiated.

↳ In waking, everyday life:

— No

Notes: This would not be common except for especially realized beings.

↳ In dreams:

— Yes

Notes: This was quite common for the nonsectarian masters. Many of the teachings that Kongtrul and others "recovered" were in fact bestowed by deities in dreams in order to fill gaps in transmission lines.

↳ In trance possession:

— Yes

Notes: Tibetan oracles and shamans commonly fall into a trance before receiving a divination. In general this is a specialized function associated with a particular office, but ordinary beings might on occasion also fall into such a trance state.

↳ Through divination processes:

— Yes

Notes: See above

↳ Only through specialists:

— No

Notes: But primarily through specialists; see above.

↳ Only through monarch:

— No

↳ Communicate with living through other means:

— Yes [specify]: Although Tibetan deities could communicate with the living through a variety of means, meditation is one worth stressing. Tantric practices and meditations in particular were often tailored toward a particular deity, such that the deity in question would grant the practitioner special insights or powers.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

— Yes

Notes: See the discussion of the Buddhist realms above. The other realms of rebirth are not strictly supernatural, but they do refer to ways of being other than the human.

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

— Yes

Notes: It is interesting to consider whether "animals" would count as a supernatural being in this context, insofar as they are a part of daily human experience but occupy a radically different form of being.

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

— Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

— No

- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:
 - No
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:
 - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:
 - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):
 - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):
 - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):
 - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings knows your basic character (personal essence):
 - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):
 - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have other knowledge of this world:
 - No
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:
 - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings can reward:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can punish:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature:

– No

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: This is an interesting way of describing important lamas or tulkus who are often understood as bodhisattvas who have taken rebirth in the human realm to work for the benefit of humanity or a specific community.

↳ These mixed human-divine beings can be seen:

– Yes

↳ These mixed human-divine beings can be physically felt:

– Yes

↳ Mixed human-divine beings have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

Notes: The capacities will vary according to the individual teacher or lama. Sometimes a teacher might be popularly understood as fully omniscient, while others might be seen as simply having greater spiritual insight than ordinary beings. Some might be especially skilled at one divine aspect like healing or divination but lack others.

- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings have knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:
 - No
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings have knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:
 - No
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings have knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:
 - Yes
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings have knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:
 - Yes
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):
 - Yes
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):
 - No
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):
 - Yes
 - Notes: Many important lamas are understood to have this capacity.
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings know your basic character (personal essence):
 - Yes
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):
 - No
 - Notes: Although many lamas are able to prophesy and foretell future events, they are not necessarily determinative.

- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings have other knowledge of the human world:
 - Yes [specify]: Particularly the ability to understand karmic interconnections.
- ↳ These mixed human-divine beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:
 - Yes
 - ↳ These mixed human-divine beings can reward:
 - Yes
 - ↳ These mixed human-divine beings can punish:
 - Yes
- ↳ These mixed human-divine beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:
 - Yes
- ↳ These mixed human-divine beings exhibit positive emotion:
 - Yes
- ↳ These mixed human-divine beings exhibit negative emotion:
 - Yes
- ↳ These mixed human-divine beings possess hunger:
 - Yes
- ↳ These mixed human-divine beings possess/exhibit some other feature:
 - No
- ↳ Mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living:
 - Yes
 - ↳ In waking, everyday life:
 - Yes
 - Notes: One might dream of a lama or consult one for a divination, however, unlike gods and deities, lamas and tulkus are experienced as everyday individuals.
 - ↳ In dreams:

– Yes

↳ In trance possession:

– No

↳ Through divination practices:

– No

Notes: In general the lama would be the one performing the divination rather than the one summoned.

↳ Only through religious specialists:

– No

↳ Only through monarch:

– No

↳ Other form of communication with living:

– No

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: See discussion of realms above.

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:

– Yes

Notes: Some of the different classes of deities are categorized according to which "Buddha family" they belong to.

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

Notes: Not strictly, but some deities are considered broadly more significant than others.

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– No

Notes: Not generally, although some deities are associated with specific geographies.

↳ Other organization for pantheon:

– No

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: Perhaps the most obvious example of this would be Yama (Gshin rje), the personification of karma who judges a being according to their karma and determines their rebirth. However, one can also offend local deities by violating their sovereignty or acting unethically.

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously "moral" or "ethical" norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

Notes: Broadly speaking yes insofar as prosocial behavior is often correlated with good karma.

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– Yes

↳ Food:

– Yes

Notes: This is true both at an individual level (e.g. certain foods should be offered or set aside for the gods) and a social one (e.g. certain fields should only be planted at certain times or after they have been blessed).

↳ Sacred space(s):

– Yes

Notes: In many temples one should not wear shoes, gaze upon protector deities, and so forth. Others are gender segregated and only men are permitted inside.

↳ Sacred object(s):

– Yes

Notes: There are a number of sacred ritual objects in Tibetan rituals, including bells, vajras (rdo rje), drums, conch shells that are often used as instruments, among many others.

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– Yes [specify]: They are at least aware of one another and can often be pitted against one another. Buddhist deities often work in complimentary ways to benefit practitioners.

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:

– Yes

Notes: One of the primary goals of the nonsectarian movement was to convince Central Tibetan Buddhists and government authorities that the practitioners of different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism were in fact coreligionists. The fear that the Gelug, the school of Tibetan Buddhism associated with Lhasa hegemony, would persecute or suppress the other schools was at the heart of the nonsectarian project.

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:

– Yes

Notes: However, one justification for war was protecting the dharma, which implicitly distinguishes between an in- and out-group.

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:

– Yes

Notes: See above.

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:

– Yes

↳ Adultery:

– Yes

Notes: However, there were some circumstances in which adultery was ethically and socially permissible.

↳ Incest:

– Yes

Notes: Expressly prohibited within one's immediate family.

↳ Other sexual practices:

– Yes [specify]: Tantric sexual practices are incredibly complex and would require their own article to explain in a nuanced way. It suffices to say here that there were certain well-defined ritual contexts, a Buddhist master could have sex with a practitioner for the express purpose of generating merit or insight for the master, rather than out of sexual desire.

↳ Supernatural beings care about lying:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:

– Yes

Notes: Violating one's bodhisattva and/or tantric vows were seen as especially egregious and would incur divine or karmic retribution.

↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness:

– I don't know

Notes: I can't remember seeing this expressly prohibited, and there are many stories of tantric masters who pretend not to work. Emily Yeh has written extensively on the function of discourses of laziness among contemporary Tibetans, but I don't remember seeing this discussed in nineteenth-century discourse.

Reference: Emily Yeh T.. *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development..* Cornell University Press.

↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery:

– Yes

Notes: Tibetan tantric masters were capable of casting hailstorms, killing from a distance, and causing crops to wither, among other actions. Similarly, the nonsectarian masters were often summoned by rulers to exorcise demons, restore rain, and perform other sorcerous rituals.

↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting:

– Yes

Notes: One could receive karmic punishment for violence and wrath.

↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk:

– I don't know

Notes: Not that I remember but I'd hesitate to say categorically no.

↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes:

– I don't know

Notes: I can't remember a case of a god or deity intervening because of a property crime, but often property crimes are the impetus for conflicts in which divine beings become involved.

↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:

– Yes

Notes: Proper ritual observance is at the heart of much Tibetan Buddhist practice, both for states who wish to be prosperous and safe, and for individuals with religious goals. Kongtrul was known for being an especially fastidious and efficacious ritual-master. Much of the nonsectarian project was devoted to reviving ritual practices that the teachers feared were on the cusp of extinction.

↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:

– Yes

Notes: See above.

↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists:

– Yes

Notes: At least in theory, as there are numerous stories of gods and tantric masters doing battle with demons to make safe the spread of Buddhism across Tibet. In practice, the Tibetans did not devote considerable resources to converting non-Buddhists to Buddhism. The various schools of Tibetan Buddhism often engaged in polemical debate and saw one another as competitors or illegitimate. The nonsectarian masters hoped to ensure some measure of political and religious tolerance even as they allowed for the possibility of hierarchies of Buddhist practice and philosophy.

↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness:

– No

Notes: Not in the sense of economic equality. However, there was a broad conception that the rich and powerful had earned their station through previous karmic achievements.

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene:

– No

Notes: Tantric masters would often appear in the guise of filthy beggars or ascetics to underscore the lack of connection between enlightened practice and social status. In that sense they might be said to care about it, but not to value it.

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– Yes [specify]: They are aware of one another; the Buddhist deities share a commitment to spreading and protecting the dharma, while non-Buddhist spirits and deities often have their own agendas.

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: Karmic theory in Buddhism is complex, and some might argue that karma is not powered by divine action, even though this process is often depicted anthropomorphically. However, in Tibet, even local deities would often punish those who challenged their sovereignty, for instance, demons who occupied geographical features.

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: One of the responsibilities of the ritual specialist is to determine the cause of a negative outcome, for instance one's previous negative karma, drawing a god's ire, etc.

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– Yes

Notes: Karma, although not exclusively.

↳ Done by other entities or through other means [specify]

– No

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: See above.

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

Notes: Perhaps from a sociological perspective, although I am less sure from a religious one.

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– Yes

↳ Done randomly:

– No

Notes: It is key to Buddhist cosmology that these acts are not random, but can be determined and corrected through proper action.

↳ Other [specify]

– No

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of mild sensory displeasure:

– Yes

Notes: Perhaps in the form of rebirth as an animal, although this is not stressed.

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– Yes

Notes: E.g. in the form of rebirth in a hell realm, as a hungry ghost, or in some animal forms.

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as an inferior life form:

– Yes

Notes: See above.

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in an inferior realm:

– Yes

Notes: See above.

↳ Other [specify]

– No

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

– Yes

Notes: Karma informs not only one's rebirth, but every aspect of one's life.

↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of political failure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of defeat in battle:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of disaster on journeys.

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of mild sensory displeasure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of impaired reproduction:

– Yes

↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck visited on descendants:

– Yes

↳ Other [specify]

– Yes

Notes: Karma informs all aspects of one's life and can lead to any reward or

punishment.

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

Notes: Same as for above; discerning the purpose and nature of rewards is the job of the ritual specialist.

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– Yes

Notes: Karma.

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

Notes: From a sociological perspective, although perhaps not from a religious one.

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– Yes

↳ Done randomly:

– No

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural rewards in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious

group:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of mild sensory pleasure:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory pleasure:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of eternal happiness:

– No

Notes: Even gods in Buddhism are eventually subject to death and impermanence.

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as a superior life form:

– Yes

Notes: As a god, demigod, or human

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in a superior realm:

– Yes

Notes: See above

↳ Other [specify]

– Yes

Notes: Karma influences all aspects of one's life.

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural rewards in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of good luck:

– Yes

↳ Reward in this life consists of political success or power:

– Yes

- ↳ Reward in this life consists of success in battle:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of peace or social stability:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of healthy crops or good weather:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of success on journeys:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success:
– Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants:
– Yes
- ↳ Other [specify]
– Yes
Notes: Karma informs all aspects of one's life.

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– Yes

Notes: Many of the nonsectarian masters believe that after a period of darkness during which the Buddhist teachings have entirely disappeared, the future Buddha Maitreya (Byams pa) will come to

reintroduce the dharma to humans once again.

↳ Is the messiah's whereabouts or time of coming known?

– Yes

↳ Alive, identified:

– No

↳ Coming in this lifetime:

– No

↳ Coming on specified date:

– No

↳ Coming in unspecified time in near future:

– No

↳ Coming in unspecified time in distant future:

– Yes

Notes: After the dharma has disappeared from the world.

↳ Coming has already passed:

– No

↳ One in a line of many past and future messiahs:

– Yes

Notes: In the Tibetan and Mahayana conception, Maitreya is one in a long line of past and future Buddhas charged with a similar mission.

↳ Is the messiah's purpose known:

– Yes

Notes: Maitreya will restore the Buddhist teachings to the world.

↳ Messiah is a political figure who restores political rule:

– No

Notes: There will be political effects of Maitreya's coming, but this aspect is less stressed than the religious restoration he will inspire.

↳ Messiah is a priestly figure who restores religious traditions:

– Yes

↳ Other purpose:

– No

Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: The primary intervention that the nonsectarian teachers wished to make was for all the Buddhist paths and schools to be understood as intrinsically valuable. In this sense, the group hoped to establish greater mutual respect and diminish inter-sectarian conflict.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: Most Buddhists, Mahayana Buddhists in particular, draw a distinction between ultimate and conventional reality. Conventional reality refers to the world as experienced by ordinary beings, wherein ordinary moral norms would hold. Ultimate reality refers to the world as experienced by enlightened beings, where ethics and moral norms have in some sense been transcended altogether. Many seemingly anti-moral or anti-social tantric practices--e.g. Buddhist masters who are alcoholics, have illicit sex, murder, etc.--are intended to undercut one's intuitive attachment to conventional morality.

↳ What is the nature of this distinction:

– Strongly present and highlighted

↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: These moral norms comprise the Buddhist teachings. The most relevant for the nonsectarian teachers is that enlightened beings do not discriminate among the superficially different Buddhist paths the way that ordinary beings do. In this sense, the conceptual differences between the paths belong to conventional reality but not to ultimate reality, at least according to one understanding of nonsectarianism.

↳ Specifically moral norms are implicitly linked to vague metaphysical concepts:

– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are explicitly linked to vague metaphysical entities:

– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked to impersonal cosmic order (e.g. karma):

– Yes

Notes: To karma.

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked in some way to an anthropomorphic being:

– Yes

Notes: Assuming the Buddhist deities qualify as anthropomorphic beings.

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked explicitly to commands of anthropomorphic being:

– No

↳ Specifically moral norms are have no special connection to metaphysical:

– No

↳ Moral norms apply to:

– All individuals within society (excepting slaves, aliens)

Notes: This is an interesting query. Most ordinary Tibetans would be expected to follow only conventional morality, i.e. generating good karma in hopes of securing a good rebirth. However, much of the nonsectarian discourses is aimed at convincing elites of the soteriological value of a variety of esoteric practices and philosophical positions. Because the conventional/ultimate divide is emphasized quite broadly, I have interpreted it as broadly as possible in the checklist above, even though it was an open question whether women, non-elites, and others were capable of realizing such norms. The moral norms are said to hold universally, i.e. for all individuals, but non-Buddhists would not have been viewed as capable of fulfilling these moral norms.

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Notes: Although many of the nonsectarian teachers were monks, some were lay practitioners, and even some of the elite monks took consorts in their tantric practice.

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):

– Yes

Notes: Even monks who engaged in sexual yoga were not permitted to have unconstrained sex.

↳ Monogamy (males):

– No

↳ Monogamy (females):

– No

↳ Other sexual constraints (males):

– No

↳ Other sexual constraints (females):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Notes: However, individual members might practice as part of their religious practice.

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

— No

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

— No

Notes: Although this might be true in practice, there was no strict requirement.

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

— Yes

Notes: Although many of the teachers involved in the nonsectarian zeitgeist were monks and so adhered to monastic precepts, some were not. Definitionally, the discourse requires a recognition of religious tolerance and pluralism, and so in this sense one might speak of an ethical requirement.

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

— No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

— No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

— No

Notes: Although in practice such participation was common, for example in funerary rituals and public terma revelations.

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– No

Notes: After looking at the list of possible markers under "yes," I've opted for "no." However, all shared a discursive commitment to a nonsectarian orientation.

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– Yes

Notes: Insofar as monastic groups treat the sangha as a family.



Fictive kinship terminology universal:

– Yes

Notes: See above.



Fictive kinship terminology widespread:

– Yes



Fictive kinship terminology employed but uncommon:

– No

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– Other [specify in comments]

Notes: The different contributors to the formation of a nonsectarian zeitgeist lived across different polities. For example, those in Derge lived in a small kingdom that was sometimes claimed by the Qing, sometimes by Lhasa, but was able to maintain its own political autonomy. Much of eastern Tibet was conquered by the warrior Gonpo Namgyal in the mid nineteenth century; during these periods teachers would have lived in a very decentralized chieftdom. Others would have lived in areas that nominally paid fealty to the Qing or Lhasa, but would have been governed by the local monastery in day-to-day affairs. In this sense, although the different nonsectarian teachers can all meaningfully be described as Tibetan, their political situations were quite distinct.

Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– Yes

Notes: Insofar as monasteries kept grain reserves for lean times.

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: Through the state for Tibetans who lived in area with a centralized government, although the state's and monastery's reserves would have been coordinated.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

— Yes

Notes: This is an interesting query. Monastic institutions were a key economic cog in the societies in which they were embedded. As large landowners they provided the means of sustenance for large numbers of Tibetans, while the monasteries themselves derived a substantial income on the basis of that labor.

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: Through the state in areas with a strong centralized government.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

— No

Notes: Although individual elderly monks and nuns were cared for within the monastery and on occasion elderly relatives might have come to live with important lamas (e.g. Jamgon Kongtrul's mother), this care was generally not institutionalized as far as I am aware.

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— No

Notes: The elderly and infirm were generally cared for within individual families.

Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

— Yes

Notes: Tibetan monastic institutions became the site of much religious knowledge in Tibet, but also to what might be called secular knowledge. For instance, monasteries were not only the place one might train to become a Buddhist ritual master, but also a medical doctor, a painter, an engineer, etc. This education was not confined exclusively to monasteries--one might also apprentice with a master, but most Tibetan knowledge systems intersected with Buddhism in some fashion.



Is formal education restricted to religious professionals:

— No

Notes: While definitely oriented toward monks and nuns, it was at least in principle available to others. For instance, many important politicians and laypeople would come to the monastery to receive teachings and even go on retreat with many of the nonsectarian teachers.



Is such education open to both males and females:

— Yes

Notes: However, the education received by men and women was strikingly different. Although individual Tibetan women were able to become learned or great Buddhist teachers, monasteries and nunneries were categorically different institutions. The entire range of Tibetan knowledge was available to men, but women were often not taught esoteric tantric practices and philosophy on grounds that they lacked the capacity to realize their benefits.

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

— Yes

Notes: Particularly through local apprenticeships, sometimes through state institutions. However, monasteries were undoubtedly the primary site of learning in Tibet.



Is extra-religious education open to both males and females:

— Yes

Notes: However, the same biases that informed monastic education informed extra-religious education as well.

Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

— No

Notes: This is an interesting query, one that of course hinges on the definition of formal bureaucracy. Although most monasteries, the nonsectarian teachers included, kept meticulous records, including catalogs of libraries, inventories of sacred objects, and receipts of payments and services, I don't believe this bureaucracy was formalized.

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

— Yes

Notes: Eastern Tibetan institutions interacted with both the Lhasa and Qing governments, both of which had more formalized bureaucratic systems, particularly in the case of the Qing. The Derge royal family, for instance, exchanged titles with the Qing, which led to the Qing to consider Derge part of their empire, even as the gesture was not interpreted by the Derge royal family in the same way. In this sense, we might say that eastern Tibet was brought into a formal bureaucratic apparatus for the first time during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

— Yes

Notes: Or at least stores food that can be distributed when necessary.

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: By the state as well, insofar as these can be distinguished in Tibet.

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

— Yes

Notes: Insofar as the monasteries are also land owners and must irrigate the fields close to them. Irrigation and flood control also falls under the monastery's ritual purview.

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: By the state as well, insofar as these can be distinguished in Tibet.

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

— Yes

Notes: Especially building roads that connected the monastery with nearby towns and trade routes.

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

— Yes

Notes: By the state as well, insofar as these can be distinguished in Tibet.

Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

— Yes

Notes: Monasteries were generally permitted to tax the areas within their jurisdiction and to benefit from the labor performed on monastery-owned lands. The various tax relationships between the state and the monastery were complex and varied across time and region; sometimes the two were synonymous, sometimes one had to pay taxes to both groups, sometimes the state would allow the monastery exclusively to receive the taxes of a given region as a boon of gratitude.

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: By the state as well, insofar as these can be distinguished in Tibet. Although monks would have generally been exempt from these taxes, the monastery as a whole might have had to pay taxes on certain occasions, and non-monastics would have been subject to taxes from both groups.

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Insofar as the local rulers had militias or armies that could be formed when the need arose.

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Notes: Monasteries often adjudicated disputes and served as a de facto judicial system, but this process was generally not formalized or institutionalized, even if particular teachers became revered for their wisdom in settling such disputes.

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Often the state would also have some sort of judicial apparatus, but in practice monasteries settled many disputes.

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– No

Notes: Although the adjudicator of a dispute could prescribe a punishment, the monastery would generally not directly enforce it, say through a military or police force.

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: By the state as well.



Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

– Yes



- ↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include exile:
 - Yes
- ↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:
 - Yes
- ↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include ostracism:
 - Yes
- ↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:
 - Yes

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– No

Notes: Whether the monastic code could be considered a legal code is an interesting question, but the nonsectarian teachers didn't subscribe to a formal legal code different from the locales in which they lived.

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: From both the state and their own local monasteries.

Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– No

Do the group's adherents participate in an institutionalized military provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: Although occasionally monks would take up arms in local disputes, they were generally exempt from state drafts.

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Broadly speaking the state military would defend the monasteries. However, when Gonpo Namgyel conquered Derge, it fell to many of the nonsectarian teachers, especially Kongtrul, to

negotiate on behalf of the kingdom with the conquerors.

Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Tibetan.

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: On occasion, teachers would send letters, teachings, and so forth to secular rulers and officials.

Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– Yes

Notes: Tibetan monasteries and Tibet more broadly follow a lunar calendar that includes that monastic ritual calendar.

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: I think of the lunar calendar as being provided by the monasteries for the state rather than the other way around.

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– No

Notes: While monasteries do own arable land and some are probably self-sufficient, they generally depend on donations, taxes, and offerings as well for their food supply.

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Laypeople and the state also donate or make offerings of food to monasteries.



Please characterize the forms/levels of food production [choose all that apply]:

- Patoralism
- Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards
- Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

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