

# THE “GREAT THREE” GELUG UNIVERSITY GOMPAS (MONASTERIES) IN TIBET

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (abstract)

## INTRODUCTION

*“Prior to the Chinese invasion of 1950, Tibet was a country steeped in religion. Religious practice permeated the daily lives of the Tibetan people and formed the social fabric connecting them to the land. Recognizing this, the Chinese focused on destroying this cultural base of the Tibetan people in the hopes of quelling dissent to their rule ... Over 6,000 monasteries and sacred places were destroyed and their contents pillaged. The Tibetans are not free to practice and organize their own religion ... China has shifted its religious policy in Tibet to actively suppress and restrict further religious growth. This shift involves measures to halt unauthorized rebuilding of monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, setting limits on the number of monks and nuns in all monasteries, enforcing restrictions on youths joining monasteries, prohibiting Tibetan Party members from practicing religion, and strengthen the control of the government and Party over each monastery.”* (<https://tibetoffice.org/invasion-after>).

This is the history of the “GREAT THREE” Gelug Monasteries: GADEN, DREPUNG and SERA. All of them re-built in Exile, in Karnataka State (South India), after the Chinese invasion of 1959.

## DREPUNG MONASTERY

Drepung Monastery (Tibetan: འབྲས་ལྷུང་དགོན་པ་, Wylie: bras spungs dgon pa, THL: drépfung gönpa, "**Rice Heap Monastery**"), located at the foot of Mount Gephel, is one of the "great three" Gelug university gompas (monasteries) of Tibet. The other two are Ganden Monastery and Sera Monastery.

Drepung is the largest of all Tibetan monasteries and is located on the Gambo Utse mountain, five kilometers from the western suburb of Lhasa. Freddie Spencer Chapman reported, after his 1936-37 trip to Tibet, that Drepung was at that time the largest monastery in the world, and housed 7,700 monks, "but sometimes as many as **10,000 monks**."

Since the **1950s**, Drepung Monastery, along with its peers Ganden and Sera, have lost much of their independence and spiritual credibility in the eyes of Tibetans since they

operate under the close watch of the Chinese security services. All three were reestablished in exile in the 1950s in **Karnataka state in south India**. **Drepung** and **Ganden** are in **Mundgod** and **Sera** is in **Bylakuppe**.



Drepung Monastery was founded in **1416** by **Jamyang Choge Tashi Palden** (1397–1449), one of Tsongkhapa's main disciples, and it was named after the sacred abode in South India of Shridhanyakataka.

Drepung was the principal seat of the **Gelugpa** school and it retained the premier place amongst the 4 great Gelugpa monasteries, known for the high standards

of its academic study, and **was called the Nalanda of Tibet**, a reference to the great Buddhist monastic university of India. Old records show that there were two centers of power in Drepung: the so-called lower chamber (Zimkhang 'og ma) associated with the Dalai Lamas-to-be, and the upper chamber (Zimkhang gong ma) associated with the descendants of Sonam Drakpa, an illustrious teacher who died in 1554.



The estate of the Dalai Lamas at Drepung Monastery, called **Ganden Phodrang**, had been constructed in **1518** by **Gendun Gyatso Palzangpo** (1476–1541), retrospectively named and counted as **2nd Dalai Lama** and declared his chief residence palace until the inauguration of Potala Palace by the Great 5th Dalai Lama. **The name of the Tibetan government established by him came from its name.**

**Penchen Sönam Drakpa** (1478-1554 CE) in **1535** succeeded Gendün Gyatso (1476–1541) on the Throne of Drepung, both of them being major figures in the history of the Geluk tradition.

By the time **Sönam Drakpa** was appointed to the Throne of Drepung (Drepung Tri), he was already a famous Geluk master. He had already occupied the Throne of Ganden (Ganden Tri) and was considered the most prolific and important Geluk thinker of his time. His successor was none other than Sönam Gyatso (1543-1588 CE), the lama who would receive the official title of the **Third Dalai Lama** (Talé Lama Kutreng Sumpa).

Before his death in 1554, Sönam Drakpa established his own estate, the Upper Chamber (Zimkhang Gongma), which was named because of its location at the top of Drepung, just below the Ngakpa debating courtyard "Ngagpa Dratshang".

Chapman reported that in the late 1930s Drepung was divided into **four colleges**, each housing monks from a different locality: "one being favoured by Khampas, another by Mongolians, and so on." Each college was presided over by an abbot who had been appointed by the late 13th Dalai Lama.

Drepung is now divided into what are known as the **seven great colleges**: Gomang Loseling, Deyang, Shagkor, Gyelw or Tosamling, Dulwa and Ngagpa. It can be a somewhat useful analogy to think of Drepung as a university along the lines of Oxford or the Sorbonne in the Middle Ages, the various colleges having different emphases, teaching lineages, or traditional geographical affiliations.

According to local sources, today the population at the monastery in Lhasa is about **300 monks**, due to population capping enforced by the Chinese government. However, the institution has continued its tradition in exile with campuses in South India on land in Karnataka given to the Tibetan community in exile by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The monastery in India today houses over **5.000** celibate monks, with around 3.000 at Drepung Loseling and some 2.000 at Drepung Gomang. Hundreds of new monks are admitted each year, many of them refugees from Tibet.

## Recent Events

About 40% of the old monastic town was destroyed after the Chinese arrived in Lhasa in **1951**, though luckily the chief buildings including the four colleges, the Tsokchen and the Dalai Lamas' residence were preserved. Drepung monastery was **shut down by Chinese authorities on 14 March 2008**, after monk-led protests against Chinese rule turned violent and businesses, shops and vehicles were looted and torched. The People's Republic of China claims that 22 people were killed in the riots but Tibetan sources put the figure much higher. The International Herald Tribune reported that the monastery reopened **2013** after being shut for five years.

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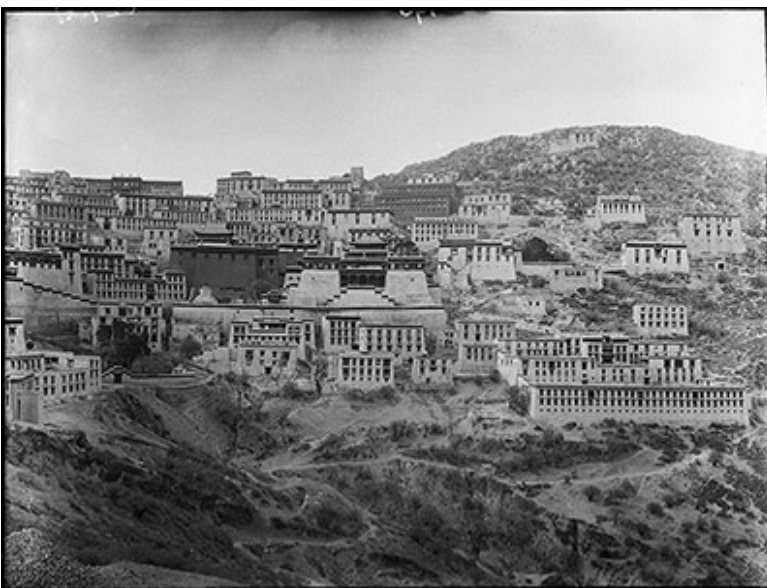
## GANDEN MONASTERY

Ganden Monastery (also Gaden) or Ganden Namgyeling is one of the "great three" Gelug university monasteries of Tibet. It is in **Dagzê County, Lhasa** and was founded in **1409** by **Je Tsongkhapa Lozang-dragpa**, founder of the Gelug order. The monastery was **destroyed after 1959**, but has since been partially rebuilt. Another monastery with the same name and tradition was established in Southern India (Mundgod, Karnataka State) in **1966** by Tibetan exiles.

### Location

Ganden is 40 kilometres (25 mi) northeast of Lhasa. The monastery lies in a hilly natural amphitheater. From the kora route around the monastery there are dramatic views over the valleys that surround it. Ganden Monastery is at the top of Wangbur Mountain, Dagzê County at an altitude of 4,300m. Its full name is Ganden Namgyal Ling (dga' ldan rnam rgyal gling). Ganden means "**joyful**" and is the Tibetan name for **Tuṣita**, the heaven where the bodhisattva **Maitreya** is said to reside. Namgyal Ling means "victorious temple".

### History



Ganden Monastery was founded by **Je Tsongkhapa Lozang-dragpa** (1357–1419) in **1409**. Tsongkhapa built Ganden's main temple, with large statues and three-dimensional *mandalas*. He often stayed at Ganden, and died there in 1419. Tsongkhapa's preserved body was entombed at Ganden by his disciples in a silver and gold encrusted tomb. The name "**Gelug**" is an abbreviation of "**Ganden Lug**", meaning "**Ganden Tradition**".

The **Ganden Tripa** or "throne-holder of Ganden" is the **head of the Gelug school**. Before dying Tsongkhapa gave his robe and staff to the **first Ganden Tripa, Gyeltsabje** (1364-

1432), who was succeeded by **Kaydrubjey**. The term of office is seven years, and by 2003 there had been 99 Ganden Tripas. The monastery was divided into four **colleges** at the time of the 2nd Ganden Tripa. Later these were consolidated in two, **Jangtsey** and **Shartsey**, located respectively to the north and east of the main temple. Both combine the study of sutra and tantra. Study methods include memorization, logic and debate. The colleges grant degrees for different levels of achievement, evaluated by examination and formal public debate.



In the **1860s** a meeting called "**the great Ganden Monastery, Drepung Monastery, and the government officials**" was organized by Shatra, a lay aristocrat. The existing regent was deposed by this assembly and replaced by Shatra. From then on the assembly, or Tsondu, chose the regents and played a significant political role as a consultative body. The monasteries of Ganden, Sera and Drepung was so great that they could in effect veto government decisions with which they disagreed. These **three monasteries** had **20.000** monks in total, supported by large estates of fertile land worked by serfs.

At one time the **Ganden** monastery could support over **5.000 monks**. Laurence Waddell reports an estimate of about **3.300** in the **1890s**. There were apparently only **2.000** monks in **1959**.



Ganden Monastery was completely **destroyed** by the People's Liberation Army during the **1959 Tibetan uprising**. In **1966** it was severely shelled by Red Guard artillery, and monks had to dismantle the remains. The buildings were reduced to rubble using dynamite during the **Cultural Revolution** (1966–76). Most of Tsongkhapa's mummified body was burned, but his skull and some ashes were saved from the fire by Bomi Rinpoche, who had been forced to carry the body to the fire.

Re-building has continued since the 1980s. Early in **1996**, after a ban had been imposed on pictures of the Dalai Lama, **400 monks at Ganden rioted**. They were fired upon by PLA troops, apparently causing two deaths and several injuries, followed by the arrest of 100 monks. In **2012** there were about **400** monks, and rapid progress was being made on rebuilding the monastery. The red-painted lhakang in the centre is the reconstruction of Ganden's sanctum sanctorum containing Tsongkapa's reliquary chorten called the Tongwa Donden, "Meaningful to Behold."

## Structures

Ganden contained more than two dozen major chapels with large Buddha statues. The largest chapel was capable of seating 3,500 monks. **Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama** (born 1935), took **his final degree examination in Ganden in 1958** and he claims to feel a particularly close connection with Tsongkhapa.

The monastery runs a guesthouse for visitors. Ganden's main assembly hall is a white building with gold-capped roofs, near a huge square. The main chapel contains many gilded images of Tsongkhapa. A maroon and ochre chapel beside the main assembly hall has a statue of Sakyamuni Buddha, and has a section used for hand-printing scriptural texts using wood blocks.

The three main sights in the Ganden Monastery are the **Serdung**, which contains the tomb of Tsongkhapa, the **Tsokchen Assembly Hall** and the **Ngam Cho Khang** the chapel where Tsongkhapa traditionally taught. The monastery houses artifacts that belonged to Tsongkhapa.

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## SERA MONASTERY

Sera Monastery (Tibetan: སེ་ར་དགོན་པ།, Wylie: se ra dgon pa "**Wild Roses Monastery**"; Chinese: 色拉寺; pinyin: Sèlā Sì) is one of the "great three" Gelug university monasteries of Tibet, located 1.25 miles (2.01 km) north of Lhasa and about 5 km (3.1 mi) north of the Jokhang. The other two are Ganden Monastery and Drepung Monastery. The origin of its name is attributed to a fact that during construction, the hill behind the monastery was covered with blooming wild roses (or "sera" in Tibetan).

The original Sera Monastery is responsible for some **19 hermitages**, including four nunneries, which are all located in the foot hills north of Lhasa.

The Sera Monastery, as a complex of structures with the Great Assembly Hall and three colleges, was founded in **1419** by **Jamchen Choje** of Sakya Yeshe of Zel Gungtang (1355–1435), a disciple of Je Tsongkhapa. During the **1959** revolt in Lhasa, Sera monastery suffered severe **damage**, with its colleges destroyed and hundreds of monks killed. After the Dalai Lama took asylum in India, many of the monks of Sera who survived the attack moved to **Bylakuppe** in **Mysore**, India. After initial tribulations, they established a parallel Sera Monastery with **Sera Me** and **Sera Je** colleges and a Great Assembly Hall on similar lines to the original monastery, with help from the Government of India. There are now **3.000** or more monks living in Sera, India and this community has also spread its missionary activities to several countries by establishing Dharma centers, propagating knowledge of Buddhism. Sera Monastery in Tibet and its counterpart in Mysore, India are noted for their **debate** sessions.

### Background



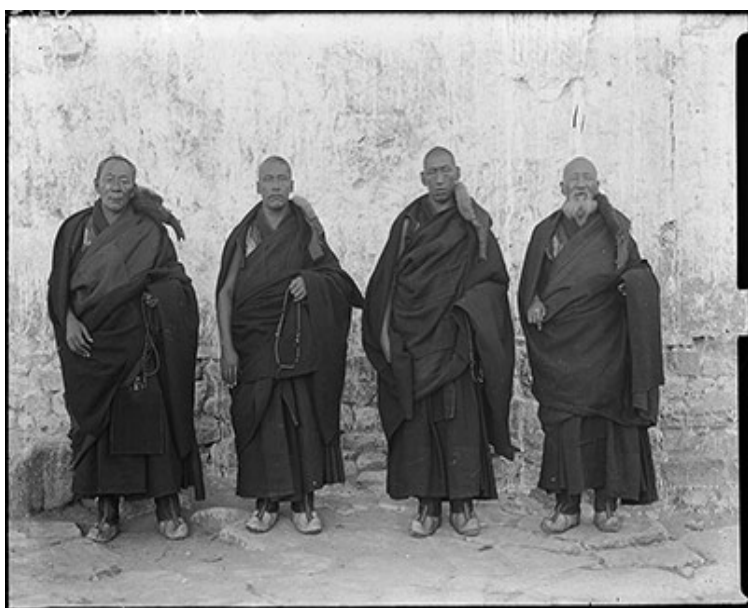
The original Sera Monastery is a complex of structures founded in 1419 by Jamchen Choje Sakya Yeshe of Zel Gungtang (1355–1435), a disciple of Je Tsongkhapa. Prior to establishing this monastery, Tsongkhapa, assisted by his disciples, had set up hermitages at higher elevations above Sera Utsé Hermitage<sup>1</sup>. The Sera complex is divided into 2 sectors by pathways; the eastern part contains the **Great Assembly Hall** and the dwellings and

<sup>1</sup> Sera Utsé Hermitage, Sera Utse, Sera Ütse, Sera Tse or Drubkjang Tse is a historical hermitage, belonging to Sera Monastery. It is located on the mountain directly behind Sera Monastery itself, which is about 5 kilometres (3.1 mi) north of the Jokhang in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. It is older than Sera Monastery.

the western part has the well-known 3 colleges: **Sera Je Dratsang**, **Sera Me Dratsang** and **Ngakpa Dratsang**, all instituted by Tsongkhapa as monastic universities for monks in the age range 8-70. All the structures within this complex formed a clockwise pilgrimage circuit, starting with the colleges, followed by the hall, the dwelling units and finally ending at the hermitage of Tsongkhapa above the Great Assembly Hall.

The Jé and Mé colleges were established to train monks, over a 20-year programme of *tsennyi mtshan nyid grwa tshang* (philosophical knowledge), which concludes with a **Geshe degree**<sup>2</sup>. The Ngakpa college, which predated the other two colleges, was exclusively devoted to the practice of **tantric ritual**<sup>3</sup>. Before 1959, the administration of each college comprised an **abbot** with council of **ten lamas** for each college. Over the years, the monastery developed into a hermitage where about **6.000** monks resided. The monastery was one of the finest locations in Tibet to witness the **debate** sessions. The monastery belongs to the Gelug Order and was one of the largest in Lhasa. In **2008**, Sera had **550** monks in residence.

## History



The history of the monastery is strongly connected to Master Lama Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the founder of the **Gelukpa Order**<sup>4</sup>, the much venerated and highly learned guru in Buddhist scriptures. It was under his divine tutelage that his disciple Jetsun Kunkhen Lodroe Rinchen Senge established the Sera Jey Monastery complex in the early 15th century AD. Kunkhyen Lodroe Rinchen Senge initially served as a teacher in the Drepung Monastery before he formed the Sera Jey. The religious

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<sup>2</sup> Geshe or geshema is a Tibetan Buddhist academic degree for monks and nuns. The degree is emphasized primarily by the Gelug lineage, but is also awarded in the Sakya and Bön traditions. The geshema degree is the same as a geshe degree, but is called a geshema degree because it is awarded to women.

<sup>3</sup> Tantra denotes the esoteric traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism that co-developed most likely about the middle of the 1st millennium AD. The term tantra, in the Indian traditions, also means any systematic broadly applicable "text, theory, system, method, instrument, technique or practice".

<sup>4</sup> The Gelug is the newest of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It was founded by Je Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), a philosopher and Tibetan religious leader. The first monastery he established was named Ganden, and to this day the Ganden Tripa is the nominal head of the school, though its most influential figure is the Dalai Lama. Allying themselves with the Mongols as a powerful patron, the Gelug emerged as the pre-eminent Buddhist school in Tibet and Mongolia since the end of the 16th century.



legend narrated for how the site was chosen was a clairvoyant vision that Tsongkhapa had in which he saw the full text of **Prajnaparamita's** <sup>5</sup> 20 slokas (quarter verses) on *Shunyata* captioned in the sky. This psychic spell gave him a full insight into the *Tsawasehrab* (Fundamentals of Madhyamika <sup>6</sup> or Shunyata <sup>7</sup>) text. Further, he also perceived the "vision of a rain like "AA" characters descending from the sky". It was only 12 years later that one of his pupils, Jamchen Choje, fulfilled the prophecy of his guru by establishing the Sera Je as a seat of learning knowledge of the complete teachings and practices of the Mahayana tradition.

Providentially, the then **King Nedong Dagpa Gyaltzen** supported the noble venture with required finances and also, in **1419**, performed the foundation laying ceremony for construction of the monastery. Further detailing with regard to the building development including installing sacred images/idols and other objects of worship were completed according to the supreme wishes of great Lama Tsongkhapa. The monastery soon came to be known as "**the Seat of Theckchen ling** (Mahayana Tradition <sup>8</sup>)". Another version for the name 'Sera' that came to be prefixed with 'Monastery' was its location that was surrounded by raspberry shrubs called 'Sewa' in Tibetan, that formed like a 'Rawa' in Tibetan, meaning "Fence.

### Post-1959 events

The 14th Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 and sought asylum there. During the month of March of the same year the Sera Jey Monastery had been **destroyed** by bombardment, which resulted in death of hundreds of monks (in **1959**, the count of monks living

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<sup>5</sup> Prajñāpāramitā means "the Perfection of (Transcendent) Wisdom" in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Prajñāpāramitā refers to this perfected way of seeing the nature of reality, as well as to a particular body of sutras and to the personification of the concept in the Bodhisattva known as the "Great Mother". The word Prajñāpāramitā combines the Sanskrit words prajñā "wisdom" with pāramitā "perfection". Prajñāpāramitā is a central concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism and is generally associated with the doctrine of emptiness (Shunyata) or 'lack of Svabhava' (essence) and the works of Nagarjuna. Its practice and understanding are taken to be indispensable elements of the Bodhisattva path.

<sup>6</sup> Madhyamaka also known as Śūnyavāda and Niḥsvabhāvavāda refers to a tradition of Buddhist philosophy and practice founded by the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna. The foundational text of the Mādhyamaka tradition is Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. More broadly, Madhyamaka also refers to the ultimate nature of phenomena and the realization of this in meditative equipoise.

<sup>7</sup> Śūnyatā – pronounced as (shoon-ya-ta), translated most often as emptiness and sometimes voidness – is a Buddhist concept which has multiple meanings depending on its doctrinal context. It is either an ontological feature of reality, a meditative state, or a phenomenological analysis of experience.

<sup>8</sup> Mahāyāna is one of two main existing branches of Buddhism and a term for classification of Buddhist philosophies and practice. This movement added a further set of discourses, and although it was initially small in India, it had long-term historical significance. The Buddhist tradition of Vajrayāna is sometimes classified as a part of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but some scholars consider it to be a different branch altogether.



in Sera Jey was **5.629**), apart from destruction of ancient texts and loss of innumerable, invaluable, ancient and antique works of art. Many of those who survived (monks and common people) this onslaught by the Chinese fled to India, under severe winter weather conditions, across the Himalayas. Following this mass exodus of people from Tibet (including, a few hundred Sera Jey lamas, Geshes and monks), when they arrived in India,

they were resettled at **Bylakuppe**<sup>9</sup> near **Mysore, Karnataka state** among many other locations spread across the country, as one of the exclusive Tibetan establishments with ready assistance forthcoming from the Government of India. It was in **1970** that the group of 197 Sera Jey monks with 103 of Sera Mey monks established a special monastery within the resettlement of Bylakuppe as a counterpart of the Tibetan Sera Jey Monastery. As none of the monks of the Ngagpa Dratsang (Tantric College) had survived the invasion, only the Sera Mey College and Sera Jey College were re-formed in India. The Bylakuppe Monastery now houses **5.000** Buddhist monks comprising some migrants and many other Tibetans who were not born in their ancestral homeland.

With forest land allotted by the Government of India, two arms of the Sera Monastery, representing the migrant monks of the Tibetan Sera Je and Sera Me colleges were established; 193 Sera je monks got 147.75 acres (59.79 ha) and 107 monks of Sera Me got an allotment of the balance area. Further, 38 tenements were built with grants by the Government of India for the Monks to reside and pursue their vocation of monkhood coupled with tilling the surrounding allotted land for raising food crops for survival. Well established as an organized Monastery with dedicated efforts of the monks, an Assembly Prayer Hall that could accommodate **1.500 monks** was also completed in **1978**. This Monastery is now the nodal monastery, with its affiliation to several smaller monasteries spread across various regions in Tibet; its popularity could be gauged by the **3.000** or more monks living here now. Encouraged by this success and noting the pressure on existing infrastructure, an additional, much larger and an impressive Assembly hall (measuring 23,275 square feet (2,162.3 m<sup>2</sup>), 31 feet (9.4 m) high with 110 pillars) has

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<sup>9</sup> Bylakuppe is an area in Karnataka which is home to the Indian town Bylakuppe and several Tibetan settlements, established by Lugsum Samdupling and Dickyi Larsoe. Bylakuppe is the second largest Tibetan settlement in the world outside Tibet after Dharamshala. It is located to the west of Mysore district in the Indian state of Karnataka which is roughly 80 km from Mysore city.



been built that can accommodate 3,500 monks to assemble for prayers. With this development, Sera has now two facets, the original “Tibetan Sera” and the Bylakuppe “New Sera” of the “Tibetan Diaspora” with the counterpart Jé, Mé monasteries, with the Ngakpa college counterpart also added recently. The Sera-India monk community of the Bylakuppe Monastery, has gone global with their missionary

activity by establishing “dharma centres” in many parts the world, thus removing the cultural isolation of pre-1959 years in Tibet.

Sera, Tibet that housed more than 5,000 monks in 1959, though badly damaged following the invasion of Tibet and the 1959 Revolution, is still functional after restoration. In 2011, according to local sources, there are about 300 monks. The reason for this decline is attributed to the 2008 Tibetan unrest.

### Geography



The monastery is located on the northern outskirts of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet Autonomous Region. As built in 1419, it encompassed an area of 28 acres (11 ha).

Its geographical location is at the base of Pubuchok mountain, also known as Tatipu Hill, located in the northern suburb of Lhasa City, which forms the watershed of the basins formed by Kyi Chi and Penpo Chu rivers.

### Architecture

The monastery complex, encompassing 28 acres (11 ha) of land, housed several institutions in its precincts. The structures of notability were the Coqen Hall Tsokchen (Great Assembly Hall), the three Zhadzangs (colleges) and Kamcun (dormitory) also called Homdong Kangtsang. In the main hall, scriptures (scripted with gold powder), statues, scent cloth and murals were seen in profusion. The descriptions given here relate to the

scenario that existed at the monastery prior to the 1959 invasion by China but most of the monasteries are stated to be since restored, though the strength of the monks are said to be small.

The **Great Assembly Hall**, the 'Tsokchen' or 'Coqen Hall', dated to 1710, a four-story structure to the north east of the monastery, facing east, is where several religious rituals and rites are conducted. The hall measured an area of 2,000 square metres (22,000 sq ft) built with 125 pillars (86 tall and 39 short columns) and was constructed by Lhazang Qan. The entry portico had ten columns. The five chapels in this building have statues or images of Maitreya, Shakyamuni, Arhats, Tsongkhapa, and Kwan-yin with one thousand hands and eleven faces. The ancient and delicately written scriptures 'the Gangyur of Tripitaka' also spelt 'Kangyur'<sup>10</sup> (dated 1410) in 105 volumes (original 108 volumes) written in Tibetan is the treasured possession of the monastery. It is said that Chengzhu, Emperor of the Ming Dynasty presented these scriptures (printed on wood blocks with gold cover engraved in red lacquer and made in China), to Jamchen Choje, the builder of the monastery. The entrance to the hall was through a portico built on 10 columns. Large appliqué Thangkas were suspended from the ceiling on the side walls. A skylight at the centre provided the light in the hall during the day. Image of the founder of the monastery Jamchen Choje Shakya Yeshe was deified as the central image. Other deities installed were of Maitreya (5 metres (16 ft) height and gilded) flanked by statues of two lions, Dalai Lamas V, VII and XII, Tsongkhapa and many more. The third and the fourth floors were used as private apartments for the Dalai Lamas and the preceptors of the Main Assembly Hall.

**Sera Me Tratsang** or Sera Me Zhakan was the oldest college built here. It was established in 1419 during the Ming Dynasty reign, initially for elementary or basic education in Buddhist religion. The college adopted a step-by-step approach to the studies of Buddhist doctrines; a practice particular to the Gelukpa or Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism. The college was built over an area of 1,600 square meters (17,000 sq ft) with 30 dwelling units. However, in 1761 lightning struck the main hall which was rebuilt in 1761. The hall, as finally refurbished, had 70 pillars which housed a galaxy of statues of Buddhist gurus with the main deity of Shakyamuni Buddha made in copper. The other Bodhisattvas enshrined along with the main deity were of Maitreya, Manjushri, Amatyas, Bhavishyaguru, Tsongkhapa, Dalai Lama VII, Pawanga Rinpoche and several other past teachers of the college. The college had five chapels with plethora of statues and frescoes. The second floor of the college had the Nyima Lhakhang where image of Shakyamuni Buddha was deified along with Tuwang Tsultrim, and the Khangyur Lhakhang with 1000 images of Tara which replaced the sacred texts that were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The third floor was reserved for the Dalai Lamas.

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<sup>10</sup> The Tibetan Buddhist canon is the Kangyur or Kanjur and the Tengyur or Tanjur (Tengyur).

**Sera Je Tretsang (College)** or Zhekong, the largest college in Sera complex, measured an area of 17.000 m<sup>2</sup> (180,000 sq ft). It was initially a three storied building; a fourth floor was added in the 18th century by strengthening the building with a total of 100 columns. It had a statue of Avalokiteśvara, which was considered the protective deity of the monastery. This wrathful deity was worshipped as dispeller of obstacles with healing powers. The assembly hall of the college depicted frescoes of Buddha's life achievements, the thrones of the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas.

**Ngakpa Tratsang**, also spelled Ngaba Zhacang, was the smallest of the three colleges that was set up in the complex. It was a three storied building originally built in 1419 by Jetsun Kunkhen Lodroe Rinchen Senge. It was refurbished in the 18th century by Lhazang Khan. Devoted to tantric studies, the college had an assembly hall and two chapels in the ground floor. However, as per reports, this college was destroyed and all resident monks also died in the bombardment done by the Chinese in 1959.

**Homdong Khangtsang**, also spelt 'Kamcuns' in Tibetan language, are the main dwelling units or dormitories which house the monks of the monastery; there are thirty-three Kamcuns surrounding the central courtyard. The size of the Kamcuns varied, depending on the strength of monks housed. Monks of the same village are housed together; however each monk is given a separate cell. Each Kamcun also has a prayer hall for exclusive study of Buddhist doctrine and also has annexed tea house. However, the main assembly hall here had minor images of Tsongkhapa, Choyi Gyeltsen, Shakhyamuni Buddha, Three Deities of Longevity, and two inner.

**Choding Khang** is the hermitage located just behind the Great Assembly Hall (on the hill slope of Sera Utse). This is where Je Tsongkhapa meditated. The hermitage is accessed through a track where painted rock carvings of Tsongkhapa, Jamchen and Dharma Raja (the protector) are seen flanking the stepped approaches, along the route. A new building has been constructed in place of the old hermitage, which was destroyed during the Revolution. Below the hermitage are the Upper Tantric College (Gyuto) and Lower Tantric College (Gyu-me) of Lhasa). A further climb up the hill leads to caves where Tsongkhapa meditated.

**Hermitages and nunneries:** Sera Monastery that developed over the centuries into a renowned place of learning, which trained hundreds of scholars who attained name and fame in the Buddhist nations, has under its affiliation **15 hermitages**, and **4 nunneries**, which are all located in the foot hills above Lhasa.

The **Hermitages** are: Pabonka Hermitage, Drakri Hermitage, Jokpo Hermitage, Keutsang Hermitage, Keutsang East Hermitage, Khardo Hermitage, Panglung Hermitage, Purbuchok Hermitage, Rakhadrak Hermitage, Sera Chöding Hermitage, Sera Gönpasar Hermitage, Sera Utsé Hermitage, Takten Hermitage, Trashi Chöling Hermitage.

The **Nunneries** are: established are the Chupzang Nunnery, the Gari Nunnery, the Ne-godong Nunnery and the Nenang Nunnery. A few nuns of some of these nunneries held protest marches against the Chinese rule, and as a result suffered incarnation and indignities.

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SERA: [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sera\\_\(monastero\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sera_(monastero))

DREPUNG: [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drepung\\_\(Tibet\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drepung_(Tibet))

GANDEN: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganden>

## LIST OF HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY TIBETAN MONASTERIES IN TIBET AND ELSEWHERE

Name	Location	Tradition	Established	Destroyed	Note
<b>Drepung</b>	Lhasa	Gelug	1416 by Jamyang Choje		
<b>Drigung</b>	Lhasa	Kagyü	1179, 1980s	1960s	
<b>Dzogchen</b>	Kham	Nyingma	1684		One of the 6 "Nyingmapa mother monasteries."
<b>Ganden</b>	Lhasa Prefecture	Gelug	1409 by Tsongkhapa	1959, 1966	Seat of the Ganden Tripa
<b>Gonchen Monastery</b>	Kham	Sakya	1729		
<b>Gongkar Chöde</b>	Lhokha	Sakya	1464		
<b>Gyumay and Gyuto Lower and Upper Tantric Colleges</b>	Tsang	Gelug	1433 and 1475		
<b>Hemis</b>	Ladakh	Drukpa	1672		
<b>Jokhang Temple</b>	Lhasa	Gelug	652 by King <u>Songtsen Gampo</u> in 647	1959	Lhasa main temple.
<b>Jonang Phuntsokling Monastery</b>	Tsang	Jonang	14th century		
<b>Kardang</b>	Lahaul	Drukpa	12th century		
<b>Karma Göñ Monastery</b>	Kham	Kagyü	1147		Seat of the 1st to the 7th Tai Situpa
<b>Katok</b>	Garze	Nyingma	1159		One of the 6 "Nyingmapa mother monasteries".
<b>Keru Temple</b>	Ü	Nyingma	mid-8th century		
<b>Kharchu Monastery</b>	Lhokha	Nyingma	16th century		
<b>Khomthing Monastery</b>	Lhokha				
<b>Khorshak Temple</b>	Western Tibet				
<b>Kirti Monastery</b>	Amdo	Gelug	1472		
<b>Kumbum Monastery</b>	Amdo	Gelug	1583		

<b>Labrang Monastery</b>	Amdo	Gelug	1709, by the first <u>Jamyang Zhaypa</u> , <u>Ngawang Tsondru</u> .		
<b>Magur Namgyal Ling</b>	Amdo	Gelug	1646		
<b>Menri</b>	Ü	Bön	1405	1386, 1966	
<b>Menri Monastery</b>	Tsang				
<b>Mindrolling</b>	Lhokha	Nyingma			One of the 6 "Nyingmapa mother monasteries."
<b>Nalendra Monastery</b>	Penpo				
<b>Namdzong Nunnery</b>	Amdo				
<b>Namgyal Monastery</b>	Lhasa				
<b>Nangshi Monastery</b>	Ngaba, Amdo				
<b>Narthang Monastery</b>	Tsang				
<b>Nechung Temple</b>	Lhasa				
<b>Ngor Temple</b>	Ü	Sakya	1429	1959	
<b>Nyethang Drolma Lhakhang Temple</b>	Ü				
<b>Pabonka Hermitage</b>	Lhasa	Gelug	7th century		Independent before 1959, belonged to Sera from 1980.
<b>Gyantse Palkor Chöde Monastery</b>	Tsang				
<b>Palpung</b>	Derge	Kagyü	1727, by the 8th Situ Panchen, and <u>Jamgon Kongtrul</u> .		
<b>Palyul</b>	Palyul	Nyingma			One of the 6 "Nyingmapa mother monasteries".
<b>Pomda Monastery</b>	Baxoi				
<b>Punakha</b>	Bhutan	Drukpa			
<b>Dzong</b>					
<b>Ralung Monastery</b>	Tsang				
<b>Ralung</b>		Drukpa			
<b>Ramoche Temple</b>	Lhasa				
<b>Rato Dratsang</b>	Karnataka	Gelug			Formerly on the outskirts of Lhasa
<b>Ratö Monastery</b>	Ü				
<b>Refing</b>	Ü	Gelug			
<b>Riwoche</b>	Kham	Kagyü			Seat of the Taklung Kagyü lineage.
<b>Rongbuk</b>	Basum Township	Nyingma	1902		
<b>Rongwo Gönchen Monastery</b>	Amdo				
<b>Sakya Monastery</b>	Tsang	Sakya			Seat of the Sakya Trizin.
<b>Samye Monastery</b>	Ü		775 - 779		
<b>Samye</b>		Nyingma	by <u>Padmasambhava</u> and <u>Shantarakshita</u> .		First monastery in Tibet
<b>Sekhar Guthok Monastery</b>	Lhokha		11th century by <u>Hugh Richardson</u>		
<b>Sanga Monastery</b>	Lhokha				
<b>Sera</b>	Lhasa	Gelug	by <u>Chöje Shakya Yeshe</u>	1959	
<b>Shalu</b>	Tsang	Sakya			
<b>Shechen</b>	Kham	Nyingma			One of the 6 "Nyingmapa mother monasteries".
<b>Simbiling Monastery</b>	...				
<b>Spituk</b>	Ladakh	Gelug			
<b>Surmang Monastery</b>	Kham	1988			
<b>Surmang</b>			Kagyü		Seat of the <u>Trunpa tülkus</u> .
<b>Tabo</b>	Spiti	Gelug			Largest monastery in Spiti.
<b>Taklung Monastery</b>	Ü				
<b>Taktsang Monastery</b>	Dzoge, Amdo				
<b>Tashichho Dzong</b>	Thimphu	Drukpa			
<b>Tashilhünpo</b>	Tsang	Gelug	by <u>Gyalwa Gendün Drup</u>		Seat of the <u>Panchen Lama</u> .
<b>Tholing Monastery</b>	West Tibet				
<b>Tibet Institute Rikon</b>	Rikon, Switzerland	Nyingma			Since 2007: representatives of all 4 great traditions: Gelug, Nyingma, Kagyü, Sakya
<b>Tingri Monastery</b>	Tsang				
<b>Tradruk Temple</b>	Lhokha	Gelug	by <u>King Songtsen Gampo</u> .		
<b>Trathang Monastery</b>	Lhokha				
<b>Tsandan Monastery</b>	Nagchu				
<b>Tsaparang Monastery &amp; Palace Complex</b>	Western Tibet				
<b>Tsethang Monastery</b>	Lhokha				

<b>Tsö Monastery</b>	Amdo				
<b>Tsozong Gongba</b>		Nyingma			
<b>Tsurphu</b>	Ü	Kagyü			Seat of the Gyalwa Karmapa.
<b>Yama Tashikyil</b>	Rebkong, Amdo				
<b>Yarchen Gar</b>		Nyingma	1985		Largest monastery in the world +10000 monks.
<b>Yarlung Sheldrak</b>	U-tsang	Gelug	18th century		
<b>Yemar Temple</b>	Tsang				
<b>Yerpa</b>		Gelug	600–700	1959	Famous meditation site of King Songtsen Gampo and Padmasambhava
<b>Yonghe Temple</b>	Beijing	Gelug	1700s		
<b>Yungdrungling Monastery</b>	Tsang				