

Measuring Income Inequality in Tibetan Society: Understanding the Different Amounts of Offerings and the Status of Tibetan Officials

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Introduction

Tibetans are culturally encouraged to donate, apparently influenced in doing so by the Buddhist concept of giving (Tib. *sbyin pa*, Skt. *dāna*)¹ which has been strongly rooted in Tibetan societies since the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th century.² Whether it is simply out of faith and generosity or in order to ask for specific help needed from the gift recipient, one does not visit teachers or higher officials empty handed. The Tibetan term for this is *'bul rten* or *'bul ba* (in the noun form) which actually means “the object to offer or to give or to donate”.

In my recent publication,³ I have shown some examples of *'bul ba* offering to government officials from a statement record of expenditures made by two sPo rong officials travelling to gZhis ka rtse and lHa sa in order to settle a dispute regarding the land of the local ruler of sPo rong, now in the district of Shel dkar. Most of these offerings were recorded as *mjal rten*, which can be understood as merely an offering made when seeing or visiting a high-ranking lama or a government official. Some officials were offered substantial amounts of money or presented with expensive gifts, while others received just a few coins or a drink. At a first glance, the offerings made by the two sPo rong officers appear rather arbitrary in their distribution, as if there were the impromptu outcome of individual whims. However, a thorough reading of the document confirms that a certain regulation—or better yet, a “social observance”—of offering was at play. It is evident from the statement record that gifts of similar value and

¹ For a Buddhist concept of giving, see “Dana: The Practice of Giving”, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi and available at <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel367.html#prac>. For the meaning of gift in other South Asian traditions, see Heim (2004).

² Robert Ekvall (1964: chapter 6) discusses in great detail the practice of offering (for which he uses the term *mchod pa*) in Tibetan societies, especially regarding its economic and cultural functions.

³ Gurung (2018).

quantities were consistently donated to officials who were either of the same rank or serving at the same post. In the light of that, several questions come to mind: Why were there differences in the number of offerings, and what do these differences tell us? Were such variations in the amount of offerings consistently regulated? Is it possible to ascribe such differences to a specific social structure? By answering these questions, I aim to quantify the different amounts of the offerings and thus measure the income inequality in Tibetan society. To do so, I will posit the practice of offerings as performed in the secular society against the backdrop of donations in the monastic environment, described by Robert Ekvall as “religious observance of offerings”.⁴

Offering in Tibetan societies

The most common and basic object that Tibetans offer at any given occasion is a ceremonial scarf called *kha btags*. Blo bzang don ldan and colleagues describe at least five major types of ceremonial scarves (with additional sub-types based on different quality), providing a brief explanation of their origins and the way they are used in Tibetan society.⁵ The abovementioned statement record of expenditures compiled by two sPo rong officials lists at least two types of ceremonial scarf (*a she* and *zub she*), although the presence of further sub-types may be speculated on the basis of the expenses reported, which range from 3.5 *srang* a piece for the cheapest one to 50 *srang* for the most expensive one.⁶ Traditionally, most offerings (*'bul ba*), such as money and any other items, are presented upon a ceremonial scarf; the type and the quality of the latter, as well as the modes of offering it—for example, by handing it, placing it on the shoulder or around one's neck, or laying it on the table in front of the seat or throne—are indicative of the social status of either givers or recipients. The use of ceremonial scarves, together with the cultural and political messages exchanged through them by giver and recipient, has been discussed in lengthy detail elsewhere,⁷ and in the light of that I will limit my discussion to a particular item usually offered wrapped up in a *kha btags*, i.e. cash.

The term used to indicate money offerings in the Tibetan monastic environment is *'gyed* (honorific, *sku 'gyed*), meaning “ceremonial

⁴ Ekvall (1964).

⁵ See Blo bzang don ldan *et al.* (1997).

⁶ For a more detailed description of the recipients of the ceremonial scarf in the document, see Gurung (2018: 237–238).

⁷ See, among others, Bell ([1928] 1968: 248–251), Blo bzang don ldan *et al.* (1997), and, more recently, Martin (2016).

offering of money to the monks".⁸ Although the 'gyed offering traditionally includes a variety of items such as foods and clothes, today it is mostly used to refer to money offerings, which the monks receive during a religious assembly. This actually serves as a part of financial income for the whole monastic community, who is largely dependent on sponsors' donations: theoretically, monks receive almost no support from their biological family. However, there are differences in the share that each monastic official or individual monk is entitled to receive at any given assembly. This share is called 'gyed skal (honorific, *sku skal*), often simply written as *skal* or *skal ba*, a term used in Tibetan language to indicate a "share" or a "fortune" of some kind, such as *rdzong skal* (dowry or the share given to the daughter when she is sent as a bride), *za skal* (the share of food in a funeral ritual or one's fortune in selling food), *zhing skal* (the share of field or allotted land for cultivation), and *nor skal* (the share in which a property is divided in case of family divisions). The share of monastic donation is usually indicated by the number of times its basic quantity—*skal ba* or *ngo skal* (term indicating that the recipient is physically present at the venue)—is offered: twofold (*nyis skal*), threefold (*sum skal*), fourfold (*bzhi skal*), fivefold (*lnga skal*), and so forth, with 'phar skal used to indicate an "extra share". The basic or minimum share of the offering to the monks is determined by the sponsor's financial capacity, and it is therefore up to the giver to decide. Whereas the amount of the basic share donated is up to the sponsor, the actual number of the shares (and thus the total amount to be paid by the donor) is regulated by the hierarchical status of the monks as clearly stated in the monastic rulebooks (*bca' yig*) that I will show later. Therefore, we can assume that all 'bul ba offerings, whether to government officials or other individuals, were similarly regulated on the basis of the social status of the recipient. In order to understand the regulation of offering in the Tibetan monastic communities, I will now turn my attention to those sections of monastic rulebooks in which the distribution of donations is explained.

Interestingly, when dealing with the process regulating donations among monks, most of the *bca' yig* examined for the present work refer to a manual titled 'Gyed gtong rtsa tshig. For instance, in the rulebook of Se ra smad, the 8th Dalai Lama 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758–1804) writes that the distribution of the shares—both monks' portions of donations and foods (*tsha bra*)⁹ and high lamas' servings of foods and

⁸ The term 'gyed is a nominal form of the verb 'gyed pa, equal to the verbs *gtong ba* ("to spend") or *sbyin pa* ("to give/to donate").

⁹ Three different spellings, with slightly different meaning, can be found in the Tibetan monastic rulebooks: *tsha bra*, *tsha gra*, and *tsha ra*. According to the Tibetan-Chinese dictionary (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 2246), *tsha bra* is the share of foods given to the deceased during a death ritual ceremony. The second one, *tsha gra*, refers to the

drinks (*tsha gzigs*)¹⁰—is to be performed as instructed in the supplementary text *'Gyed gtong rtsa tshig*.¹¹ A similar reference is also found in the rulebook of Se ra monastery written by the 7th Dalai Lama bsKal bzang rgya mtsho (1708–1757) in 1737.¹² Those references from the two aforementioned rulebooks clearly show that an official regulation was separately issued to systematise the share of the donation for monks. However, since I have not yet been able to find the *'Gyed gtong rtsa tshig* manual, I cannot explain how exactly the distribution of donation offering is instructed in the text. Fortunately, we do have access to some monastic rulebooks, e.g. the *bca' yig* of 'Bras spungs monastery, that provide us with similar instructions regarding the share of donation.

Share of offerings in the rulebook of 'Bras spungs monastery

Together with dGa' ldan and Se ra, 'Bras spungs monastery is one of the three principal seats (*gdan sa*) of the dGe lugs pa school and the largest among the three. It was founded in 1416 (Fire Monkey Year) by 'Jam dbyangs chos rje bkra shis dpal ldan (1379–1449), one of Tsong kha pa's main disciples. As the highest authority in the monastery, the college professors take the full responsibility of both its religious and political administration.¹³ The general assembly meeting (*bla spyi*) is presided by the incumbent abbot (*mkhan po khri pa*) as the chairperson, and the members includes all the serving college professors and former-abbots, the prayer leader of the general assembly, two disciplinarians (*zhal ngo*), and the estate manager (*pho brang sde pa*) of the dGa' ldan pho brang residence.¹⁴ After the death of 'Jam dbyangs chos rje bkra shis dpal ldan, the monastery was headed by several masters including the Dalai Lamas, and they were known as the throne-holders (*gdan sa khri pa*).

The primary book of rules and regulations followed by the monks in this monastery is the rulebook of 'Bras spungs monastery written by

parched barley flour (*rtsam pa*) distributed to monks from the government store (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 2242). The third one, *tsha ra*, cannot be found in any dictionary, but it is most probably a phonetic rendering of *tsha gra*.

¹⁰ The term *tsha gzigs* means the share of tea and soup offered to extra-ordinary members of the monastery (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 2247).

¹¹ *'gyed dang tsha bral tsha gzigs sogs kyi skal ba rnams 'gyed gtong rtsa tshig zur gsal bzhin gtong ba las/ lhag pa blangs mi chog*. See *Ser smad bca' yig*: 500.

¹² See *Se ra bca' yig* (101) and also Ye shes kun dga' (1996: 108).

¹³ At the time of the 3rd Dalai Lama, there were seven colleges (Blo gsal gling, sGo mangs, bDe yangs, Shag skor, Thos bsam gling aka rGyal ba, 'Dul ba, and sNgags pa colleges). Of these, only four (Blo gsal gling, sGo mangs, bDe yangs, and sNgags pa colleges) remain, as the other three were closed down (Byams pa blo gros 1983: 115, 117).

¹⁴ Byams pa blo gros (1983: 117).

the 5th Dalai Lama in 1682. The *bca' yig* contains new regulations regarding the share of offerings to monks, issued in place of the old one determined on the basis of the financial status of the sponsor. The section regarding the share of *'gyed* and *tsha ra* offerings is rather lengthy, and, for the sake of convenience, I will therefore separate it into two units. The first concerns the monks who attend a general religious gathering as well as the servants who worked in different capacities while the congregation was held; the second is a list of the management units of the monastic community. The share (*skal*) of the offering in the 1682 rulebook includes all kinds of items, from money to foods and clothes, yet, in today's monastic communities, this regulation became the standard way to convert the share of money offering.

According to the first list, a fortyfold basic share of the offering must be deposited to the dGa' ldan pho brang residence,¹⁵ a fivefold basic share is offered to the former and the incumbent head (*slob dpon khri gdan zur*) of the colleges, and a twofold basic share goes to the teachers who have passed *rigs grwa* examination.¹⁶ A basic share is reserved to the lamas returned from abroad. A fivefold basic share is offered to the prayer leader (*dbu mdzad*), and a sixfold one to the disciplinarian (*dge skos*). An extra or double share (*skal 'phar*) is given to each members, including the ordinary government officials (*gzhung las pa*), the apothecary (*sman sbyin pa*), the prayer reciter (*dmigs brtse ma*), the congregation convener (*chab skad pa*),¹⁷ the trumpet player (*dung mkhan*), the person who makes or prepares the ritual cake (*gtor ma ba*),¹⁸ the assistant of the disciplinarian who gives permission water (*chab ril*

¹⁵ dGa' ldan pho brang is the name given by the 2nd Dalai Lama (1476–1542) to the residence of the Dalai Lamas in 'Bras spungs monastery. The name was then extended to the Tibetan government in Lhasa when the 5th Dalai Lama became the religious and political head of Tibet. Therefore, this share was in principle meant for the Dalai Lama.

¹⁶ The *rigs grwa* examination is one of the four graduate examinations marking the student's education level. These are the *lha ram pa*, the *tshogs ram pa*, the *rigs rams pa*, and the *gling bsre* (arranged from highest to the lowest grade) (*Se ra rtsa tshig*: 757; *Ser smad bca' yig*: 503; Sopa 1983: 26). According to Namri Dargyab (2009: 57, 134), there is a ceremony called *bdun pa'i rigs grwa* held in summer in the seventh month of Tibetan calendar, which is probably the ceremony during which this examination takes place. Geshe Lhundrup Sopa informs us that the examinations for the higher two grades (*lha ram pa* and *tshogs ram pa*) take place in winter in the first and the second months of the Tibetan calendar.

¹⁷ The *dmigs brtse ma* prayer reciter and the congregation convener (*chab skad pa*) are those who summon the monks for religious congregation to the assembly hall.

¹⁸ The one who prepare religious offering and altar.

ba),¹⁹ the *khro gnyer*,²⁰ the kitchen chef (*ja ma lag bde dbu mdzad*, cf. Jansen 2018: 72), the one in charge of collecting firewood, the cook assistant (*thabs g.yog*), and the *tshwa tshul ba*.²¹ A basic share is finally given to the cleaners (*'bags sel ba*) and the helpers hired to assist in the kitchen.

Below the relevant passage from the *'Bras spungs bca' yig*:

snga thog dngos gzhi sbyin bdag 'byor pa che chung la gzhigs nas lhus gang things byas pa'i dper na dga' ldan pho brang du mtho bzhi bcu/ slob dpon khri gdan zur rnam la lnga skal rigs grwa gcig btang ba'i slob dpon rnam la nyis skal/ phyogs la song ba'i bla ma tshur yong gi ris la ngo skal/ dbu mdzad la lnga skal/ dge skos la drug skal/ gzhung las pa/ sman sbyin pa/ dmigs brtse ma/ chab skad pa/ dung mkhan/ gtor ma pa/ chab ril pa/ khro gnyer/ ja ma lag bde dbu mdzad/ shing gnyer/ thabs g.yog pa bzhi dang tshwa tshul ba gcig sogs la skal 'phar re/ 'bags sel ba gsum la ngo skal re/ thabs g.yog pa bzhi po nas so'i ram 'degs kyi mi gsum bzhi re sla dgos kyi yod 'dug pa mi 'khyam grub mtha' mi gtsang ba'i rigs mi 'gab pas so so'i skyes yul sogs zhib dpyad pa'i dge skos dang spyi so'i gnyer par gnang ba zhus nas bzhag par skal ba re//²²

According to the second list, a fortyfold share of the offering must be deposited to the general store of the monastic community (*spyi pa'i phyag mdzod*) and a twenty-threefold to the treasurer store. A threefold share is offered to the manager (*gnyer pa*) of dGa' ldan pho brang residence, and a twofold one to the general manager (*spyi gnyer*) and the three managers of Phan bde legs bshad gling,²³ bDe yangs pa, and sNgags pa sgrub mchod pa. A sevenfold share is offered to the gNas chung oracle, a fivefold one to the manager of summer retreat (*dbyar gnas kyi gnyer pa*), and basic one to the eight ritual performers of

¹⁹ The one who gives water of permission to the monks during religious congregation (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 788). In a sense, this person also serves as assistant to the disciplinarian (*dge skos*). He has to pass a leave request to the disciplinarian and if the permission is granted, he has to go to the monk and give water of permission so that the monk can leave the congregation.

²⁰ Possibly the person who takes care of the cauldrons made of cast iron (*khro*) used for making tea (i.e. *ja khro*) and soup (i.e. *thug khro*) in the monastic kitchen.

²¹ I could not figure out its exact meaning, as I found no record of *tshwa tshul ba* in any known dictionary. But, from the context, I assume it refers to the person who is dealing with salt management (*tshwa*) in the monastery.

²² *'Bras spungs bca' yig*: 179–180.

²³ This college is said to have been founded by the 2nd Dalai Lama, although it was the 3rd Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho (1543–1588) who formally established it as one of the colleges in 'Bras spungs monastery in 1574, giving it the name rNam rgyal grwa tshang phan bde legs bshad gling (see Blo bzang bsam gtan 2003: 1–2; Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2010: 543).

invocations (*gsol kha ba*),²⁴ the lay officials (*drung 'khor*), the clerks (*nang zan*), the temple caretaker, the one in charge of the rituals, and the registered ordinary monks.

Furthermore, a fourfold basic share is offered to the finance manager (*chos sde spyi so*) of the monastic community and to the *shas bdag*²⁵ of the summer retreat (*dbyar gnas*) from both Blo gsal gling and sGo mangs colleges. A threefold offering to *spyi pa* of the colleges Phan bde legs bshad gling pa, bDe yangs, and sNgags pa sgrub mchod pa,²⁶ and one share or the basic share is offered to the monastic households (*bla brang*), the apothecaries, and the temple caretakers (*mchod khang dkon gnyer*) of the three colleges rGyal ba,²⁷ 'Dul ba and Shag skor ba, as well as to the one in charge of the wages (*phogs do dam pa*) of rGyud stod college and Tā dben pa.²⁸

Below, the relevant passage from the 'Bras spungs bca' yig:

*spyi pa'i phyag mdzod du mtho bzhi bcu/ gnyer tshang du nyi shu rtsa
gsum/ dga' ldan pho brang gi gnyer par sum skal/ spyi gnyer la nyis
skal re/ phan bde legs bshad gling pa/ bde yangs pa/ sngags pa sgrub
mchod pa gsum gyi gnyer pa sdad dus nyis skal/ gnas chung sku khog
la bdun skal/ gsol kha brgyad la ngo skal/ dbyar gnas kyi gnyer par lnga
skal/ gzhung gi drung 'khor dang nang zan/ grwa tshang gi skal ba
la'ang phyogs la phar song dang tshur slebs bstun do dam pas brda*

²⁴ The person who performs invocation rites to the protector deities on someone's request (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 3033).

²⁵ I was not able to find the exact meaning of the term *shas bdag*, but I presume it could be read as *shas pa*, the person who goes to collect the share of harvested grains from the people who were given a part of agricultural land on lease (*shas la btang ba*) on behalf of the monastic estate. In this case, the collected grains may be used to cover the expenses of the summer retreat.

²⁶ Robert Ekvall (1964: 195) translates *spyi ba* as "superintendent," and identifies this figure with the head of wealth administration office of the monastery (*spyi khang*), a position often held by two individuals appointed from two to four years. Berthe Jansen (2018: 74–75) identifies two different responsibilities for this position: monastic supervisor or finance manager. Yet, I am not certain what responsibility the *spyi pa* of these three colleges had. The rulebook of Phan bde legs bshad gling (Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes: 522), one of the three colleges, lists a *spyi so'i sde pa*. This position seems to have carried the responsibility of monastic supervisor, and it may have been identical to the *spyi pa* mentioned here.

²⁷ This is another name of Thos bsam gling college (see note 13), which is written in five different spelling: *rgyas pa* and *rgyal ba* in 'Bras spungs bca' yig, *rgyal pa* in the 'Bras spungs history (Byams pa blo gros 1983: 115), *rgyal sa* in Blo bzang phun tshogs (2009: 51) and *rgyal po* and *rgyal pa* in Dung dkar (2002: 1550).

²⁸ Tā dben is the title given to one of the Sa skya pa master by the Yuan Emperor as the priest of the Mongol King (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 1022; Heimbrel 2017: 85). According an official letter (*zhu yig/chab shog*) written by the 5th Dalai Lama in 1655 (*Shing lug chab shog*: 359), there were two messengers of the Emperor of China (*gser yig pa*) who held the title of Tā dben. Thus, it is possible that the Tā dben pa mentioned in the above rulebook could be related to that position.

sbyar nas yod med kyi dbye ba phyed pa byin/ dge 'phel ba dang dngul chu chos rdzong pa ngo yod/ mchod khang dkon gnyer gyis mtshon gnyer las pa'i rigs sku rim do dam dang grwa pa grangs bcad song nges la ngo skal re/ chos sde spyi so dang dbyar gnas pa'i shas bdag ngo yod/ blo gsal gling pa dang sgo mangs par bzhi re/ phan bde legs bshad gling pa/ bde yangs/ sngags pa sgrub mchod pa gsum gyi spyi par gsum re dang bla brang so sor skal ba re/ rgyas pa/ 'dul ba/ shag skor ba gsum gyi bla brang dang sman sbyin pa/ mchod khang dkon gnyer/ rgyud stod pa'i phogs kyi do dam/ tā dben pa rnams la so sor skal ba re/ ra ma rdzong dpon g.yog bdun ma gtogs gzhan ma'i brel gcod par skal ba gtong len mi byed pa gzhung dang bod pa'i rigs la yin cing khams tshan de ga'i khams par gsum skal btang na bod pa dang nye logs rnams la nyis skal/ dge 'dun spyir mi gnod pa'i ngos rta drung sogs skyid sdug la phan slebs che ba tshor bcu skal tsam gtang ba sogs skyid sdug lan 'jal byed srol 'dug²⁹

Looking at the way the number of shares were regulated in the '*Bras spungs bca' yig*, it is clear that the offering to the monks were based on their hierarchical rank or on their social responsibilities. Excluding those shares of the offering reserved to the monastic community, the *bla brang*, or the treasure, I will summarise here the offering to the individuals to show the differences from highest to the lowest in share (see Table 1). For instance, the highest share of the offering goes to the disciplinarian (*dge skos*), who receives a sixfold basic share, followed by the head of the colleges and the prayer leader (*dbu mdzad*), who both receive a fivefold share. Then there are the teachers with *rigs grwa* examination, the ordinary government officials, the apothecary, the reciter of the *dmigs brtse ma* prayer, the congregation convener, the trumpet player, the ritual cake maker, the giver of permission water, the *khro gnyer*, the kitchen chef, the one in charge of collecting firewood, the cook assistant, and *tshwa tshul ba*, all of whom receive one extra share, i.e. a twofold portion of the offering. Other workers, like the cleaner and the kitchen helper, receive the basic share. In the case of the management unit, the highest share (a fivefold one) is offered to the manager of summer retreat, followed by a fourfold one to the manager of the monastic finance and to the "manager" of the two bigger colleges' (Blo gsal gling and sGo mangs) summer retreat. A threefold share goes to the manager of the dGa' ldan pho brang residence, and to the *spyi pa*-s of the three smaller colleges (Phan bde legs bshad gling, bDe yangs pa, and sNgags pa sgrub mchod pa). A twofold share is offered to the general manager and to the managers of three smaller colleges. The rest of the members –the performers of the invocation

²⁹ '*Bras spungs bca' yig*: 180.

ritual, the lay officials, the clerks, the temple caretaker, the one in charge of the ritual, the ordinary monks, the apothecary, the temple caretakers of the three colleges (rGyal ba, 'Dul ba and Shag skor ba), the one in charge of the wages of rGyud stod, and the Tā dben pa—receive only a basic share.

Recipient	Number of share (basic x fold)	
	List 1	List 2
disciplinarian	x 6	--
the former and the incumbent college heads, prayer leader	x 5	--
manager of summer retreat	--	x 5
monastic finance manager, summer retreat "manager" of the two larger colleges	--	x 4
manager of dGa' ldan pho brang, <i>spyi pa</i> of the three smaller colleges	--	x 3
teacher with <i>rigs grwa</i> exam, ordinary government officials, apothecary, prayer reciter, congregation convener, trumpet player, ritual cake maker, permission water giver, <i>khro gnyer</i> , kitchen chef, collector in charge of firewood, cook assistant, <i>tshwa tshul ba</i>	x 2	--
general manager, managers of the three smaller colleges	--	x 2
cleaner, kitchen helper	x 1	--
invocation ritual performers, lay officials, clerks, temple caretaker, ritualist in charge, ordinary monks, apothecary and temple caretaker of the three colleges, rGyud stod wage giver, Tā dben pa	--	x 1

Table 1 — Share of offerings in the rulebook of 'Bras spungs monastery.

Share of offerings in the rulebook of Chos mdzod gling and its colleges

There are also numbers of other monastic rulebooks detailing the regulation to be followed when distributing the donations to the monks. However, for the sake of clarity, I will limit my discussion to only one of them, namely the *bca' yig* of dGa' ldan chos mdzod gling monastery in Mongolia, as the text has the merit of clearly showing that the rules in force in the monasteries of Central Tibet were adopted and implemented outside the plateau. According to the catalogue of dGa' ldan chos mdzod gling (*Dkar chag dzambu nā da*, 2r–3v) compiled by Lcang lung Paṇḍita Ngag dbang blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1770–1845), this monastery, also known as dGe 'phel gling, was founded by rJe Blo bzang dpal 'byor lhun grub rab rgyas (ca. 18th century, exact date unknown) in 1743 (Water Pig Year) with the support of his patron Pe'i le dpal 'byor rdo rje, who is described in this *Dkar chag dzambu nā da* as the “lord of the men” (*mi'i dbang phyug*) and a descendant of Genghis Khan. There is hardly anything recorded about this founder, except from Lcang lung Paṇḍita's claim that he was a teacher of Kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa dkon mchog 'jig med dbang po (1728–1791).

According to the rulebook of dGa' ldan chos mdzod gling written by Lcang lung Paṇḍita, a fivefold basic share of the offering is to be entrusted to the monastic *bla brang*. A threefold share is to be offered to Tā bla ma,³⁰ while the disciplinarian, the *byang* (*ngu*) ritual priest, and the general manager (*spyi gnyer*) are to be given a twofold one each. All the ordinary monks receive the basic share of the offering.

Here is the relevant passage from the *Chos mdzod gling bca' yig*:

*'gyed kyi skor la/ 'di gar skal ba lnga/ tā bla ma la skal ba gsum/ dge bskos byang 'dren/ spyi gnyer sogs na mo che khar gnyis skal/ de 'og tshor gnyis la skal 'phar re gtong ba lta bu sngar srol dang bstun nas byed/ dus rgyun bcar sdod kyi grwa pa yin phyin ngo skal gcig/ nad pa mtshams pa sogs yong mi thub nges dang/ bla dpon dge 'dun spyi'i don la song rigs rnam la ngo skal gtong/*³¹

More details of the offering regulation may be found in the rulebooks of dGa' ldan theg chen bshad sgrub gling³² and mKhas mang thos bsam gling, two dialectic colleges under dGa' ldan chos mdzod gling,

³⁰ This title was given to a high-ranking monk official working in the Tibetan government. There are two different ranks of Tā bla ma mentioned in the rulebooks related to dGa' ldan chos mdzod gling monastery: Tā bla ma and college Tā bla ma. It is not known how their functions differed, but we could see that they held different ranks in the rulebook of bShad sgrub gling (*Bshad sgrub gling bca' yig*).

³¹ *Chos mdzod gling bca' yig*: 11v.

³² See *Bshad sgrub gling bca' yig*: 2r.

both texts ascribable to the same writer Lcang lung Paṇḍita. According to the latter, the *bca' yig* of dGa' ldan theg chen bshad sgrub gling was adopted from the rulebook of Se ra byes college, in turn itself probably an adoption from the *Tshogs gtam chen mo* ("The Great Exhortation"), which had been memorised and orally recited during the mass gathering of the college, and was not written down until its first publication in 1991.³³ According to this rulebook, a sevenfold share is offered to the college *bla brang*, a fivefold one to the mTshan nyid bla ma, and a fourfold one to the Tā bla ma of the college (*grwa tshang tā bla ma*). A threefold share goes to the Tā bla ma³⁴ and the college disciplinarian (*grwa tshang dge bskos*), and a twofold one to the disciplinarian of the great assembly (*tshogs chen dge bskos*), the prayer leader of the college (*grwa tshang dbu mdzad*), and the general manager (*spyi pa'i gnyer pa*). The prayer leader of the great assembly (*tshogs chen dbu mdzad*), the temple caretaker (*dgon gnyer*), the permission water giver, and the cook (*ja ma*) receive the basic share, while the kitchen assistant (*thab g.yog*) and the water fetcher (*chu len pa*) receive only half of the share.

Below, the relevant passage from the *Bshad sgrub gling bca' yig*:

bla brang la sku skal bdun/ tā bla ma la sku skal gsum/ mtshan nyid bla ma la sku skal lnga/ grwa tshang tā bla mar sku skal bzhi/ tshogs chen dge bskos la skal pa gnyis/ tshogs chen dbu mdzad la skal ba gcig grwa tshang dge bskos la skal ba gsum/ grwa tshang dbu mdzad dang spyi pa'i gnyer pa la skal ba gnyis re/ dgon gnyer/ chab ril/ ja ma bcas la skal ba re/ thab g.yog chu len pa gnyis la skal phyed re gtong/ bzang smon gyi rgyun 'gyed nas dgon gnyer dung pa sogs la skal ba gnyis re ster ba dmigs bsal /³⁵

A similar regulation is followed in the dialectic college of Thos bsam gling. According to its rulebook (*Thos bsam gling bca' yig*), a sevenfold share is offered to the college *bla brang*, a fivefold one to the mTshan nyid bla ma, and a threefold one to the Tā bla ma and the college disciplinarian. A twofold share is given to the disciplinarian of the great assembly, the prayer leader of the college, and the general manager. All the others, including the prayer leader of the great assembly, the temple caretaker, the permission water giver and the cook receive the basic share; only a half of the share is offered to the kitchen assistant and the water fetcher.

Here is the relevant passage from the *Thos bsam gling bca' yig*:

³³ For a whole translation of the *Tshogs gtam chen mo*, see Cabezón (1997: 338).

³⁴ The *Bshad sgrub gling bca' yig* described the post of Tā bla ma separately from the Tā bla ma of the college (*grwa tshang tā bla ma*), therefore I take them as separate position.

³⁵ *Bshad sgrub gling bca' yig*: 18v–19r.

'gyed kyi skor la/ 'di gar sku skal bdun/ tā bla ma la sku skal gsum/
 mtshan nyid bla mar sku skal lnga/ tshogs chen dge bskos la skal ba
 gnyis/ tshogs chen dbu mdzad la skal ba gcig/ gra tshang dge bskos la
 skal ba gsum/ gra tshang dbu mdzad dang spyi ba'i gnyer pa la skal ba
 gnyis re/ dgon gnyer/ chab ril/ ja ma bcas la skal ba re/ thab g.yog chu
 len pa gnyis la skal phyed re gtong /³⁶

The above information shows that the offerings are consistently and systematically regulated in the two dialectic colleges under the same monastery, the latter a fact that demonstrates the uniformity in the rank status in the monastery. However, far from being permanently fixed, this status is temporarily allotted and shifts in accordance with the duties involved in certain events. Such changes are evident in the rulebook for the great sMon lam festival of the dGa' ldan chos mdzod gling monastery.³⁷ According to this rulebook, in fact, a thirtyfold share is to be offered to the monastic *bla brang*; the next highest recipients of the offering are the abbot of sMon lam festival (*smon lam mkhan po*) and the Tā bla ma, who both receive a sevenfold share of the donation. Then, a fivefold share goes to each college head (*grwa tshang bla ma*), the disciplinarian of the great assembly, and the prayer leader of the great assembly. A fourfold share is reserved to the disciplinarian of the college and the general manager (*spyi gnyer*), while a threefold one goes to college prayer leader, a twofold one to the chant singer (*mchod dbyangs pa*, eight of them in total) and the two disciplinarian assistants (*dge g.yog*). All the others, including the monk servant (*zhal ta pa*),³⁸ the temple caretaker, the trumpet player, the religious flute player (*rgya gling pa*), the permission water giver, and the *mdo dar* performers (four of them)³⁹ receive the basic share of the donation.

This is the relevant passage in the *Chos mdzod smon lam bca' yig*:

'gyed kyi skal ba 'di gar sum cu/ smon lam mkhan po zur du yod tshe

³⁶ *Thos bsam gling bca' yig*: 13r.

³⁷ See *Chos mdzod smon lam bca' yig*.

³⁸ A monk who acted as a servant during summer retreat, *dbyar gnas skabs dge 'dun pa spyi la zhabs 'dags zhu mkhan* (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 2380).

³⁹ In the Tibetan-Chinese dictionary, we find the related entry *mdo dar ma*, which is vaguely described as one particular musical instrument "*rol mo'i bye brag cig*" (Zhang *et al.* 1996: 1383). However, in his very elaborate paper on the history of *mdo dar* in Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil monastery, Gdugs dkar bkra shis (2017) suggests that it is type of musical composition that includes ten different compositions played during a religious ceremony to receive important guests. He further explains that it is currently played with about six different musical instruments. I am indebted to my colleague Dr Lobsang Yongdan for this reference and Lobsang Thapka for his kind explanation of *mdo dar*.

*sku skal bdun/ tā bla ma la skal ba bdun/ gra tshang bla ma rnams dang/
tshogs chen dge bskos tshogs chen dbu mdzad rnams la skal ba lnga/
gra tshang dge bskos dang spyi pa'i gnyer pa la skal ba bzhi/ gra tshang
dbu mdzad la skal ba gsum/ mchod dbyangs pa brgyad dang dge g.yog
gnyis la skal ba gnyis/ zhal ta pa dgon gnyer dung mkhan/ rgya gling
pa rnams la gnyis la skal 'phar re/ chab ril pa/ do dar pa tsho la bzhi la
skal 'phar re gtong/*⁴⁰

To summarise all the above information, as organised in the table below (Table 2), the individuals who receive the highest offering within the monastic community of dGa' ldan chos mdzod gling are the abbot of the sMon lam festival and Tā bla ma during the mass gathering of the great sMon lam festival. The abbot of the sMon lam festival seems to be a temporary status only appointed during the festival, as there is no mention of the share for this status in the other rulebooks. Although the Tā bla ma is the highest recipient during the festival, he gets only three shares during the assembly of colleges, that is one share less than the Tā bla ma of the college (*grwa tshang tā bla ma*) and two shares less than mTshan nyid bla ma. mTshan nyid bla ma or the head of the colleges (*grwa tshang bla ma*) receive five shares and that is the highest individual recipient during the college's assembly and the second highest recipient during the sMon lam festival. The second highest recipients during sMon lam festival also include the disciplinarian of the great assembly (*tshogs chen dge skos*) and the prayer leader of the great assembly (*tshogs chen dbu mdzad*). They are offered a fivefold share during the festival, but during the college's assembly they receive less than their counterparts, i.e. the disciplinarian and the prayer leader of the colleges. The disciplinarian of a great assembly receives two shares, and the prayer leader of a great assembly receives only one share, while their counterparts respectively receive three and two shares of the offerings during the college's assembly. This shows how individual statuses fluctuate up and down according to the events, and apparently this has to do with how burdensome is the task that the monastic officials have to carry out during a particular event. This is also clear from the share of offering reserved to the disciplinarian (i.e. fourfold) and the prayer leader (i.e. threefold) of the colleges during the sMon lam festival, a quota that is less than the one received by their counterparts (fivefold, as mentioned above). Another example that illustrates such shifts of status can be seen when looking at the share received by the general manager (*spyi gnyer*). His task seems to be perceived as lighter than the one of disciplinarian of the college, and therefore he receives one share less during the college's assembly, although

⁴⁰ *Chos mdzod smon lam bca' yig*: 8r–8v.

during the sMon lam festival his share is equal to the one given to the disciplinarian (i.e. fourfold).

Recipient	Number of share (basic x fold)			
	Chos mdzod	bShad sgrub	Thos bsam	sMon lam
abbot of the sMon lam festival	--	--	--	x 7
mTshan nyid bla ma	--	x 5	x 5	--
college Tā bla ma	--	x 4	--	--
Tā bla ma	x 3	x 3	x 3	x 7
head of the colleges	--	--	--	x 5
disciplinarian	x 2	--	--	--
<i>byang (ngu) ritual priest</i>	x 2	--	--	--
disciplinarian of the college	--	x 3	x 3	x 4
disciplinarian of the great assembly	--	x 2	x 2	x 5
prayer leader of the college	--	x 2	x 2	x 3
prayer leader of the great assembly	--	x 1	x 1	x 5
general manager (<i>spyi ba'i gnyer pa</i>)	x 2	x 2	x 2	x 4
chant singer, disciplinarian assistant, monk servant, trumpet player, flute player, <i>mdo dar</i> performers	--	--	--	x 2
permission water giver	--	x 1	x 1	x 2
kitchen chef	--	x 1	x 1	--
kitchen assistant	--	x half	x half	--
water-fetcher	--	x half	x half	--
water-fetcher	--	x 1	x 1	x 2
ordinary monks	x 1	--	--	--

Table 2 — Share of offerings in the rulebooks of Chos mdzod gling, its two colleges, and sMon lam festival

Offering amount in legal documents

After discussing in detail how the share of donation is regulated in Tibetan monasteries, I will now explain how and why different amounts of offerings were made in the secular context. It is important at this point to remember that, being the head of the state a monk, the social system in Tibet was to some extent influenced by the system of monastic rules and regulations. This is particularly true in the case of the rulebook of 'Bras spungs monastery, as its author, the 5th Dalai Lama, became the head of the Tibetan government. Although the offering obligation in the secular community does not seem to have been subject to written regulations nor was documented in any legal document, a system similar to the one in force in the monasteries was at play in the secular community.

To illustrate the influence wielded by the monastic system on lay customs, I will present examples of offerings made to government officials and individuals as recorded in the document DTAB ID 0200 (SBB 6823). The latter is a record of expenditures made between 1891 and 1895⁴¹ by Khang dkar dbang phyug and sMan phyi bkras don, two officials of sPo rong travelling to gZhis ka rtse and Lhasa in order to settle a dispute regarding the right of land ownership of the sPo rong rje dpon, the local ruler of sPo rong. The expenses include the purchase of gifts items such as foods, clothes and stationery, offerings of money, and their travel expenses on food, lodging and transportation. Most of these offerings were made as *mjal rten* or *'bul rten*, which is traditionally an offering made when paying a simple visit. Since these visits were carried out on behalf of the local ruler of sPo rong, there was certainly an important reason behind the offering accompanying them. Unfortunately, we can only speculate as to why these two sPo rong officials paid such visits, as they did not disclose any specific purpose in their record of expenditures: maybe it was simply to pay respect or to show loyalty to the recipients or to gain support or influence from them over any pending decision in favour of the giver. Some of the offerings were also made as *snyan rten* (a present given when one

⁴¹ The conversion of this period has been confirmed from three references in the document. Firstly, there is a reference of sixty-four days between the 28th day of the 9th month and the 20th (30th) day of the 10th month of the Iron Rabbit Year. This reference fits only if we take 1891 (Iron Rabbit Year) as date of the document. Secondly, there is another reference calculating 3 years, 10 months, and 17 days between the 28th day of 7th month of the Iron Rabbit Year and the 15th day of the 4th month of the Wood Sheep Year. This calculation fits only between 1891 (Iron Rabbit Year) and 1895 (Wood Sheep Year). Thirdly, there was an offering made when the *mchog sprul* of Phur lcog byams mgon *rin po che* (1825–1882) was enthroned. This event can be dated sometime between 1891 and 1895, because it cannot be very far from 1882, year in which Phur lcog byams mgon *rin po che* passed away.

makes an appeal or requests advice or as a reminder of such entreaty),⁴² *skyabs rten* (money or presents given when asking for a favour or help in return), and *'don bskul* (offering done when requesting someone to read a prayer or to perform a ritual).

From the Tibetan Buddhist perspective, *skyabs rten* is not considered as a bribe when it is offered to one own's spiritual master; rather it is deemed to be "the offering to request guidance through the spiritual path towards liberation",⁴³ thus it is a kind of *'bul rten* with a spiritual purpose. However, according to Melvyn Goldstein, in legal documents the term *skyabs rten* is most often used for an offering analogous to a bribe.⁴⁴ From the record of expenses, it is clear that, when in gZhis ka rtse, the sPo rong officials twice offered a *skyabs rten* to a person named Chos khang pa who both times refused to accept, only to cave in later when they offered him one ball of butter (*mar hril*) as a departing gift.⁴⁵ Another example of this *skyabs rten* used as bribery can be found in the history of Ngam ring district written by Phran rtsa rta mgrin rgyal po: here the author claims to have witnessed first-hand episodes of corruption among the Ngam ring officials, who accepted money as *skyabs rten* to file a case.⁴⁶

The purpose of the offering of *snyan rten*, *skyabs rten* and *'don bskul* may be clearly understood from the context in which the terms appear; sometimes the specific case is even briefly mentioned in the document. Generally speaking, the amount of these offerings seems to be based on the difficulty or urgency of the task requested in favour, rather than with the status of recipient. The last point will become clearer once we examine a few examples of *snyan rten* and *skyabs rten* offerings. For instance, the highest-ranking monk official of dGa' ldan pho brang government, the sPyi khyab mkhan po, was offered 150 *srang*⁴⁷ for a normal visit (*mjal rten*), which we can assume was the standard rate for his status. Yet, he was offered less, i.e. 100 *srang*, on one occasion when a *skyabs rten* was given for a *viva voce* request, and more, i.e. 250 *srang* plus a load of rice worthy 450 *srang*, on two different occasions as the

⁴² Alternative terms found in the document are: *snyan zhu bka' slob zhu rten*, *zhabs bskul bka' slob zhu rten*, *snyan bskul zhu rten*, and *bka' slob zhu rten*.

⁴³ *mgo 'dren byed rogs zhu ba'i 'bul rten*, see Zhang *et al.* (1996: 143).

⁴⁴ Goldstein (2001: 68).

⁴⁵ DTAB ID 0200 (SBB6823): [line 122–123] *chos khang par zhabs bskul snga phyi'i skyabs rten bzhes min la brten thon mjal mar hril 1 rin srang 350/*

⁴⁶ Phran rtsa rta mgrin rgyal po (1994: 73–74): *grong drag ming chen rnam nas sger mjal sha/ mar/ dngul sogs 'bul srol len rkyang khar khrims chad nyes dngul dang/ rnam kun khrims gtugs byed mkhan gyi sa nas skyabs rten dngul dngos 'bul len/ nyes chad gcod pa sogs rdzong thog rim pas za bed byed lugs rdzong sdod mi 'gro so so'i byed phyogs yin cing/* For the detail study of this source, see Alice Travers (forthcoming).

⁴⁷ *Srang* is a Tibetan monetary unit. I have discussed the use of *srang* in Gurung (2018).

skyabs rten accompanied a written request (*skyabs 'dzin* or *skyabs zhu'i tshig tho*). The fact that there is a written request attached to the money offering made during the two occasions indicates the urgency of the tasks, which also explains why the amount of offerings differs, although they belong to the same type (i.e. *skyabs rten*) and are made to the same ranking official. A similar example is provided by the offering made to a fourth-ranking finance minister or *rtsis dpon*, who was given 150 *srang* as *snyan rten* and 100 *srang* as *skyabs rten*. This is less than the offering of 250 *srang* as *skyabs rten* made to the official named E zhabs.⁴⁸ Even though his position or rank is not known, E zhabs was apparently a very influential and authoritative figure who the sPo rong officials visited about seven times, bringing him gifts of cash, meat, and butter worth more than 1,400 *srang* in total. Likewise, the second person to whom the sPo rong officials paid the most visits was Chos khang pa of gZhis ka rtse. He was offered gifts of meat, butter, rice, paper, and cash mostly as *mjal rten* (only once as *skyabs rten*) worthy more than 4,700 *srang* in total. As mentioned earlier, he twice refused *skyabs rten* offerings—unfortunately, the amount of each donations was not recorded in the document. To conclude, all these examples suggest that, although the gift offerings made as *skyabs rten* or *snyan rten* do not reflect the status of the recipient, they are somewhat indicative of the importance of the requested task.

As mentioned above, the offering known as *mjal rten*, the one made when paying a simple visit, appears to be the most consistent one in terms of amounts, as it was perhaps determined on the basis of one's social rank. As shown in the table below (Table 3), Yab gzhis mTsho mgon chen po was given 250 *srang* (the highest amount offered). Among the others, the highest-ranking monk officials, the sPyi khyab mkhan po (rank 3) and the Bla brang phyag mdzod (rank 4), were both offered an average of 150 *srang*, while the council ministers (rank 3) and the acting council ministers (bKa tshab or bKa 'blon las tshab), the finance ministers (rank 4), and the secretary general (*drung che*) were offered about 100 *srang* for a normal visit (*mjal rten*). The fifth-ranking officials, like the district heads or mayors, and the staffs (rank unknown) of the private treasury of the Dalai Lama (*mdzod sbug*), and the ex-manager of the private chapel of the Dalai Lama (gZim chung lha khang) were offered about 25 to 50 *srang* per meeting, the latter considered as a normal visit (*mjal rten*). The following table (Table 3) lists

⁴⁸ In all the seven occurrences in the document, his name is written as *e zhabs* or *e zhabs mchog*, which seems to be title, possibly an abbreviation of *E khang zhabs 'bring*, a section of the government office where the letters and documents were copied. Since no real name or any other description is given, it is difficult to guess his position, rank or social status. However, it is clear from this document that he was in gZhis ka rtse.

the amounts of offerings from the highest (250 *srang*) to the lowest (25 *srang*), accordingly to the official rank of the recipients.

Recipient	Rank	in <i>srang</i>
Yab gzhis mTsho mgon chen po	3	250
Lha yum chen mo (the great mother)	3?	100–150
Ja sag	3	150
sPyi khyab mkhan po	3	150
bKa' blon	3	100
bKa' blon las tshab	3?	100
<i>sku ngo rim bzhi</i> (4 th -ranking official)	4	200
rTsis dpon	4	100
drung che Lha sdings (secretary general)	4	100
Bla phyag	4	150–200
manager of sPyi khyab mkhan po	4?	100
<i>dbus mda' dpon</i> (sngon lung pa)	4	50
Mi dpon (district heads or mayor)	5	50
rTsis pa	6	150
E zhabs (from gZhis ka rtse)	unknown	150
Chos khang pa (from gZhis ka rtse)	unknown	100
rGyal nang sku ngo	unknown	25–50
ex-manager of gZim chung lha khang	unknown	25–50
Staff in <i>mdzod sbug</i> office	unknown	

Table 3 — List of the offerings as *mjal rten* (only money offerings listed)

Conclusion: measuring income inequality in Tibetan society

As explained in the previous sections, although in principle the '*gyed* offering may be determined by the donor based on his financial capacity, the existence of a regulation of multiple shares forces the donor to follow the rules established in the *bca' yig* of the monastery, according to which the offering must be calculated following the hierarchical status of the monks. When the offering is made through the monastic administration, such regulations are almost always implemented. In the unlikely case that the recipient's status is ignored, this may be either considered an unfortunate event, as the donor refuses to acknowledge the recipient's rights and thus does not pay sufficient respect (*bskur sti* or *bsnyen bskur*), or an offensive way by which the giver expresses his unwillingness to accept the rightful status of the recipient. Since no Tibetan sponsors dare to go against the religious harmony and cause their own ruin in terms of social prestige, it is almost impossible that

the monastic rules are not followed. In the case that the government or lay official are not offered amounts according to their status or the standard rate for their position, the favour that the giver expects in return may not be accomplished.

Looking at the number of the shares regulated in the monastic rulebooks, we can see how the offering to the monks were made on the basis of their hierarchical rank, or on their social responsibilities. This is clearly illustrated in the excerpts from the 'Bras spungs *bca' yig* quoted above, where the largest shares are given to the highest-ranking monastic officials, such as the disciplinarian (sixfold share), the heads of colleges and prayer leader, whereas the smallest ones go to the lowest-ranking monks, like the kitchen helper (one share). Although the exact share distribution is different, a status-based repartition of the offerings is also found in the rulebook of Chos mdzod gling and its colleges, according to which the highest share goes to the mTshan nyid bla ma (fivefold), followed by the Tā bla ma, the disciplinarian, and the prayer leader, down to the lowest status-holder, namely the water fetcher (half share). This shows that the offerings were consistently and systematically regulated in Tibetan monasteries according to one's status. However, as we have seen, such status shifted up and down, as shown in the case of the numbers of shares received by the Tā bla ma, the disciplinarian, and the prayer leader during the sMon lam festival versus those they got when attending a regular assembly of the college (see Table 2). This shift was apparently due to the difficulty of the task entrusted to the recipients during that particular event.

The regulation of offerings in the monastery has evidently influenced the way in which Tibetans treated the amount of offering to be given in the secular community. However, unlike the regulation in the monastery, offerings at a secular level (e.g. to government officials) were neither written in guidelines nor in rulebooks. The purpose of the offering to the government officials was also different from the offerings made to a monastery, and their amount sometimes seemed to have been based upon the urgency of the requested task, and therefore it was not necessarily determined by the recipient's status (see the case of the *skyabs rten* offerings to the *rtsis dpon* vs E zhabs). However, looking at the different amounts of the offerings recorded in the sPo rong document, particularly in case of *mjal rten*, it appears that the offering was, to some extent, regulated according to the hierarchical status of the recipients. We can see that the higher-ranking officials (like the sPyi khyab mkhan po, the Bla brang phyag mdzod, the council ministers, etc.) were offered more than 100 *srang* per meeting whereas the lower-ranking officials (e.g. district heads or mayors) were paid 25 to 50 *srang* per meeting. In other words, we can say that the giver was

expected to make an offering on the basis of the official rank of the recipient.

In some cases, the variation of the amount given for a *mjal rten* also seems to have been due to the importance of the meeting or the desire to keep a personal relationship intact, the latter factors may explain why the donor made expensive offerings despite the relative low status of the recipient. Such variation in the offerings directly affected the actual income of the recipients, and therefore influenced their economic status and positions within the society. Since the economic status or income of the Tibetan officials depended, among other things, upon the number of visitors that they received, their official social status and prestige also play an important role in securing them visitors, thus allowing them to maintain a high economic status. The competition in offerings is even fiercer today, as a high donation displays the givers' economic status, and increases their reputation in the community.

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