

Francisco Díez de Velasco

# Budismo en España: historia y presente



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Ediciones del Orto

Francisco Díez de Velasco

**BUDISMO EN ESPAÑA**  
**HISTORIA Y PRESENTE**



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## ÍNDICE

|                                                                                                                                                                        |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. EL BUDISMO: APROXIMACIÓN INTRODUCTORIA .....                                                                                                                        | 7   |
| 2. BUDDHISM IN SPAIN: AN OVERVIEW .....                                                                                                                                | 49  |
| 3. EL BUDISMO ANTES DEL BUDISMO EN ESPAÑA .....                                                                                                                        | 81  |
| 4. LA RELEVANCIA DE LA PRODUCCIÓN EDITORIAL<br>BUDISTA EN LA VISIBILIZACIÓN DEL BUDISMO<br>EN ESPAÑA .....                                                             | 113 |
| 5. THE VISIBILIZATION OF THE NEW BUDDHIST<br>HERITAGE IN SPAIN: EXAMPLES OF ARTISTIC<br>HYBRIDIZATION IN VAJRAYANA RETREAT<br>CENTRES .....                            | 185 |
| 6. REFLEJOS DE JAPÓN: EL ZEN EN ESPAÑA .....                                                                                                                           | 211 |
| 7. BUDISMOS Y BUDISTAS EN CANARIAS.....                                                                                                                                | 261 |
| 8. PLANTEAMIENTOS METODOLÓGICOS<br>PRELIMINARES PARA EL ESTUDIO DEL BUDISMO<br>EN CANARIAS: CRÓNICA DE UN EXPERIMENTO<br>DE HISTORIA ORAL Y SECUELAS POSTERIORES ..... | 299 |
| 9. BUDISMO EN ESPAÑA: ESTADO DE LA CUESTIÓN<br>Y REFLEXIONES SOBRE LOS LÍMITES DEL PROCESO<br>DE INVESTIGACIÓN .....                                                   | 333 |

## ABREVIATURAS

- aec: antes de la era común (para las fechas)
- AZI: Asociación Zen Internacional
- CBSZ: Comunidad Budista Soto Zen
- CCEB: Coordinadora Catalana d'Entitats Budistes / Coordinadora Catalana de Entidades Budistas
- CPTM: Comunidad para la Preservación de la Tradición Mahayana
- DSK: Dag Shang Kagyu
- DW: Diamond Way
- EBU: European Buddhist Union / Unión Budista Europea / Union Bouddhiste Européenne
- ec: era común (para las fechas)
- FBMTT: Federación Budista Mahayana Thubten Thinley
- FCBE: Federación de Comunidades Budistas de España (actual UBE)
- FPTM: Fundación para la Preservación de la Tradición Mahayana
- NTK: Nueva Tradición Kadampa
- RER: Registro de Entidades Religiones hasta 2020 dependiente del Ministerio de Justicia, a partir de 2020 dependiente del Ministerio de la Presidencia
- STL: Sakya Tashi Ling
- UBE: Unión Budista de España-Federación de Entidades Budistas de España

## THE VISIBILIZATION OF THE NEW BUDDHIST HERITAGE IN SPAIN: EXAMPLES OF ARTISTIC HYBRIDIZATION IN VAJRAYANA RETREAT CENTRES

The presence of Buddhist worship centres in Spain is recent. The first centres were established in 1977 within the context of religious freedom brought about by democratization. One of the main elements of this new democratization was the guarantee to freely exercise religion after decades of religious exclusivity that prevented the development of Buddhism beyond a few individual options. Just as many other minority religious options, in the years since, a new Spanish Buddhist artistic heritage emerged. This new artistic heritage continued manifesting in an interesting way in the Vajrayana Buddhist retreat centres. This work will review six of these centres in order to highlight the features and diversity of the new Spanish Buddhist artistic heritage and its two primary forms of expression. The first form of expression is evident in some cases where centres chose mainly to import Asian constructive and artistic models, which provided significant aesthetic impact with respect to Spanish artistic heritage as a whole. The second form of expression is shown in other cases where centres combined Asian elements with local and modern elements, which produced an interesting process of hybridization.

### 1. DAG SHANG KAGYU

Perhaps the clearest example of the systematic inclusion of Asian constructive and artistic models is the Dag Shang Kagyu monastery (Panillo, Huesca; see Díez de Velasco 2020: 90-93), located in the Aragonese Pyrenees. Belonging to the Kagyu school (Shangpa Kagyu and Dhagpo Kagyu lineages), Kalu Rinpoche launched this monastery in 1984 and it is one of the most impressive Buddhist centres in Spain (Araque 2006). Dag Shang Kagyu is the central site for a network of a dozen urban practice centres throughout Spain (see ‘Centros Hermanos’ [Brother Centres] <https://dskpanillo.org/page/centros-hermanos>; Díez de Velasco 2013-2018: 238–246) and is included in the international network led by by the second Kalu Rinpoche, the young tulku who has been recognised as the reincarnation of the founder of the centre Dag Shang Kagyu (see <https://palden-shangpa.org>).

It was the second Buddhist community to register with the Ministry of Justice as a religious group, with Dag Shang Kagyu and the monastery address as the central reference of the group. It was one of the five founding communities of the Buddhist Federation and its third president, Florencio Serrano, who held the post from 2010 to 2016, is a member of this community and has also presided over it. Therefore, the legal visibility of the group has been a clear commitment from the very beginning, the numerical visibility of the group is remarkable and the Dag Shang Kagyu monastery appears clearly visible as the central and referential place of the whole network. We must also take into consideration the cultural heritage visibility that shows that they have set up their own publishing house called Chabsöl, which has published around twenty titles (see Díez de Velasco 2018: 91-92 and here, chapter four).

Dag Shang Kagyu looks like a corner of Tibet or Bhutan in the middle of the Pyrenees, with the decorative and architectural elements characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism: the large stupas, a large hall of worship (gompa in Tibetan), a study centre (shedra in Tibetan), decorated doors, images painted on the rock, banners and flags. Going into more detail, it should be noted that it is one of the centres where the most investment has been made in the construction of stupas. It is a type of monument to house relics that is circumambulated, but, with a few exceptions, does not usually have its interior accessible. It is not a form of religious architecture that is comparable, therefore, to those found in Spanish culture. Dag Shang Kagyu is the site of the second large stupa to be erected in Spain, which was consecrated in 1992 and has the particularity that the interior space has been used to include a meditation room, thus doubling the ritual use of the monument, which is employed in the usual processional ceremonies around it, but is also used for meditative practices inside (illustration 41).



Illustration 41: Dag Shang Kayu. Main stupa

Two other large stupas are now added, one of which, the most recent, is a kalachakra stupa, located near the first and in the central part of the complex, and the other is located in a more secluded area of the site. Also marking the access to the ceremonial zone of the centre are one hundred and eight small stupas, of less than two metres, located on the path that goes from the great monumental access door to the main zone (illustration 42).



Illustration 42: Dag Shang Kayu. Access door and little stupas

The complex can be divided into three main areas. The most spectacular, and which presents a construction of unquestionable Tibetan monumentality, is that which includes the ceremonial buildings of the complex, with the gompa as a symbolic centre towards which the visitors converge on the one hand from the great entrance door and the path marked out by small stupas, and on the other from the area of large stupas that includes a building for offerings and details in the accesses such as images of Buddha. The main buildings have several roofs superimposed on four slopes with the traditional Tibetan appearance and proportions, especially the large gompa which is located in an exempt building whose proportions and decoration are fully Asian (illustration 43-44). This is the area that is shown (even with stipulated visiting hours) to occasional visitors who are attracted by the exoticism of finding in the middle of the Pyrenees a tourist offer that differs from the other points of interest promoted in the region, and which is even visible on the general signposting.





Illustration 43: Dag Shang Kayu. Building of the meditation hall (view from the main stupa)

The second area of Dag Shang Kagyu could be defined as more focused on the interior of the community, as opposed to the ceremonial area which is more focused on representation and the exterior, and is the one that specializes in the study facet associated with the monastery. It is in a more remote area and includes a large library/study centre (*shedra*), which is located in a building of Tibetan appearance and construction (illustration 40), and also a restricted area for retreats lasting four years, which have culminated in each of the retreats held to date, with around twenty participants. This is a restricted access area framed by a decorated door. The third area is the accommodation area and includes houses for the monks that form a numerically outstanding community (by Spanish standards), and also the accommodation for visitors and other residents of the centre, with refectory spaces, kitchens, storage rooms and other facilities. In this case the Asian elements are much less prominent, except in the usual Tibetan iconography that presides over the spaces, and in general the decision has been made to adapt the traditional construction methods of the area and to take advantage of local buildings in which the exposed stone and gable roofs are common. Modern construction and design techniques are also being used (albeit with a certain eastern aspect) for the new functional buildings such as the one called *Norbuling* which is in the process of being completed and will serve as accommodation and other services. In general, local artistic influence is hardly noticeable in Dag Shang Kagyu perhaps because there is a community of mainly Bhutanese monks (led by

Lama Drubgyu) who oversaw the construction processes and artistic program of the monastery from the beginning. Non-Asian models are predominantly utilized in buildings for non-religious uses.



Illustration 44: Dag Shang Kayu. Gomba, interior

## 2. KARMA GUEN

Religious tourism is even more prominent in the case of Karma Guen (Vélez-Málaga, Malaga: <https://www.karmaguen.org>; see Díez de Velasco 2020: 93-96). The centre was founded in 1987, prior to the separation of the Karma Kagyu lineage because of the controversial recognition of the XVII Karmapa. It is included in the Diamond Way international Buddhist network and for years was the largest Diamond Way retreat centre in Europe. Although there are now about twenty other centres, Karma Guen remains the groups largest centre in Spain (Diez de Velasco 2013-2018: 247-250; Perea & Díez de Velasco 2010: 152). Karma Guen has grown significantly, following an ambitious project that included religious, educational and cultural elements as expounded by the main person responsible for setting up the site, Pedro Gómez (Gómez 1995). It has not yet been completed, as is the case, for example, with a planned museum of Tibetan art that has not yet fully materialised, although at Karma Guen there are a significant number of artistic pieces that have been shown in exhibitions in the area or have been sent on temporary loan for exhibitions in various places, increasing the visibility of the group.



Illustration 45: Karma Guen. Kalachakra stupa

The centre includes a 14-metre kalachakra stupa (illustration 45) built in 1994 and designed by Lopön Tsechu Rinpoche, who was one of the main teachers of the Diamond Way leader, Lama Ole Nydahl, and lived from 1995 until his death in 2003 in Spain. The stupa was therefore a very prominent element of Asian visibility in the monastery and has become a reference for sport in the area as well. Thus, for example, the Stupa is a symbolic landmark in the cycling race called, for the reason of passing through the surroundings of the monument, “The Challenge of the Buddha” which has reached its 12th edition in 2019 and has on occasion in the past called more than a thousand participants and was even integrated among the races of the Andalusian championship (see Perea & Díez de Velasco 2011: 163-164).

But the most prominent building is a huge hall of meditation and worship (illustration 46), named Thaye Dorje Gompa, in honour of the Karmapa recognized by the Diamond Way international network. This is one

of the largest Buddhist worship halls located outside of Asia, with the capacity for more than 2,000 attendees. Its proportions make it an equally impressive building when viewed from the outside. Its modern architectural design contrasts the inner decorations in the style of Karma Gadri, detailing scenes from the life of the Buddha, different masters of Tibetan Buddhism, especially the Karma Kagyu school, and the representation of supernatural beings of the Tibetan pantheon. The painted wall to the right of the main altar is remarkable for its symbolism and the vindication of the rooting of Diamond Way in the Karma Kagyu lineage.



Illustration 46: Karma Guen. Thaye Dorje Gomba, interior

In front of the painting is a statue of the sixteenth Karmapa, who is depicted in the painting alongside his fifteen predecessors. The bottom right part of painting shows an interesting representation of the sixteenth Karmapa, as he is surrounded by disciples whom he entrusted with the task of transmitting their lineage's teachings to the Western world. The Western world is symbolically represented through diverse monuments, such as the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty, as well as the landscape of Karma Guen.

Despite its huge size, the building is sometimes insufficient in accommodating the thousands of followers who congregate at Karma Guen from many different places around the world. It is also interesting to note that Spanish followers at these events are a minority. The 2007 phowa ceremony, for example, which was presided over by Karmapa Thaye Dorje, was attended by more than 4,000 people, who overflowed the group's facilities. In the 2010 phowa, which was followed up in detail in a punctual field work (Perea & Díez de Velasco, 2011), in the midst of the economic crisis, the

attendance decreased, slightly exceeding 1,000 participants, a figure which, in any case, is exceptional in Spanish Buddhism, only surpassed in the great ceremonies presided over by the Dalai Lama and by very few other great Buddhist leaders. But what is significant is the origin of the participants: nearly 30 percent were German, only 15 percent Spanish, 13 percent Polish, 6 percent Czech, 4 percent Russian, over 3 percent Swiss, British, Danish and Austrian and up to 35 other nationalities in smaller numbers. This outstanding number of foreign visitors has the peculiarity of making Spain's Buddhist heritage visible beyond the borders of the country, as it is a centre of attraction in which the climate, the available leisure and service infrastructures and the attraction of the combination of sea and mountain do not cease to be a major added attraction that enhances Buddhist religious tourism.

Another small meditation room is located among the initial buildings of the complex and reuses the traditional farmstead. More notably, retreat caves in full Tibetan style have been built around the area of the Kalachakra Stupa. The stupa and the caves are located in the highest place of Karma Guen. From there, the view displays the spectacular size of the large meditation hall and reveals the extent of land acquired by the group, as well as the combination of modern buildings with the reuse of traditional buildings. Among the various rooms located in the older part of Karma Guen is a particularly rich library housing written works with Buddhist and Tibetan themes (illustration 34). The library is also comprised of teaching rooms where various Buddhist studies programs by the Institute of Tibetan and Asian Studies (ITAS: <https://www.itas.uni.eu>) are held.

However, it must be noted that in the face of such outstanding heritage visibility and the also very notable numerical visibility of both the network of centres and the many people who attended the ceremonies at Karma Guen, the legal-religious visibility is minimal (Perea & Díez de Velasco 2010). Although in 2011 they institutionalised their legal status a little more and constituted themselves as the Karma Guen Karma Kagyu Diamond Way Foundation (see <https://www.karmaguen.org/legal-structure-2>), they have not been registered as a religious group in the official instances (the RER) and therefore are not visible as religious but only as a cultural institution. In fact, it is the only one of the large Buddhist networks in Spain which has systematically opted for this strategy which makes it invisible from a legal-religious point of view.

The hybridization between Asia and Europe at Karma Guen is crystallized in the huge building of the gomba Thaye Dorje. These large proportions are also characteristic of another outstanding Diamond Way project in the same province of Malaga, the Benalmádena stupa (<https://www.stupabenalmadena.org>; Seegers 2015; 2017: 72; Perea & Díez de Velasco 2011: 159ff.; Díez de Velasco 2020: 96-98) It is one of the largest stupas

outside Asia, standing 33 meters high. The Benalmádena stupa cannot be treated in detail here because it is not located within a retreat centre. Despite this, the stupa requires a mention because it represents an exceptional project of hybridization between Asian and modern artistic and cultural proposals. The stupa even includes a museum in the basement, which is a characteristic element of the Western model of understanding the heritage.

### 3. O SEL LING

The oldest Buddhist retreat centre founded in Spain, O Sel Ling (Bubión, Granada: <http://www.oseling.org>; see Díez de Velasco 2020: 99-102), is an impressive example of the use of buildings that do not look Asian, even in areas of religious or representative use of the centre. It is a spectacular complex located in the heart of the Granadine Alpujarra that was first used as a Buddhist retreat centre in 1980. It was opened under the direction of the lamas Yeshe and Zopa, who founded the FPTM (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition: <https://fpmt.org>) in 1975 and introduced Gelugpa Buddhism to Spain while in Ibiza in 1977.

The centre was visited in 1982 by the Dalai Lama, who gave it its name, during his first visit to Spain, where he was accompanied by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa among others. Two years later, the first, Lama Thubten Yeshe, who had attracted many Spaniards to Buddhism because of his extroverted character and charisma, died in the United States and the search for his reincarnation led to a child born in Granada in 1985 less than a year after Lama Yeshe's death, named Osel Hita Torres. He was the son of two Buddhists from the first period of Ibiza, Paco Hita (whose dharma name imposed by Lama Yeshe was Thubten Kunsang) and María Torres who lived in the surroundings of O Sel Ling and were disciples of Lama Yeshe. Osel was officially recognised as Lama Yeshe's tulku in 1986 and enthroned as Tenzin Osel Rinpoche in 1987 and his importance reflected in the directories of world religious leaders a few years later (Jenkins 1994: 224). He was educated in Tibetan centres in India and Nepal and in the West until, after coming of age, he chose to follow a less directly related, but not completely separate, training and personal career from the FPTM. His story, which is very famous and has a very continuous media presence, both in Spain and in Buddhist magazines in other countries, with interviews and reports that are sometimes somewhat sensational, has been narrated for his first years in monographs (MacKenzie 1996-1989; 1995:160 ff.), including one written by his own mother and with a strongly biographical or even hagiographical tone (Torres 1994). It seems that his figure came to influence the profile of the Western tulku boy who appears in the famous 1993 film by Bernardo Bertolucci, *The*

*Little Buddha.* This visibility associated with the figure of Osel has influenced the fact that this centre is perhaps the Spanish Buddhist complex that has had the greatest media impact.

O Sel Ling is a centre associated with the Nagarjuna network in Spain along with a dozen of other centres. There are a number of important elements of Buddhist artistic heritage in O Sel Ling (Araque 2005; Díez de Velasco 2013-2018: 222ff.). The entrance welcomes visitors on a Tibetan style portico with a large prayer wheel. It also contains other elements of Asian style, such as the first great stupa to be built in Spain in 1990 (illustration 47; Manzanera 1988).



Illustration 47: O Sel Ling. Stupa

The interior roads of the complex are decorated with murals, banners and other details, which, combined with the surrounding mountains, offers a spectacular reflection of Asia and is greatly appreciated by visitors seeking a taste of the Himalayas in Europe. The use of traditional Alpujarra architecture is particularly notable. It combines stone walls and flat roofs in the nuclear area of the Buddhist retreat centre, where a meditation room, a library, study rooms, a kitchen-dining room and other various rooms are located. This part of the centre reuses a completely restored and adapted old farmhouse. Traditional Alpujarra construction techniques are also used in the various houses for individual retreats around the complex (illustration 48), as well as in the common dormitory.



Illustration 48: O Sel Ling. Retreat house

The main meditation room is surprisingly different in contrast to the aesthetic of the rest of the centre. It does not correspond with a traditional local element or with an oriental element, but rather is constructed as a large round tent with futuristic details (illustration 49). However, this building adds great symbolic value to the community. The meditation room is a restoration of the provisional tent where the teachings of Lamas Yeshe, Zopa, and Song Rinpoche were developed in Ibiza in 1978. A huge statue of Tara presides over the whole retreat centre, highlighting the majesty of the peaks and valleys of the Sierra Nevada.

The O Sel Ling monastery remarkably exemplifies hybridization between local, modern and Asian elements. The centre is an attraction for numerous visitors each year, many of them non-Buddhists, which caused them to implement a visitation schedule.



Illustration 49: O Sel Ling. Futuristic meditation room



#### 4. SAKYA TASHI LING

The heritage and artistic programme that has been developed at the Sakya Tashi Ling Buddhist Monastery located in the Natural Park of El Garraf (Olivella, Barcelona see Díez de Velasco 2020: 103-106), which opened in 1996, is perhaps one of the most peculiar in Spain and even on a global scale and has extraordinary visibility. It is a group that can be associated with the Vajrayana but with an unusual trajectory because it is led and implemented not by Asians, but by Spaniards, and it is one of the best academically studied in its networks and proposals (Rodríguez and Arroyo 2011; 2014; Rodríguez, Ramon and Arroyo, 2011; Rodríguez et al. 2017).

The group was founded and formed by the person they call Lama Blanco (White Lama), the Catalan Francesc Padró López (also named by his followers as Lama Jamyang Tashi Dorje Rimpoché) and they have generated some of the most mediatic Spanish Buddhist proposals because of their impact and visibility.

The Sakya Tashi Ling Monastery is a very peculiar heritage proposal in which reuse and hybridisation are key, since they restored the buildings of the Palau Novella, a jewel of eclectic Catalan architecture, which was built in 1890 by a native of Sitges who had been enriched in America, Pere Domènech i Grau, and is located in the Garraf Natural Park (Olivella, Barcelona). It is an architectural and decorative context that cannot fail to impress those who visit it. On its own merit it has become a notable tourist attraction, with guided tours that are one of the revenues of the monastery, including also a museum of Tibetan art, mainly religious, with an outstanding number of pieces, some of a very considerable size, which are displayed in showcases and rooms adapted for museographic purposes. The complex is impressive and the Palau Novella itself is a unique building worth visiting, with artistic elements from a past that the community has taken good care to respect, although superimposing Buddhist elements. Therefore, the Vajrayana features predominate as a counterpoint even in the areas that have been less transformed. Much in Sakya Tashi Ling evidences a conscious and reflective programme of hybridisation of elements that sometimes produce a strong cultural and aesthetic shock.

A good example of this hybridization is the dining room of the Palau Novella. Although it is presided over by statues and tankas of Buddhas, decorated with photographs of the White Lama and other lamas of the community accompanied by various personalities, it maintains also the original decoration by walls papered with elephant leather, a shocking material from the Buddhist sensibility given the veneration that is dispensed to these animals in countries with a Buddhist majority (since it is said that when Siddhartha escaped from his palace only the elephants were awake).

The mixture of Buddhist and classical Spanish elements is also remarkably evident in the living room on the first floor, as the Modernist decorative elements are combined with the statues and paintings of supernatural beings from the Tibetan pantheon, with voluminous Tara statues that give the room a symbolically feminine touch. In addition to the impact of the building itself, the Buddhist ceremonies held in the centre are particularly colourful and much appreciated by participants and visitors, who are not unaware of the careful general attention given by members of the community, including, for example, a childcare service. The restaurant, located in the old cellars of the mansion, even provides a culinary addition. The kitchens and other service facilities are outstanding, offering quality vegetarian meals in a general environment where great care has also been taken to respect the environment and natural heritage.



Illustration 50: Sakya Tashi Ling. General view from the roof of the Palau Novella with the main stupa at left

The most obvious Asian element in the entire complex is the great stupa (illustration 50), built in 2002. It was placed in a very visible and spectacular location at the entrance of the complex and surrounded by prayer wheels, marking a clearly different space to that of the Palau Novella, since in this case there is no hybridisation and, on the contrary, it has been chosen to include an element with a clearly differential Tibetan aesthetic.

However, perhaps the most interesting and creative example of the commitment to artistic, cultural and symbolic hybridization may be a smaller stupa embedded in a restored Catalan Modernist monumental laundry (illustration 51). It was a perfectly designed and implemented artistic project, in whose restoration and new use the Reial Càtedra Gaudí of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya participated (Bassegoda and Alcalá

2003). In this remarkable monument, the local, modern and Asian elements combined culminate generating a new use, perfectly appropriate in a Buddhist monastery, for an obsolete architectural element such as a laundry. The fact that the original element was built according to modernist and eclectic aesthetic criteria means that the final product, after the inclusion of clearly Asian and foreign elements, is aesthetically harmonious and symbolically very interesting.



Illustration 51: Sakya Tashi Ling. Monumental laundry with embedded stupa

Paradigmatic in its respect for this heritage visibility programme is the Catholic chapel (illustration 52), a very symbolic, and particularly multireligious, example of this program of artistic and cultural hybridization. It retained both its original location, in the main area of the Buddhist monastery (the courtyard of the Palau Novella), and its intended use. All its elements have been respected, both the altar and the worship images, and even the

pews, which are an element that is not used in Vajrayana worship and religious Buddhist etiquette, since the floor is the place where the participants use. The particularity in Sakya Tashi Ling is that the statues wear white Tibetan scarves around their necks as if they were Buddhas or bodhisattvas. It is a commitment that makes both religious worlds visible and that illustrates the capacity for adaptation that Buddhism can have. A notable concept in Buddhism is that of *upaya*, which could be translated by “skilful means”, and which can be understood not only in the personal context of learning and gradually assuming the Buddhist ways that each master adapts to the capacity of his disciples, but also as the capacity to use in each circumstance and place the most appropriate formulas to access the various people and populations by shaping the message to the local and individual religious idiosyncrasies and sensitivities. At Sakya Tashi Ling this ability to disseminate its proposals, which includes refined marketing techniques, is rooted in a great adaptability and creativity when it comes to respectfully combining, both artistically and symbolically, whatever the context offers.



Illustration 52: Sakya Tashi Ling. Church. Statues with Tibetan katas

For its part, the community's meditation room follows completely modern construction techniques, which even allow, by means of screens and movable walls, to enlarge or limit the spaces depending on the participants in each particular ceremony or practice, but the cultural elements, objects and iconography, in this case, are entirely Tibetan (illustration 53).

While the usual oriental iconographic programs in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries are evident at Sakya Tashi Ling, the hybridization creates a unique architectural and decorative base. A different Orientalism (not the Asian Buddhist one) is reminiscent in the neo-Arab bathroom of the palace. However, with both proposals, the use of modern construction techniques is overlapped by eclectic-local and Buddhist-Asian styles when required by the needs of the new space.

Furthermore, if the artistic program implemented during the late nineteenth century in the Palau Novella was already eclectic, then the inclusion of Buddhist elements a century later multiplies the miscellaneous character of the entire space and creates a mixture that redefines both local and global elements.

This hybridization also permeates other artistic proposals that have emerged from Sakya Tashi Ling. The various music recordings produced by the community are especially interesting. In 1999 they produced and sold 'En busca de la felicidad: Cantos tibetanos' (The Pursuit of Happiness: Tibetan chants). Although they had success in sales, further public acclaim occurred later when they chose to explore musical hybridization. The mixture of traditional Tibetan music with Western rhythms and arrangements led to remarkable sales success in 2005 with 'Monjes Budistas' (Buddhist monks). This musical recording became both gold and platinum albums. They subsequently published 'Live Mantra' in 2007 and 'Live Peace' in 2008, although they had less success. They have also promoted the commercialisation of products such as a cookbook "for happiness" together with other proposals (Sakya Tashi Ling 2007; 2008) such as a motorbike helmet which they have named "Tantric" with mantras which they consider to be protective inside, which was even sponsored by the Spanish General Department of Traffic in July 2008, taking pictures with the monks even their own general director. Therefore, the group has a very remarkable impact of its cultural products and its website is very well designed (<https://monjesbudistas.org>) and the network that is organized through it is very active. The legal visibility is also noteworthy, Sakya Tashi Ling was registered with the Ministry of Justice in 1994 and has been a member of the Spanish Buddhist Federation since 2004. It is the main register of the group and is also a member of the CCEB (Catalan Union of Buddhist Entities). Its international legal visibility is outstanding and was boosted in 2004 with its membership of the European Buddhist Union, whose annual assembly they organised in 2006 in Barcelona.

In short, the commitment to make the monastery visible at all levels and to take great care of the exceptional space in which it is located means that the heritage visibility at Sakya Tashi Ling is particularly notable and the number of visitors to the site is very high, making it a reference tourist attraction in the area.



Illustration 53: Sakya Tashi Ling. Modern gompa

## 5. SAKYA FOUNDATION / SAKYA PARAMITA

A further step in this process that we are exemplifying in the hybridisation between Asian and modern elements can be found in the Sakya Foundation / Sakya Paramita Buddhist Centre (<https://www.paramita.org> see Díez de Velasco 2020: 106-107) which is located in a luxury complex in Pedreguer, Denia, in one of the most touristic areas of the coast of Alicante (see Díez de Velasco 2013-2018: 251-253). It is a centre linked to the Sakyapa School of Vajrayana which is currently run by the Lama Rinchen Gyaltsen (Alejandro Veiga Martínez, Uruguayan by birth and from a family of Galician origin) and is associated with Gongma Trizin, who was until 2017 the XLI Sakya Trizin, head of the said school. The building was a gift from an architect who asked to remain anonymous and in it the Asian architectural models do not mark the main artistic references, but opt for a modern architecture.

It is a building with a completely modern design that is a display of functional adaptation to the plot on which it is located, which has a rugged terrain. It is an exceptional example of the creativity and versatility of contemporary architecture (illustration 54).

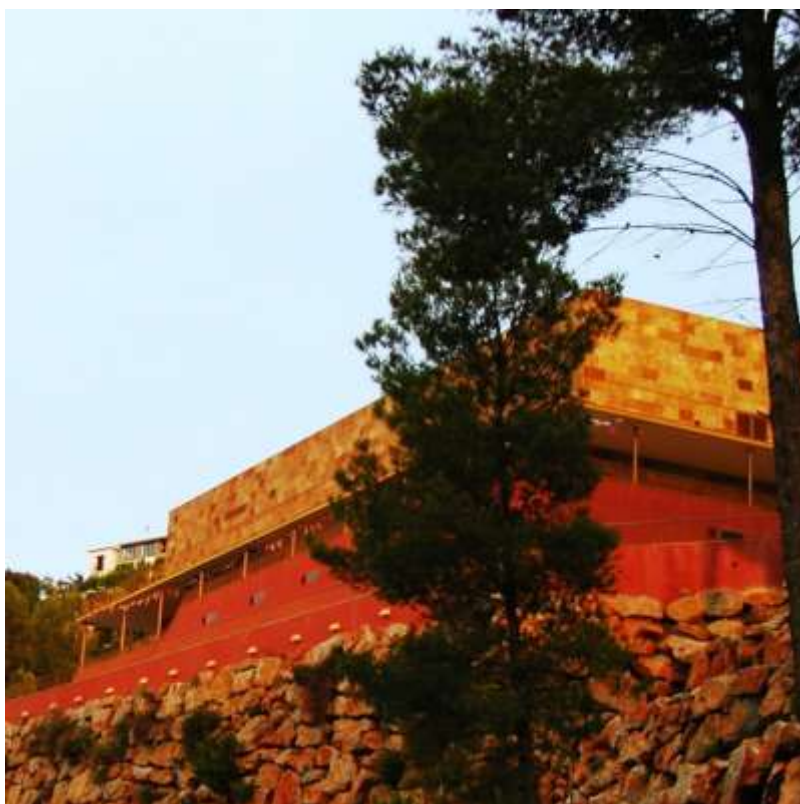


Illustration 54: Sakya Foundation. General view of the building

Perhaps the most impressive element of the centre is the main meditation room. This is a very large space, characterised by its diaphanousness, as it has no columns, and can accommodate many hundreds of participants. In contrast to the common Tibetan spaces with columns supporting the roof, in this case the supports have been minimised. The sensation of spaciousness is such that it has been resolved by hanging round textiles on the ceiling in the form of half-columns that delimit the emptiness of the room which, not having any chairs, is perhaps surprising to those who contemplate it with the sight accustomed to cathedrals or large churches common in Spain, which are furnished with rows of seats (illustration 55). The lighting details of the meditation room are resolved with skylights that form a roof in which aesthetics do not conflict with utility, but rather produce added value in the visibility of the proposal. They allow the entrance of zenithal light in addition to that coming from the east of the building, with windows that open onto a terrace with views of the Mediterranean, thus combining mountain and sea. The complex includes two other smaller meditation rooms, one specifically designed for ceremonies that use fire, as well as various study rooms or for specific ceremonies, a library, a small museum, as well as rooms for the lamas, including one reserved for the

former XLI Sakya Trizin himself when he visits the site. There are also several dozen rooms for those who make retreats or attend courses at the centre. A large dining room and modern kitchens are included, ready to cater for hundreds of guests if required.

The building was officially inaugurated, with notable media visibility, in September 2006 by the XLI Sakya Trizin, and although it does not currently have its own registry at the RER, between 2006 and 2010, when the centre was home to the Sakya Drogön Ling community, it did house the community and its registry, and was therefore more legally visible than it is today.

In short, the complex, in general, presents some notable architectural singularities, both in terms of the modernity of the design elements and construction techniques, as well as their adaptation to the symbolism, colours and, in general, to the usual aesthetics of the Buddhist proposals of the Vajrayana, but also to the talent with which it has been chosen to open up to the privileged site where it is located, which is greatly enhanced by the building itself, which has become a tourist attraction in the area as well as an extraordinary element in the visibility of Buddhist proposals in Spain.

However, it is also worth noting that very large worship rooms, which can hold many hundreds or even thousands of attendees, such as this one at the Sakya Foundation or the even larger one at Karma Guen, which has already been revised, are usually only fully occupied on rare occasions. Although in the regular practice of the centres they usually do not cover their large capacity, having such rooms allows the centres to plan events of impact, and to propose an offer of Buddhist religious tourism that is logical in a country with a great tourist vocation like Spain. It is not surprising that the largest meditation halls are located in privileged tourist areas such as the coast of Malaga and Alicante.



Illustration 55: Sakya Foundation. Meditation hall (general view of the free column space)

## 6. KMC (KADAMPA MEDITATION CENTER. SPAIN)

A further step in this combination of a Buddhist centre and modern space can be found in the very touristic area of Malaga and forms a central space in Spain for the New Kadampa Tradition (<http://kadampa.org>). This is what



has been called the Kadampa Hotel in Alhaurín, Malaga, which takes the official name of KMC (Kadampa Meditation Center) Spain / Centro de Meditación Kadampa de España (<https://www.meditaenmalaga.org>; see Díez de Velasco 2020: 109-111). This is a retreat centre that is part of the New Kadampa Tradition network, which has more than a thousand centres worldwide and many meditation groups in Spain that are coordinated around almost twenty main centres (Diez de Velasco 2013-2018: 265-272). These centres have a very notable legal visibility and form, within the groups registered as religious entities, the most numerous group with eighteen records distributed throughout Spain. Such a large number of groups of practices and centres means that the numerical visibility of the group is very high, and that a large number of people have attended the meditation courses they offer, many thousands of them, given the strategy of the group to offer an approach that is very much adapted to Western and modern sensibilities. This is even evident in the fact that in the centres in the meditations are used chairs and therefore, from a postural point of view, they are much easier to follow and adapt to Western etiquette, which may not be comfortable on the floor.

As regards the Kadampa Meditation Centre in Spain, it is a mixture of a hotel and a meditation and retreat centre, with infrastructures that fully satisfy the demands of religious tourists and exemplify the characteristic adaptability of the New Kadampa Tradition with respect to Western formulas, also in the management of leisure, and provides yet another element in the evidence of the boom of Buddhist religious tourism in Spain. It is characterised by the usual elements of a rural hotel, and in the past it was offered on the usual hotel reservation circuits. However, the clientele has been made up of both tourists in general who are looking for a different location, with a plus of services that set them apart from the habitual offers of sun and beach, and Buddhists who are looking for the possibility of developing meditation and vajrayana retreat practices in an environment with other diverse attractions.

In a way, it is a place that emphasizes the services that are usually offered in other Buddhist retreat centres, but following the usual modes of visibility of the more standard tourist proposals. Many retreat centres have rooms that are quite similar to those of a hotel, in a line that is not unfamiliar to what is proposed, for example, in the case of Catholicism, where the transformation of some monasteries or parts of them into residences very similar to hotels in the services they offer is not exceptional. In the case in question, it is important to note that a further step has been taken; we are not dealing with a centre that includes a few rooms, but with a resignified hotel complex in which the religious components are offered as added value. In fact, in its presentation as a hotel, it is composed of standard rooms and bungalows that have their key and number, including among its attractions a swimming pool with solarium. But it also offers a library on Buddhist themes and a sober but very carefully decorated meditation room where guests can follow meditation practices, retreats, or attend ceremonies (illustration 56).



Illustration 56: KMC. Meditation hall. Interior. General view and altars

All of the above is located in the same area and in immediate proximity, so customers can take a bath or sunbathe, with the meditation room just a few metres away (illustration 57), which is also visibly labelled “Kadampa Temple of Peace” and has artistic and aesthetic elements that are Asian and characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism, but located in a general, completely modern architectural context (illustration 58). Kadampa's leisure proposals on a global scale include a network of bars-restaurants called Cafés de la Paz (<https://kadampa.org/es/centers-5/cafes-paz-mundial>), and in this centre that we review there is one.



Illustration 57: KMC-Kadampa Hotel. Swimming pool and meditation hall

Let us add that this complex is the main office of the Tharpa publishing house in Spain (<https://tharpa.com/es>), which is dedicated to the publication in Spanish of translations of the works of the New Kadampa Tradition and especially of its founder and leader, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, and which offers a growing catalogue of books and brochures that is approaching fifty (Diez de Velasco 2018: 91; see here chapter four), so the cultural visibility of the group also has that notable instrument that is a publishing house.

But we must remember that this centre located in Malaga is not the only retreat centre of the New Kadampa Tradition in Spain. They have another centre in Menorca, of more modest proportions, but which is very visible on the group's web pages worldwide and which bears the name "Menorca International Retreat Centre" and since 2012 has been recognised by the group with that international category that only applies to two other centres of the group worldwide. But the Malaga centre that we have just reviewed is particularly symbolic of the group's commitment to adapting to the ways of thinking about heritage that the vast majority of the group's followers have, who are Westerners to whose sensibility Geshe Kelsang Gyatso has spared no effort in bringing them closer in many aspects. The fact that the group has opted for a fully tourist heritage vehicle such as a hotel, and given the area in which it is located, is perfectly consistent with this tendency.



Illustration 58: KMC. Meditation Hall (Templo Kadampa de la Paz)

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Through our case studies of these Buddhist monasteries and retreat centres in Spain, we were able to detect an interesting progression of hybridization among local, modern, and Asian elements. This progression is summarized in the following table (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Summary of architectural elements in Buddhist monasteries and retreat centres in Spain.

| A: Asian<br>L: Local<br>M: Modern                         | Dag<br>Shang<br>Kagyü | O Sel<br>Ling | Karma<br>Guen | Sakya<br>Tashi<br>Ling | Sakya<br>Founda-<br>tion | Ka-<br>dampa<br>Hotel |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Stupa                                                     | A (3 +<br>108)        | A             | A             | A (1) M<br>(1)         |                          |                       |
| Stupa<br>with hall                                        | 1                     | 0             | 0             | 1                      |                          |                       |
| Medita-<br>tion Hall<br>(building)                        | A                     | M/L           | M/L           | M                      | M                        | M                     |
| Medita-<br>tion Hall<br>(decora-<br>tion)                 | A                     | A             | A             | A                      | A/M                      | A/M                   |
| Library-<br>Educa-<br>tional re-<br>sources<br>(building) | A                     | L             | L             | L                      | M                        | M                     |
| Entrance<br>Area                                          | A                     | A             | L             | L                      | M                        | M                     |
| Pathways                                                  | A                     | A             | L             | L                      | M                        | M                     |
| Retreat<br>zones                                          | A                     | L             | A             | L                      | M                        |                       |
| Decora-<br>tion                                           | A                     | A             | A             | A/L                    | A/M                      | M/A                   |
| Non reli-<br>gious<br>buildings                           | L                     | L             | L             | L                      | M                        | M                     |

On the one hand, we see examples of more modern stylistic patterns, which do not include characteristically Asian element such as stupas. Their meditation rooms are also designed in a less ornate decor than centres which opted for a greater weight of Asian elements. On the other hand, centres with more traditional, Asian artistic elements can likely be explained by the presence of stable communities of Asian monks in charge of these centres. However, centres modelled closest to Western sensibilities,

and in line with 'New Buddhism,' can show how the process of hybridization has made Asian artistic elements less relevant.

In addition, we have been able to highlight the notable investment effort undertaken in our country by the Vajrayana groups in terms of setting up large retreat centres (Diez de Velasco 2013-2018: 147-149; 284-286; 2020). Until some large projects such as that promoted by the Lumbini Garden Foundation, which has gone from being located in Madrid to Cáceres ([http://www.budamadrid.com/Project\\_Big\\_Buddha/Proyecto.html](http://www.budamadrid.com/Project_Big_Buddha/Proyecto.html)), with the aim of erecting the largest seated statue of Buddha in the world, or some others which have been attempted to be set up, especially to satisfy the needs of the Chinese Buddhist community, which is numerous in our country (Diez de Velasco 2013-2018: 71ff.), these examples which we have highlighted in this work stand out clearly. In any case, they show the emergence of a new Buddhist heritage that is adapting very skilfully to the new Western contexts where this millenary religion is taking root, which on so many previous occasions has succeeded in hybridising foreign and local elements and is now evidencing global expansion, and Spain may be an interesting example of this. In a country that makes tourism one of its most flourishing "industries", the weight of the tourist element, as we have seen in several of the cases reviewed, may explain what we could call the overdimensioning of some of the proposals reviewed, if we take into account the modest numerical impact of those who, living in our country, follow Buddhist practice in Spain in a non-sporadic way. In short, such heritage visibility is sufficiently notable to justify an action of visibilization such as that proposed in these pages.

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This work reflects, systematizes, develops and updates the analyses and data that were presented under the title "The visibilization of the new Buddhist heritage in Spain: examples of artistic hybridization in Vajrayana retreat centers" at the International Forum on Buddhist art and Buddhism's transmission to Europe: When the Himalaya meets with Alps, Madrid, 26-29 August 2016. In Spanish a reduced version of this work was published in Díez de Velasco 2016 and a more complete development in Díez de Velasco 2020.

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