The monastery of Ke ru lha khang is located in an area called 'On and now belongs to Nedong County of Lhokha Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region. This monastery is very famous both in Tibet and beyond for its historical significance and for the ancient art objects and texts that are preserved there. In 2001 this monastery became a state level cultural relic, according to the order of the State Council. Before 1959 or 1966 a wealth of ancient statues and manuscripts were kept here; unfortunately many were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The restoration of the monastery began in 1990 and is currently being continued. Now there are three main chapels: the assembly hall which includes a dri gtsang khang, the Vairocana chapel and a small chapel where Ati a is said to have spent one month. The main statues are located in the dri gtsang khang. These comprise a statue of Buddha kyamuni and his eight disciples (Bodhisattvas) and two wrathful forms of Hayagrva and Vajrapni and two statues that are considered to be Byang chub sems dpa’ yab yum according to Dungkar Rinpoche. Before I started my project the manuscripts were in considerable disorder and were piled up around the statues. In my paper I give an outline of the project concerning these manuscripts that I initiated after two research surveys in 1995 and 2000.

THE MANUSCRIPTS OF KE RU

I first went to Ke ru in 1995 and I was deeply impressed by the manuscripts I saw there, some of which presented a very archaic writing form that can be attributed to the period before the 9th century. It was only in 2000 that I was able to make a detailed survey of the monastery and its precious contents. On this occasion I went together with Professor Deborah Klimburg-Salter and Professor Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, respectively a renowned art historian and a renowned codi-
cologist; these two scholars were able to call on their experience of having worked on comparable materials in Tabo monastery, in northern India. On the basis of their expertise it was possible to raise some questions concerning the dating of the monastery, to which I shall return later, and to give some instructions to the monks on how to start the difficult task of ordering the loose folios.

I soon realised that a proper systematic conservation project was needed. In order to make it possible I contacted the Cultural Relics Office of Lhokha and explained my plan. They welcomed it but there were still some financial difficulties in getting it started. So I decided to ask friends abroad for help. In particular I was able to count on the financial support of the organisation “Future Generations” and of the anthropological project “Tradition and Modernity in Tibet and the Himalayas” funded by the Austrian Science Fund. Once the institutional framework and the funding were secured I was able to start the work. In 2001 I took three master degree students of Tibet University to the monastery. We stayed at the monastery for a couple of weeks; together with the monks we made a plan on how the folios should be ordered so that they were able to continue the work alone after we left. In five months the monks had completed the work. However we still need to make a detailed catalogue and this is a rather difficult task since the volumes are incomplete, often lacking title and colophon. In order to do this we are hoping to invite a specialist who will help in identifying the texts. Furthermore, we are also hoping to make a better wooden structure to preserve the volumes.

After a thorough examination of the extant materials I came to believe that before the Cultural Revolution in 1966, there must have been three or four sets of the *Bka’ gyur*. I was told that during the Cultural Revolution many of the volumes were piled together and burnt. I was also told that the monks took whatever was left and wrapped them in yellow cloth. These were the bundles that we were able to see and that looked approximately like 200 volumes. However, these ‘volumes’ were made of folios in absolute disorder. After carrying out my preliminary project it was possible to put together the folios according to the original volumes they belonged to.

Altogether we can now count 210 volumes; all are incomplete. According to the writing form we can infer that most of them belong to the 11th century. However, among them there are two volumes of the *Prajñā pāramitā* that can be attributed to the dynastic period, as