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# The Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China

Charisma, money, enlightenment

Dan Smyer Yü



# The Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China

Focusing on contemporary Tibetan Buddhist revivals in the Tibetan regions of the Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces in China, this book explores the intricate entanglements of the Buddhist revivals with cultural identity, state ideology, and popular imagination of Tibetan Buddhist spirituality in contemporary China. In turn, the author explores the broader sociocultural implications of such revivals.

Based on detailed cross-regional ethnographic work, the book demonstrates that the revival of Tibetan Buddhism in contemporary China is intimately bound up with both the affirming and negating forces of globalization, modernity, politics of religion, indigenous identity reclamation, and the market economy. The analysis highlights the multidimensionality of Tibetan Buddhism in relation to different religious, cultural, and political constituencies of China. By recognizing the greater contexts of China's politics of religion and of the global status of Tibetan Buddhism, this book presents an argument that the revival of Tibetan Buddhism is not an isolated event limited merely to Tibetan regions; instead, it is a result of the intersection of both local and global transformative changes. The book is a useful contribution to students and scholars of Asian religion and Chinese studies.

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# 1 Introduction: *mise-en-scène* of Tibetan Buddhism in China

## The polygon of Tibetan Buddhist revivals in the twenty-first century

Toward midnight, late June of 2001, a police team comprised of Han Chinese and Tibetan officers surrounded a humble inn nestled in the foothills below the Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Academy (ལྷ་ལུང་ནང་བསྐྱེད་ཚོས་གྲིང་།) in Larung Gar (གསེར་རྩ་ལྷ་ལུང་གླང་); these foothills lie in Sertar County of the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province. There, both Han and Tibetan pilgrims were awakened abruptly from their sleep and ordered to show their identification cards. The police commanded everyone to leave the area before 6:00 the next morning. This group of pilgrims, gathered together from different regions all across Tibet and China, had traveled from afar in hopes of paying homage to Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (མཁའན་པོ་འཇིགས་མེད་ལུན་ཚོགས།), the renowned and charismatic Tibetan Buddhist teacher who founded the Academy.

Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok and his Academy were primarily responsible for the revitalization of Tibetan Buddhism in Kham and Amdo, two eastern Tibetan regions in current Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces. Many monks, nuns, and pilgrims affectionately addressed him as *chos rgyal* (ཚོས་རྩལ།), which means the King of Dharma. In 1980, he informally founded a small monastic college at Larung Gar. At the time, the handful of students were all Tibetan. The official establishment of the Academy did not take place until 1987, when the late 10th Panchen Lama requested Sertar County to grant it recognition. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's revival of Tibetan Buddhism was not limited to Tibetans, it also strongly emphasized cross-cultural and cross-regional outreach. There were two landmark events which permanently connected this revival of Tibetan Buddhism to non-Tibetans. In 1987, Khenpo led over 10,000 Tibetan monks on a pilgrimage to Mt. Wutai in Shanxi Province. Mt. Wutai is a sacred Buddhist site, considered the abode of Bodhisattva Manjusri. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok himself is revered as an incarnation of Manjusri, and according to a few of Khenpo's close disciples who were present then, this particular pilgrimage created a spectacular scene. Crowds of Chinese pilgrims and onlookers tagged along. Upon returning to Sertar, Khenpo and the monks found that a large number of Han Chinese lay and monastic practitioners then followed them into the mountains of Kham. In the history of Tibetan Buddhism, this was the largest number of Han Buddhists to become part of a Tibetan Buddhist order in an organized fashion (Sonam Darje 2000).

Although the sectarian association of Khenpo's Academy is Nyingmapa (སྒྲིབ་མཚན།), the oldest branch of Tibetan Buddhism, it has, since its founding in the

## 2 Introduction: mise-en-scène

1980s, become the largest center of the contemporary non-sectarian movement of Tibetan Buddhism outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. In addition to its profound religious significance, this non-sectarian movement has also become a movement toward the revitalization of Tibetan culture. In concordance with this cultural revitalization, long-term monastic residents at the Academy increased from the handful of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's initial disciples to more than 12,000, including approximately 2,000 Han Chinese monks, nuns, and lay practitioners, as well as a number of practitioners from North America and Western Europe. It became the largest Buddhist academy in the world and one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations in cultural Tibet.

However, when the Chinese state's personnel descended on this remote Tibetan region in the summer of 2001, the regular instructional schedule of the Academy was disrupted. The state personnel came as a "work team" (工作组 *gongzuo zu*) consisting of staff from the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the United Front Work Department, and local and provincial policemen. "Work teams" are a common tool used by the state in order to suppress social occurrences which take place within China's constitutional and legal framework, but which the state perceives as a threat to its definition of social order or its ideological framework. Time again, the Chinese state was not agreeable with large gatherings of religious adherents. This time a large Tibetan Buddhist group was its target. Thus the objective of the work team was to disperse the growing population of both Tibetan and non-Tibetan residents of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's Academy.

The Chinese state's attempt to suppress the Academy did not last long. Since the passing of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok in 2004, the academy has not only gradually resumed its instructional routines but has also expanded its outreach to non-Tibetans. Pilgrims and students intending long-term residence continue to stream into the Academy. Meanwhile, the Academy has extended their systematic Dharma teachings from the Larung Valley into the cyberspace. Its website, Wisdom and Compassion Buddhism Web in Chinese, English, and Tibetan languages has become one of the most interactive Buddhist teaching-oriented websites in the world. It facilitates off-campus study-groups in different parts of China by archiving audio and visual records of Dharma teachings as well as by broadcasting live teaching sessions by its important monastic instructors. In addition to this cyber-outreach effort, the public lectures of Khenpo Sonam Darje (བསོད་ནམས་དར་རྒྱལ།), one of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's first disciples, at Peking University, Fudan University, and Nanjing University in 2010 and 2011 have further contributed to the popularity of the Academy and Tibetan Buddhism on both local and global scales.

\* \* \*

I do not intend this book to be a narrative concerning the rise of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's Academy in China or the global religious landscape. Other scholars, Buddhist practitioners, and activist organizations, such as David Germano, Karma Phuntsok, and the International Campaign for Tibet have already made these important contributions. Instead, I am concerned with contemporary Sino-Tibetan Buddhist interactions as understood within the contexts of the politics of religion,

the sociocultural ramifications of the market economy in China, and the globalization of Tibetan Buddhism. I wish to explore these three facets of Tibetan Buddhist revitalization, and particularly that of the Nyingmapa sect, based on my fieldwork in both eastern Tibetan regions and urban China.

First, the global market system has played a critical role in the revitalization of Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The Tibetans involved in this unprecedented religious revitalization are not static and localized, nor do they lack agency in determining the course of changes brought about by the global economic system via China's modernization program. In the last fifteen years, there has been a consensus in Western scholarly research in which China's "liberalizing policy" toward Tibetans was the primary backdrop of the Tibetan Buddhist revitalization. This contention was particularly expressed in many of the works collected in Buddhism in *Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, edited by Melvyn Goldstein and Matthew Kapstein (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998). This assessment was most pertinent to the sociopolitical reality of China in the decades of the 1980s and the 1990s. During this time period a cultural phenomenon arose among Tibetans called "Tibetanization," which, according to Robert Barnett, refers to the then "converging interests" of the Chinese state and the Tibetans (Barnett 2006:38). Out of its globally strategic moves to reverse the negative image of China's human rights and ethnic minority issues, and to attract foreign investments, the Chinese state encouraged Tibetan cultural expressions throughout Tibetan regions within its political territory. Meanwhile, Tibetans also wanted to revive their severely injured cultural traditions, as Barnett remarks, "Tibetan officials were thus able to embark upon and facilitate new initiatives that involved specifically Tibetan cultural expression" (ibid.:38).

The rapid growth of the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's Academy was part and parcel of this Tibetanization era. Its official establishment was congratulated in 1993 by Zhao Puchu, the late chairman of China's National Buddhist Association. When Germano went to the Academy in the late 1990s, the revitalization of Tibetan Buddhism on the campus of the Academy was inevitably equated with the revitalization of Tibetan cultural identity (Germano 1998:53–94). However, since the turn of the twenty-first century, China's "liberalizing" posture has become rather questionable. The state has taken various measures to suppress or contain the ongoing Tibetan Buddhist revitalization. "Tibetanization" in this respect is no longer encouraged, but rather suppressed because of the obviously now diverging interests of the Chinese state and Tibetans. The state's suppressive attitude reached a climax during the Tibetan uprisings in March 2008.

However, the cessation of state-sanctioned "Tibetanization" does not mean that Tibetan religious and cultural revivals have also stopped. They continue, though mostly within China's globally-linked market. The force of change brought by economic globalization is also initiating simultaneous cultural globalization and localization especially in China's popular realm which, according to Yunxiang Yan's research, is left aside by the Chinese state "because it can be used to lessen the social tensions of the post-1989 era and to create an image of prosperity and happiness" (Yunxiang Yan 2002:39). The logic of how the state exercises its power in the popular realm is similar to that of "Tibetanization." Its lessening control

#### 4 Introduction: mise-en-scène

over the popular realm inadvertently permits cultural, religious, and political interstices as alternative social space in which the revitalization of Tibetan Buddhism, especially Nyingmapa, is inextricably linked with economic and cultural globalization. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Tibetan Buddhism under the rule of the Chinese has rapidly entered what I call its “marketing era” in which it is reviving but paying the price of being commercialized.

The second facet that I wish to recapitulate is that the ongoing Tibetan Buddhist revitalization has not been uniform everywhere in Tibetan regions. Its teleology and expressions vary from sect to sect. In particular, it is worthwhile to compare the Nyingmapa with the Gelukpa. While the revival of the Gelukpa has manifested in street demonstrations against the rule of the Chinese state since the 1980s, the Nyingmapa have mostly focused on reconstructing their ruined monasteries and engaging in lineage-based teachings to both Tibetans and non-Tibetans. Nyingma monastic personnel have not been overtly confrontational toward the Chinese state. Germano noticed that the revival of the Nyingmapa distanced itself from “any involvement with overt political protests” (ibid.:71). This seemingly apolitical aspect of the Nyingmapa revival has remained unchanged in the ten years since Germano’s observation in Kham.

As for Gelukpa monasteries, in *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (Schwartz 1994), Ronald Schwartz points out that during the late 1980s, Geluk monks in large monastic establishments in Lhasa, including the Drepung, Gandan, and Sera monasteries, visibly involved themselves in the cause of Tibetan nationalism that is closely linked with the 14th Dalai Lama’s Tibetan government in exile. Buddhism obviously became a means of protest against the rule of the Chinese state. Tibetan nationalism was loudly pronounced by the political activities of Tibetan monks and nuns. Schwartz also found that both monastic and lay populations in Lhasa utilized *khorra* (མོ་ར་), or circumambulation of sacred sites, in marching around the Jokhang Monastery and shouting slogans for Tibetan independence (ibid.:26). This political orientation of a Buddhist practice was instrumental in creating a critical mass of protestors in Lhasa. Schwartz says, “By combining *bskor-ba* [khorra] with symbols of Tibetan nationhood – the Dalai Lama, the flag – the Drepung monks forged a link between the powerful motivation that underlies religious ritual and the national consciousness that divides Tibetans from Chinese” (Schwartz 1999:236). However, in the end, these demonstrations were ruthlessly suppressed by the Chinese armed police and military. The religious aspect of Gelukpa in Lhasa suffered a large setback (Goldstein 1998:46–8), although it has gained tremendous political momentum internationally. The same circumstances were repeated during the Tibetan uprisings in March 2008, the majority of which occurred in places where Gelukpa monasteries are the centers of local communities.

I find that the Nyingmapa revitalization in Kham and Amdo runs on its own course and differs significantly from its Gelukpa counterpart. The teleologies of the sects’ revitalizations appear to have divergent orientations, despite their doctrinal commonalities. To the Gelukpa, the revival of Tibetan Buddhism is synonymous with the revival of Tibetan cultural identity. Gelukpa monks’ and nuns’ overt confrontations with the Chinese state are recognized as acts of cultural

and political resistance, whereas the regional and global activities of Nyingmapa lamas suggest their more soteriological intent to globalize Tibetan Buddhism. In this respect, Tibetan Buddhism overlaps with Tibetan identity in both sects; however, in the Nyingmapa revival the former is not merely eclipsed by the latter but is rather imbued with soteriological and cross-cultural goals – involving a worldwide dissemination of Nyingmapa-based teachings as well as a raising of public awareness for the Chinese about the positive values of Tibetan religion and culture.

And last but not least, the presence of Han Chinese Buddhists in the Nyingmapa revitalization reflects the complex social, political, and psychological conditions of Tibetan Buddhist revivals in particular, and religion in general, within contemporary China. The presence of these Han Chinese Buddhists has been minimally discussed in scholarly literature. Among the very few works concerning Buddhist interactions between Tibet and China, Gray Tuttle's *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China* (2005) and Matthew Kapstein's edited volume *Buddhism between Tibet and China* (2009) mostly focus on the Sino-Tibetan Buddhist ties prior to the founding of the PRC. In Goldstein and Kapstein's edited volume (1998), Germano is the only contributor who mentions Chinese Buddhists who were studying the Nyingmapa version of Tibetan Buddhism in Kham. According to his recollection about his stay at Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's Academy, he saw Chinese Buddhists "who made the long trek from their homeland to visit Khenpo in his residence; some of them [were] considered to be very advanced students ... " (Germano 1998:68). Following on the presence of Han Chinese in Kham, Germano briefly touched on "modernism," "communism," and "Han imperialism" (ibid.:90). These phrases, to me, have indexical value in helping us understand modern and contemporary Sino-Tibetan relations. They deserve a deeper and broader analysis.

Herewith, what I see in the complexity of the ongoing Tibetan Buddhist revitalization, especially at the turn of the twenty-first century, is that Han Chinese Buddhists, in addition to their partaking in pilgrimage activities in Tibetan monasteries, have been among the primary financial sources for Tibetan monastic reconstruction and cross-regional teaching activities. Han Chinese Buddhists from metropolitan centers of China are serving as an integral part of the regional and global connectivity of Tibetan Buddhism in Kham and Amdo. They are responsible for introducing Web technologies to Tibetan lamas as a wide-reaching means to disseminate Buddhist teachings, re-educate the Chinese public about Tibetan history and culture, and raise resources to aid recovery from the past destruction by the Chinese state, while subversively dodging more recently suppressive acts.

The increasing number of Han Chinese who embrace Tibetan Buddhism also mirrors the current state of religion in China, where a perceived "spiritual crisis" is widely acknowledged in popular discourses concerning the Chinese state's marginalization of religion and the deterioration of state-sanctioned socialist morals. The alliance of Han Chinese Buddhists with Tibetans compels us to engage in a new way of looking at the intricacy of contemporary Sino-Tibetan relations, which, for the West, have been traditionally represented by the relationship between the Chinese state and the Tibetan government in exile. This limited

perception of governments as sole representations of their citizens has contributed to both scholarly and popular conceptions of Tibetans and Chinese that are essentialized. Thus, in the West, Tibetans are identified as religious whereas the Chinese are atheistic, Tibetans are the victims and the Chinese are villains of Communism. In an inversed fashion, the Chinese state has portrayed the Tibetans as “backwards” and “feudalistic” while promoting itself as modern, progressive, and therefore advanced. However, the growing alliance between Chinese Buddhists and their Tibetan teachers’ communities in the twenty-first century is subverting this rigid dichotomization. Through the popular Buddhist culture of China, both Tibetans and Chinese are starting to see each other’s humanness and humanity. Tibetan lamas find it effective to utilize traditional Chinese stories of morality and modern scientific terms as analogies and metaphors in teaching their Chinese disciples. Meanwhile, Chinese Buddhists host private meetings and create Web pages to highlight the spiritual significance of Tibetan Buddhist civilization. This popular Sino-Tibetan Buddhist alliance is undoubtedly undermining the Chinese state’s constructs of Old and New Tibet, which serve only to glorify socialist China’s role in the creation of Tibetans’ current state of well-being in contrast to that of the demonized, backward, traditional Tibet.

The 14th Dalai Lama has in fact noticed the increasing conversion of Chinese to Tibetan Buddhism, both in and outside China. His global campaign for the Tibetan cause is thus emphasizing a more nuanced understanding of the Chinese population and is making efforts to build political alliance with those who have converted to Tibetan Buddhism as well as those who are concerned about the Chinese state’s human rights violations. Since the late 1990s, the Dalai Lama and his representative institutions, such as the International Campaign for Tibet, have sustained their ongoing effort to initiate public forums and round-table dialogues with numerous individual Chinese Buddhists, Tibet enthusiasts, and political dissidents, in addition to their annual official negotiation activities with the Chinese state. These contemporary Buddhist interactions between the Tibetans and the Chinese concerning the politics of the Tibet Question and Tibetan religious revivals are rarely discussed among scholars.

### **The charismatic theme of Tibetan Buddhist revivals**

The central theme of the book is what I call the “Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok phenomenon” as an integral part of Tibetan religious revitalization in Kham and Amdo regions, currently placed in Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces. The attributes of this phenomenon are charismatic, trans-cultural, cross-regional, tech-savvy, conversant with modern science and familiar with the economic system, awareness-raising, and seemingly non-confrontational toward the state. The heart of this phenomenon is the charisma of prominent Tibetan lamas actively transmitting tantric teachings to both Tibetans and non-Tibetans in China. This type of charisma is what Stanley Tambiah calls “religious charisma” (1984:325) with a transcendental orientation; however, dissimilar to the conventional understanding of charisma, it is not exclusively a property of religious personalities in the context of the current trans-cultural Tibetan Buddhist revitalization. Instead, this

unique religious charisma of Tibetan lamas, especially *tulkus* (ལྷན་སྐྱེས་པ་), or reincarnate lamas, has heterogeneous incarnations and manifestations in both the personal and the collective sense. This charisma is reborn in a person but reinstates itself in a collective environment, such as a monastery or a sacred site or a global religious community. Its nascent state of inner revolution, in the Buddhist sense, continues to manifest its vitality in a physical body, namely the reincarnate lama consecrated by his lineage-based monastic or lay institution. It appears both ascetic and extravagant when it need be. It eases in and out of the greed of the commercial realm and the inner state of modern consumers, and yet retains its Buddhist essentials. It is resilient enough that it does not die but continues to find its sentient presence when the person who embodies it dies.

On January 7, 2004, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok passed away in a hospital in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. The revitalization of Tibetan Buddhism in Kham and Amdo did not cease with the loss of this charismatic lama. It became less concentrated on the Khenpo Academy, but was diffused into other parts of Tibet, China, and beyond. Meanwhile, along with other charismatic lamas from different parts of Kham and Amdo, Khenpo's first disciples, such as Khenpos Sonam Darje (བསོད་ནམས་དར་རྒྱལ་), Tselchem Lodru (ཚལ་ཁྱིམས་ལོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་), and Yeshe Phuntsok (ཡེ་ཤེས་ཕུན་ཚོགས་), have emerged as charismatic tantric masters teaching a broader audience from both Tibet and China. The pedagogical and methodic differences between them and their master is that they are well-versed in Chinese philosophical systems and are fully employing modern printing and communication technologies to disseminate Tibetan Buddhism on both regional and global scales. Their messages and images streamed into the World Wide Web are frequently viewed by Chinese Buddhist netizens, and their books and tracts are often religious bestsellers in China, regardless of their lack of official ISBN codes. They still enjoy fast circulation among religion-hungry readers in the backrooms of numerous private bookstores and Buddhist souvenir shops in China. The centerpieces of these Tibetan Buddhist images and publications are lamas; not those voiceless lamas on the cover pages of tourist brochures or in glossy coffee-table pictorials of Tibetan landscapes, but those who bring to the audience the Tibetan version of Buddhism and those whose names have already been synonymous with particular tantric lineages. This is Buddhist charisma at work, in a manner which is distinctly Tibetan.

It is noteworthy to mention the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's meeting with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in 1990 as part of his groundwork for the current charismatic presence of Nyingma lamas among Tibetans and Chinese. According to Khenpo Sonam Darje's narrative, it was the Dalai Lama who initiated the meeting while Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok and his pilgrimage entourage were in Nepal. During the meeting, the Dalai Lama requested Khenpo to perform a *terton* (གཏེར་སྣོན་། hidden Dharma treasure revealer) initiation and exchanged gifts with him. This meeting was included in Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's biography in Chinese, written by Khenpo Sonam Darje. Since the meeting and the dissemination of the biography, the charisma of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok has been intimately associated with the Dalai Lama; thus it has contributed to the Han Chinese Buddhists' positive acceptance of His Holiness as Tibet's ultimate spiritual leader.

The political dimension of the ongoing charismatic revitalization of Tibetan Buddhism is interlaced with the global presence of the Dalai Lama. The Chinese state's suppression of large Tibetan Buddhist communities, such as Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's Academy, is intrinsically linked to its own reflexive allegations regarding the Dalai Lama's political logic. "Taking control of one reincarnate lama and his monastery means taking control of one area of Tibet" (He Zhenhua 2009); thus, the growth of one monastery also means, to the Chinese state, the growth of separatism. However, from the perspective of charisma studies, the Chinese state's political allegations of separatist treason and its own self-proclaimed moral superiority heavily rely upon its negative dependency on the Dalai Lama's global charismatic presence – meaning that without the Dalai Lama as a target to attack, the Chinese state's construct of New Tibet would lose its moral and ideological ground.

The Tibet Question has intensified ever since the 14th Dalai Lama went into exile in 1959 and the Chinese state began its global diatribe against the Dalai Lama and his Western allies. In this respect, the Tibet Question is nothing but the Dalai Lama Question, and therefore both a religious and political "charisma question." The Chinese state recognizes the charismatic power of the Dalai Lama, albeit negatively, by calling him and his cabinet the "Dalai Clique." Clique, or *jituan* in Chinese, is a derogatory term – a nomenclature of socialist China describing individuals and organizations considered subversive and challenging to its rule and ideology. For example, there was the "Khrushchev Clique" of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, and the "Lin Biao anti-Party, anti-Revolutionary Clique" of 1970s China. The political function of naming a person or an entity "clique" is to downgrade its popularity and therefore make it containable and morally base. The Tibet Question, as the Dalai Lama Question, is not as simplistic and black-and-white as the Chinese state perceives. Its opponent is not as easily reducible as it wishes. The Dalai Lama Question is a question of a living belief as "a conscious reincarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of universal compassion" (Robert Thurman 2008:3) in all Tibetan regions.

In the Tibetan context, religion does not manifest itself merely in doctrines and institutions but, most critically, grows its roots in the consciousness of the common individual as well as in the unique physical landscape of Tibetan plateaux where religious sacred sites are commonplace and pilgrimages are routine. Furthermore, the position of the Dalai Lama is both a political and a cultural institution, in addition bearing a religious function. Its institutionality precedes the individuality of the person who bears the title. The Dalai Lama, as Tibet's foremost institution, has been sustained by successively chosen individuals based on prophecies and oracle readings. From a modern scientific perspective, the history and religious manifestation of this unique institution appears outlandish and fantastic; however, its material culture is as real and tangible as one can see and feel. Its cultural function generates no less collective psychology than a modern constitution-based polity. In fact, the collective psychology of what the Dalai Lama represents is much deeper and more complex than its modern counterparts, as it intersects both the spiritual and the material realities of a human society as the successive Dalai Lamas have been both religious and secular leaders of Tibetans. Since the 14th

Dalai Lama went to India and the Chinese state abolished Tibet's theocratic polity, the Tibetans in China have not ceased in their deep emotion and affection toward the Dalai Lama. Those – such as Chinese statesmen – who fixate themselves on modern progress as a forward-moving temporal process, would smear the institution of the Dalai Lama as a “decadent,” “backward,” and “feudalistic” system. However, if one can temporarily bracket a modern linear value judgment, the Dalai Lama, as a combination of spiritual and secular authorities, is profoundly rooted in the consciousness of Tibetans, in the Durkheimian sense – in which collective effervescence is routine, not a novelty, among many Tibetan communities. This type of collective effervescence is centered upon charismatic lamas.

This is the cultural context in which this book is written. The reincarnation system operates in the same way throughout Tibet, and bases itself everywhere on the same Buddhist logic – that although they may not know their next lifetime's destination, all sentient lives undergo rebirth; enlightened ones, especially bodhisattvas, have the ability to choose the realms of their rebirths in accordance with their bodhisattva vows. Reincarnate lamas, such as the Dalai Lama and Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, are revered as bodhisattvas. They are playing the pivotal role in revitalizing Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan cultural identity. While their unifying effects are irrefutable, both global and regional forces of change, mainly through economic globalization, are engendering complex representations of the charismatic lamas in the public space of China.

## **Interpreting the entanglement of charisma, money, and enlightenment**

### ***Bonds of charisma***

Throughout this book, contemporary Tibetan Buddhist revitalization – especially amongst the Nyingmapa – is understood not as an isolated event occurring only in the geographic regions of Tibet, but rather also as a global and cross-regional event linking Tibetan lamas and their communities with non-Tibetan populations from both China and abroad. The charisma of Tibetan lamas is at the center of my narratives and analyses. I treat charisma as a composite, fluid quality whose inner contents are susceptible to different representations, dependent upon the volitions of those who represent it. It is composite, because it encompasses not only the personality of a given lama but, most crucially, is transcendental, transpersonal, institutional, communal, and place-based. The transcendental and transpersonal dimensions of charisma refer to the soteriology of Tibetan Buddhism, which is a world religion with a dynamic global history of crossing multiple cultural, linguistic, and psychological boundaries. The institutional, communal, and place-based dimensions emphasize the collective nature of Tibetan Buddhist charisma. While the charisma of a given reincarnate lama is consecrated in its prophesied human community, it is also marked on the landscape where the community is situated; such place-based markings are often centered upon a previous incarnation's solitary meditation cave or within mountain spirits who, according to local religious folklore, have sanctioned the lama's lineage for many lifetimes.

Charisma, in such genuine form, is what Max Weber terms “pure charisma,” or charisma in status of nascendi, in which the awe-inspiring quality of a given individual “revolutionizes men [sic] ‘from within’” (Weber 1978:1115). This exposition of genuine charisma is apposite to the case of Tibetan religious revitalization, but has not yet seen itself in much interpretive connection with contemporary studies of Tibetan Buddhism.

In his essay “Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet,” Germano mentions the “miraculous nature” of the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok’s charismatic presence among Tibetans and Chinese, but this charisma is not given enough interpretive attention perhaps because “even by Tibetan standards [it] seemed to stretch one’s imagination” (Germano 1998:57). Charlene Makley, in *The Violence of Liberation*, recognizes *tulkus* as “transcendent Buddhist agents” (Makley 2008:33); however, the weight of her actual ethnographic accounts and analyses is mostly placed on *tulkus*’ “male-dominated world of interregional politics” and the “unmarked nature” of their sociocultural status among Tibetans (ibid.:39). Both Germano’s and Makley’s disbelief or disinterest in the inner forces of Tibetan Buddhist charisma is common in contemporary Tibetan studies, in which the inner and intangible dimension of Tibetan *tulkus* is overshadowed by analyses of the politics of Tibetan religion and cultural identity.

My interpretive interest in the inner nature of charismatic lamas does not downplay the imperative intersection of Tibetan religion and cultural identity. To me, it is given that both overlap one another – as they are in a symbiotic relationship. My purpose of underscoring the inner contents of religious personalities and institutions is twofold: first, to recognize the material manifestation of religious charisma and explore the manner in which it emanates inner forces of psychological and sociopolitical change, and secondly, in turn, to assess the ways in which these inner contents and charisma are represented and reshaped by political and economic forces.

My use of Weberian nomenclatures of charisma studies is not intended to formularize the charismatic expressions of Tibetan lamas with Weber’s linear model of charisma, which predetermines the course of charisma from birth to routinization and demise (Weber 1978:1121). Weber’s model, in fact, decontextualizes and reifies the complexity of both the inner and outer configurations and representations of charisma in diverse cultural and political environments. In this book I do not focus on charisma solely as a phenomenon of personality, examples of which have been fitted into Weber’s model in prolific scholarly works spanning from the 1960s to the 1980s. This notable timeframe coincided with the geopolitical, dualistic positioning of large nation-states during the Cold War. It also reflected the general ethos of North America at the time, characterized as a “culture of narcissism” (Lasch 1978), as North Americans were experiencing a collectively felt sense of identity crisis in the midst of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and the popular spiritual experiments with psychoactive sacraments and gurus of alternative belief systems. In response to these political and psychological conditions both domestic and international, scholars of charisma studies produced copious amounts of theoretical literature; however, to a large extent many of them – aligning with Weber’s typology of charisma – reified

charisma mostly as a product of personality attributes (Csordas 1997:136). Key words such as “seizure,” “blind faith,” and “unreflective imitation” frequently appeared in the scholarly conceptualization of charisma. Arthur Schweitzer’s *The Age of Charisma* (Schweitzer 1984) is a representative work of that era. In essence, its proffered varieties of charisma did not deviate from Weber’s typology except in different nomenclatures. His list of twentieth-century charismatics such as Nehru, Mao, and John F. Kennedy reflected the geopolitical landscape of the time. The rise and the fall of these charismatic individuals perfectly fit Weber’s linear developmental model of charisma from the nascent stage to routinization and decline. Works on religious charisma at the time, particularly situated in established ecclesiastic systems, were rare.

In the context of Tibetan Buddhism, my understanding of charisma is both personal and institutional. It diverges from Weber’s model by affirming that the charisma of Tibetan lamas is a long-lived sociocultural phenomenon. The institution of Tibetan Buddhism does not necessarily suffocate charisma with its worldly economic and organizational pressures. Instead, institutional involvement can be seen here as a mechanism to preserve charisma’s initial vigor – thus eternally engendering inner revolution. In this respect, approaches in post-Weberian charisma studies are more apt in terms of the Tibetan case. The works of Stanley Tambiah (Tambiah 1984), Ronald Glassman and William Swatos (Glassman and Swatos 1986), Charles Lindholm (Lindholm 1990), and Thomas Csordas (Csordas 1997), for instance, go beyond Weber’s typology by linking charisma with other theoretical traditions such as Durkheim’s collective conscience, Mauss’ idea of collective spirit embedded in gift exchange, and Codrington’s use of *mana*. On the theoretical level, my post-Weberian position is meant to decenter charisma from the personality of the leader (Csordas 1997:138). At the same time, it is also meant to de-typologize charisma by contextualizing the charismatic in a particular cultural, religious, and political milieu. Like Tambiah, I also wish to assert that tradition and pure charisma in the context of Buddhist traditions are not necessarily diametrically opposed. In Tambiah’s association of the Theravada saints of the forest with the traditional Buddhist idea of arahantship, and my observation of Tibetan *tulkus* and their monastic system, the relationship between traditional institutions and genuine charisma can be also understood in symbiotic terms. The genuine charisma of both Theravada *arahants* and Tibetan *tulkus* are inextricably part and parcel of the traditionally conceived and scripturally sanctioned image of the historical Buddha. Both Theravada saints and Tibetan *tulkus* acquire their charisma through respective monastic systems which are directly responsible for charismatic education. Thus charisma, in this Buddhist context, is the result of the symbiotic efforts of the charismatic and the institution where he or she is situated.

In this symbiotic relation, I see charisma in the Tibetan context as a “meaning-giving central power” (Lindholm 1990:291). It is an institution itself, and an inherent part of Buddhist history. Its continuation and preservation take place in a culturally specific *sangha*, a worldly institution inaugurated for an other-worldly purpose – namely, Buddhist enlightenment. In reading Edward Shils’ elucidation of Weber’s notion of charisma, Lindholm remarks, “an innate human quest for a coherent and meaningful way of understanding the world is the sacred heart of

every viable social formation” (ibid.:291). In this manner, charisma in the Tibetan case has a generative function for both internal and external orders and meanings. It cannot be limited to a Weberian scheme of “irrational” and “epileptoid” personalities. In other words, the charismatic relation is not unilaterally initiated and expressed merely from the charismatic to the “irrational” and “entranced” crowd. If it were, the individuals in the crowd would thus appear indiscriminate, gullible, and even blind, as persons whose spiritual and material rationalities and agencies were absent. By affirming the meaning-giving power of charisma, I emphasize the collective nature of Tibetan lamas’ charisma based on its material manifestations: it possesses historical records; it is institutionally discerned; it is communally sanctioned; it saturates both its ecological environment and human community; and it is materially sustained by its monastic institution and lay adherents. Herein, charisma is polygonal. It is a center, but cannot exist without its dependence upon and bonding with its worldly institution and community. In the twenty-first century, the bond of Tibetan *tulkus*’ charisma with this world is becoming ever more multifaceted. Its cross-regionalization and globalization marks a new era of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, China, and beyond. While its soteriological effort continues to be materialized in both Tibetan and non-Tibetan social environments, the broader presence of *tulku* charisma is increasingly witnessed also in contexts concerning Sino-Tibetan relations, the geopolitics of the Tibet Question, transnational market economics, public discourses on religion and science, modernization and ecological health, and indigenous rights. These innumerable facets of Tibetan Buddhist connectivity in a global context clearly reveal themselves, in all their intensity and intricacy, within the popular realm of religion in the midst of China’s development of its market economy.

### ***Spiritualization of money and materialization of charisma***

In the current studies of Tibetan Buddhism’s global connectivity within the political domain of China, emphases are mostly placed on Tibetans as the victims of China’s economic development in Tibetan regions, the exclusivity of which effectively marginalizes Tibetans (Fischer 2005). A decade ago, scholarly research on Tibetan Buddhist revivals rarely touched on the global connectedness of Tibetan Buddhism – as evidenced in Goldstein and Kapstein’s edited anthology (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998). A decade later, Makley’s *Violence of Liberation* (Makley 2008) extensively discusses the impact of economic globalization in the Labrung area. In her ethnographic accounts, the Tibetan Buddhist revitalization and current Sino-Tibetan relations are also caught up in China’s market economy – and particularly in the consumer market of ethnic tourism. Although the local repercussions of Makley’s work are at the center of her analysis, she nevertheless makes a note of local Tibetans’ own wishes to be a part of global modernization, as to them “to be ethnic is to be left behind” (Makley 2008:7). According to Makley, Tibetan lay folks and Gelukpa monks in the Labrung area overtly prefer the Western style of modernization over the Chinese version, as they favor Western visitors as “preferred consumers of ethnic commodities” (ibid.:7). The ethnic dimension of the Geluk revitalization in the Labrung area is the focal point

of Makley's ethnographic narratives, and Tibetans remain localized as passive recipients of both Western and Chinese modernization. In Makley's interpretation, their passively participatory, resisting posture toward China's modernization program is reinforced.

Unlike what is taking place in Gelukpa-centered communities, Nyingmapa lamas do not overtly emphasize Tibetan ethnicity when they rebuild their ruined monasteries and when they are in contact with their Han Chinese adherents; instead, they highlight Buddhist soteriology. They are taking more initiative in China's market economy for the revitalization and globalization of Tibetan Buddhism. Since the onset of large-scale Nyingmapa revivals in the late 1980s, Tibetan lamas from Kham and Amdo have been cross-regionally on the move. They move between the highlands of Kham and Amdo and the lowlands of Han China, in both a physical and virtual sense. They physically travel to Han Chinese regions, offering teachings and raising alms. They also have a virtual presence in metropolitan centers of China, by means of the internet and print media. The virtual representations of their charismatic teachings, in turn, draw streams of Han Chinese pilgrims to Kham and Amdo. In these physical and virtual motions of Tibetan charismatic teachers, the market economy plays a mediating role in linking the Tibetan Buddhist revitalization with the Han Chinese population. To put it candidly, the linkage is money.

In this book, money is understood as possessing a dual nature – from Georg Simmel's sociological perspective, both “as a concrete and valued substance and, at the same time, as something that owes its significance to the complete dissolution of substance into motion and function” (Simmel 2004:176). In this respect, money is not purely the representation of economic value. It is seen as a unifying value and an agent of social relationships. Its function is facilitating exchanges not exclusively limited to the economic realm. Rather, it deeply and widely connects itself with the sentiments, social ethos, and collective psychologies of a given society. In fact, from a historical perspective, money has held a position rivaling ultimate values in relation to God, Buddhas, and other forms of divinity and the sacred throughout a vast diversity of human societies. Simmel has pointed out that while God unifies all diversities, contradictions, and estrangements of the world, money serves an almost identical function without being revered as being of divine content; however lacking in divinity, it does bring together different interests and shortens or dissolves the social distance between those who share similar and dissimilar aesthetic, moral, and economic values (*ibid.*:236–7). From Simmel's viewpoint, “Money in its psychological form, as the absolute means and thus as the unifying point of innumerable sequences of purposes, possesses a significant relationship to the notion of God – a relationship that only psychology ... may disclose” (*ibid.*:236). The religiosity of money is visibly expressed in the physical forms of currency. Religious icons may not necessarily be printed on them, and yet indications of the highest morals and apotheosized historical figures are among the most frequent images found on paper and coin monies in the contemporary world. To name a few, such figures as George Washington, Queen Elizabeth I, Mao Zedong, and Mohandas K. Gandhi may be taken as representative of this phenomenon. The remark of the sixteenth-century German playwright

Hans Sachs, “Money is the secular God of the world” (ibid.:238), continues to exercise its bearing upon our experience and intellectual understanding of the social and psychological function of money in the twenty-first century.

Throughout the book I do not subject money to a class analysis, simplistically parsing a social group into the dispossessing and the dispossessed. The ultimately unifying economic value of money is assumed. It is seen as the most powerful and effectual string that lashes together every social member – the rich and the poor, the judges and the criminals, the religious and the atheistic, the charismatic and their nameless adherents. It creates passages between the subject and the object. When money brings together the subjectivity of the consumer and its desired object, it externalizes the inner activities of the consumer, i.e. his or her desires, moral, aesthetic, and religious perceptions, and ideals. What is exchanged, with money as the medium between the subject and the object, is not necessarily concerned with the proposed monetary value of the object. By taking Simmel’s perspective, I see that the value of the object is not in the object itself, but resides in the mental space of the subject or the owner of money. The object represents, rather, the inherent value of the subject in an a priori manner. The function of money here is not limited to the acquisition of the monetary value of the object, but is mostly activated to externalize the internal values of the subject, be they material or spiritual. In this respect, money turns the shapeless into the shaped and the colorless into the colorful, and transforms the object into the subject or makes the object as the representation of the subjective contents of the money owner. In reversal, money also transfigures the subject into the object. Whatever subjective values (identified by the market) are monetarily profitable – and thus the material representations of these intangible values – are to be made, and distributed, and sold. This dual nature of money is also what Simmel calls money’s “divisibility and unlimited convertibility” (ibid.:292). In other words, it both destroys and creates.

The revitalization of Tibetan Buddhism is intimately entwined with the dual nature of money in contemporary China. From Simmel’s sociological and psychological viewpoint, Tibetan lamas are not merely embodiments of the Buddha’s teachings, but have become objects of acquisition. On the one hand, they are subject to commercialization; on the other hand, their objectification reflects both the internal moral and spiritual values of Han Chinese as well as the social conditions of religion in contemporary China. In other words, these internal values of the Han Chinese and the external social conditions of religion are projected onto or infused into the external representations of charismatic Tibetan lamas. In this context, the activities of exchange between the subject and the object, or between the Han Chinese Buddhists and Tibetan lamas, are a process of representation in which money, either in its paper or electronic form, is at once complicating and speeding up the current Tibetan Buddhist revivals in China.

Whenever money is connected with religion, it is weighed on the scales of moral judgment. The presence of Tibetan Buddhism in the West has already given rise to what Chögyam Trungpa called “spiritual materialism,” referring to the volitions and acts of harnessing material profit from Buddhist Dharma teaching activities (1973). The emergence of charlatan Dharma teachers and profit-minded alms-raising activities is an inevitable occurrence in Buddhist spiritual materialism. This

is not a distinctly Western religious phenomenon, as it certainly occurs elsewhere in the world; however, the dual split between the spiritual and the material is a distinct Western phenomenon. In both capitalist and socialist worldviews, seeking material abundance is morally and ideologically justified – and is often unbridled. Western transnational corporations and socialist modernization programs in China are ideologically different; however, the ways they harness both human and natural resources are identical. Both separate the material and the spiritual, and the mutually perceived superiority of the material is manifest enough in the current state of environment and sociopolitical issues.

In the Buddhist worldview, the spiritual and the material are not separated; instead, they mutually saturate each other and form such interdependency that the existence of one relies on that of the other. Wealth is inherently connected with leisure and freedom for one's Dharma practices. Tibetan tantric practices in the Nyingmapa tradition have numerous rituals and recitations to bring forth the leisure and wealth that are preconditions for the success of one's practice. Leisure (ཁོངས་པ། *khompa*) is understood against the backdrop of what is known in Buddhism as the "eight conditions of non-leisure" (མི་ཁོངས་པ་བརྒྱུད། *mi-khompa-gyad*), referring to the realms of the hells, the hungry ghosts, the animals, the pleasure-only, the long-life heavens, the deaf and dumb, the sophists, and the temporal intervals without the presence of Buddha-dharma. Although the historical Buddha is long gone, his teachings are nevertheless present in many parts of the human realm. The first lesson of a tantric novice from a Tibetan Nyingma teacher often pertains to the rare chance of being (re)born as a human. Buddhas only come in human form; thus, it is one's fortune to be born as a human. However, most humans live a life with bondage to the social environment and financial conditions, and therefore have no or little leisure to receive and practise the teachings of the Buddha. In this respect, leisure is inherently a property of freedom and, as such, is intimately related to the external conditions of one's inner freedom concerning the materialization of one's spiritual volition. The word *rangdbang* (རང་དབང་།), or freedom, in Tibetan, literally means self-authority or self-power. Thus, freedom in a Tibetan Buddhist sense is realized when one possesses the capacity to choose one's spiritual path without external hindrances. Material wealth in this aspect of Buddhist practice is a necessity which clears one's external hindrances and thus functions as a primary means to secure leisure and freedom in this world.

In twenty-first-century China, money is the representation of wealth. In the highest echelon of its nouveaux riches, twenty-six of all Chinese businesses were listed among the Fortune 500 in 2008 (enorth.com 2008). According to Forbes, among the four hundred richest Chinese, the highest net worth is US\$2,300 million at the age of 37, while the lowest net worth is US\$101 million at the age of 41. The ages of these richest Chinese average in the early forties (sina.com). The youngest is 25 years old. Without exaggerating, the whole nation of China has caught money fever. In the lowest echelon of Chinese society, millions of rural migrant workers are on the move in search of the fulfillment of their money-dreams. They work in sweat shops and shoe factories, on construction sites, in the sex industry, and as housekeepers. Meanwhile, the headlines of popular websites as well as the cover pages of newspapers, magazines, and tabloids sold on urban

street corners often catch the eyes of netizens and pedestrians, who read therein about cases of corruption related to high-level Party officials whose communist moral puritanism has been eroded by their insatiable appetite for money. For them, as well, “the sky is the limit” in the exchange of their political power for wealth. Daily, following each other’s routine greetings, friends and colleagues often begin to talk about their money issues. Money is becoming the second nature of this most populous nation on earth.

Tibetan Buddhism is not immune from this money-environment of China. Historically, monetary offerings from the Yuan and Qing courts were common; however, they were mostly channeled through the Chinese, Mongol, and Manchu courts to larger monastic establishments in Tibet. There were few or no large-scale, Chinese popular donations to Tibetan monasteries and lamas. In this sense, the Tibetan monastic system is currently being invaded by the forces of money from a market economy. Most Han Chinese who are converts of Tibetan Buddhism are not stereotypical Chinese Buddhists – old, rural, and less educated. On the contrary, they are from the middle and upper classes of China. They are either looking for alternative spiritual paths or theurgical ways to expand their wealth. Tibetan Buddhism seems to possess an efficacy for their spiritual and material advancement. In January 2001, Khenpo Sonam Darje, an original disciple of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, had an extensive dialogue on the modernization of Buddhism with Dharma Master Jiqun, then President of the Mingnan Buddhist Academy in Fujian Province (Sonam Darje 2002). The entire transcript of the dialogue later became a very popular Buddhist tract in Chinese, as it touches upon the topics of modern science, tantric sex, wealth, the impact of the Cultural Revolution on religion in China, and the Han Chinese perception of Tibetan Buddhism. In 2006, Li Lin, the CEO of an energy company and allegedly the youngest daughter of Li Peng, China’s former premier, interviewed Dorzhi Rinpoche (དོར་ཞི་རིན་པོ་ལེ།), a popular charismatic lama and prolific Buddhist author in China, about how to become a Buddhist. The interview notes were subsequently published in *Culture of Buddhism*, a Beijing-based, semi-academic magazine (Miaolin 2002). In 2007, Dorzhi Rinpoche lectured on Buddhism and social harmony in the auditorium of the School of Business Management at Zhongshan University in Guangdong Province. Most of his audience was comprised of the School’s faculty members, MBA students, and successful entrepreneurs from other parts of the province (Zhang 2007). In March 2008, martial artist and movie star Li Lianjie (known as Jet Li by North Americans) paid homage to the 14th Dalai Lama. It was his second meeting with the most charismatic Tibetan lama on earth, since his initial conversion to Tibetan Buddhism at the turn of the twenty-first century. His multi-million-dollar One Foundation primarily serves his Buddhist-inspired charitable work.

The mobility of Tibetan lamas and their affluent Han Chinese patrons contribute to the entanglement of religious charisma and money. This is a “Chinese characteristic” imprinted upon the current Tibetan Buddhist revitalization in Kham and Amdo. Herein, money and the charisma of Tibetan lamas are both ends and means for one’s spiritual yearnings and material desires. The materialization of charisma and the spiritualization of money are thus enmeshed. In this dialectic process, charisma and money are at once destroyers of existing modes of being

and creators of new inner and outer conditions of communities and individuals. Depending upon the volitions of the charismatic lamas and owners of money, new opportunities for leisure and freedom could be seized for either genuine Buddhist practice or the commodification of Tibetan Buddhism in China's market economy. Meanwhile, what charisma and money destroy and create is also reshaping the relationship between the Chinese state and religion – engendering alternative social space for private religious and spiritual expressions, and fostering an emergence of popular discourses and contentions on how the Chinese state has represented Tibet for the last half century.

## **The cross-regionality of the fieldwork**

### ***Positioning***

My interest in Sino-Tibetan Buddhist relations began in the mid-1990s, when I was among a small group of graduate students and faculty members who met the Dalai Lama at the library of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Attending the public speech he delivered at UC Berkeley's Memorial Stadium, the crowd was truly multicultural. Standing next to the (now late) Chancellor Tien Chang-lin, the Dalai Lama remarked that it was critical for the Tibetans and the Chinese to recognize each other's humanity and to renew the Buddhist tie between these two important peoples of Asia. My personal attendance at this event led to my second Master's thesis concerning the contemporary Tibetan diaspora in North America. In my work with Tibetan immigrants and refugees from Kham and Amdo regions, I became quite aware of the nature of their triangular relationships with Americans and Chinese in the US. With their American friends, many of them conformed to the public, media-generated image of Tibetans as Buddhists and refugees. Those who received the atheistic education of modern China before coming to the West were re-embracing Tibetan Buddhism for both spiritual and practical purposes in their new living environment. Meanwhile, in their private space and leisure time, they shopped and dined in the Chinatowns of Oakland and San Francisco. Unlike their compatriots from Dharamsala, they maintained a dual cultural consciousness – meaning that they simultaneously distanced themselves from their Chineseness in public when necessary, and yet they retained personal friendships with their Chinese counterparts in private. This duality of public Tibetanness and private Sino-Tibetanness in North America is a correlation of their past living experience under the rule of the Chinese state and functions in response to their new host country's geopolitical position and popular opinion on what is termed the "Tibet Question."

Tibetan studies in the West and China are, needless to say, political. Tibetans are not the only ones affected by the politics of the Tibet Question. Scholars are pressured to take a politically-correct position. On both sides, the Tibet issue is moral and ideological. In China, scholars of Tibetan studies – whether they are Tibetans or non-Tibetans – are required to produce their scholarly works within the framework of the Chinese state. This mandates their recognition of Tibet as a part of China and their acceptance of modern Tibet, or New Tibet, as a product of

the Chinese state's liberation of common Tibetans from serfdom. As a US citizen working in a Chinese university which has the largest department of Tibetan studies in China, I am not subject to this state conformity; however, I am aware of the imminent threat to my career if I ever politicize my scholarly research in favor of any particular interest groups which are up against the Chinese state. With this political awareness, I retain my non-political positioning as much as possible. However, Tibetan cultural expressions of any form in the public space of China are often perceived as political statements. My host university generously assigned me a large office space and a gallery for the development and implementation of exchange activities involving US students. Among the artists' works exhibited in the gallery have been paintings by a diversity of members of the Yi, Dai, Mongolian, and Tibetan nationalities. My own personal fondness for Tibetan art was perceptible, however, in viewing the murals I commissioned particularly for my office. Eventually, after the March 2008 Lhasa uprisings, my host administrator politely suggested to me, "Dr Yu, your office is too Tibetan. Please make it multicultural, since this campus is representative of all ethnic groups in China." It is true that my host university has the most ethnically diverse student body in China. For the sake of this cultural reality, I took his suggestion. The current mural on my office wall is based on a Duanhuang cave painting, and is ethnically ambiguous. I then nicknamed my office "the cave," which I hoped might shelter my work from the politics of Tibetan studies.

In actuality, there is no place which can shelter scholarship from politics. Perhaps I can dodge political intimidation from one side, but certainly not from all sides. This "intimidation" is sometimes unconscious and unintentional. Last semester I had an American student who majored in Tibetan Buddhist studies at a reputable university known especially for its Tibetan studies program. It was her first time meeting Tibetans in China. I recognized her excitement and did my best to support her personal and academic interest in Tibetan people and culture. Tibetan students like to frequent my "cave" to borrow books and discuss their readings. She took the opportunity to make Tibetan friends and, in the meantime, manifested her discomfort when I was with my Tibetan friends. She often verbally reminded them of my being a Chinese, or interrupted our conversations in an irritated manner. Within a short time, the students began to tell me that she was "cautioning" them about my being a Chinese. It was most unfortunate that she came to my exchange program with this pre-existing view on the Sino-Tibetan relation which presumed the total separation and non-relatedness between people on the ground level. What I saw from her social behavior with Tibetans in China was that she was possessive of Tibet. This was not her personal issue, but rather a cultural phenomenon in the Western academic environment in which one is similarly pressured to take a side.

In fact, she was not the only Westerner who was critical or uncomfortable with my being a Chinese in the field of Tibet-related research. An English instructor on campus had similar issues. Having lived in Golok and having taught English there for a few years prior to coming to the university, his experiences motivated his creation of an English corner specifically for Tibetan students on campus. I was invited to help his Tibetan students practise English, but, like the American

student, he was not comfortable when Tibetan students were friendly with me. Once, when his weekend English session ended, a Tibetan graduate student asked me to proofread his English translation of a short description of a tourist site in Amdo. As we sat down in the campus café, the English instructor followed, asking us what we were doing and bearing an expression of suspicion on his face. We told him what we were going to do and invited him to join us, but he said he had other engagements. An hour later when we walked out of the café, he was standing outside and insisted on walking the Tibetan student back to his dorm. The next day, the Tibetan student told me that the instructor had wanted to find out what “exactly” we had done in the café. Whether or not it was intentional, the instructor’s manner put him in a position of policing the “politico-racial line” between Tibetans and Chinese.

I had no choice to be born as a Chinese, but had the choice to become an American. Having lived in the US for over twenty years, I see myself as an Asian-American; however, the personal choice of one’s identity is not always congruent with one’s externally perceived or defined identity. The force of externally ascribed ethnic, cultural, and political identity is often depressingly conforming and uncompromising. In the field of Tibetan studies in the West, there are scholars such as Melvyn Goldstein and Gray Tuttle who claim a politically neutral position in their works and who obviously do not wish to identify themselves with any political faction; however, their research findings are unavoidably political in nature. In my class discussions on contemporary Tibet issues, my North American students appear less critical of these scholars’ subjectivities and personal backgrounds than mine. This is a recognized pattern of my students when we have Tibet-related conversations. This pattern, admittedly, is not random but manifests how impossible it is to exclude personal backgrounds of scholars from the politics of contemporary Sino-Tibetan relations, on the ground level. In this book I do not wish to claim a totally objective position. Neither do I take a position with a particular political faction; however, I do position myself as a social scientist engaging in scholarly analyses of politics of religion, ethnic identity, and the state ideology in relation with the revitalizations and growth of Tibetan Buddhism among both Tibetan and non-Tibetan populations in contemporary China.

### ***Conceiving the field***

An anthropological field in the twenty-first century is no longer a geographically isolated location where everything and everyone is sedentary and land-locked. “Everyone’s on the move,” remarks James Clifford (1997:2). Of course, human beings have always been on the move; however, the magnitude and intensity of modern movement is unprecedented in regards to channels of migration, exile, war, urbanization, transnational commerce, and the electronic mediation of human ideas through the internet. Geographically, many Tibetan Buddhist communities where I have lived or visited are located in “remote” mountainous regions of Kham and Amdo. Their remoteness, in essence, is a perception of those of us who situate our livelihoods in cosmopolitan centers where time and space are mostly defined by the schedules and locations of our work and by the sophisticated

infrastructures of transportation and communication. In the consciousness of cosmopolitan-minded and -habituated individuals, non-cosmopolitan regions of the world like Kham and Amdo appear “remote.” This perception is not so much about geographic distance as it is about self-centered conceptions of time and space with the flavor of so-called modernity. If there were a non-stop flight between San Francisco and Lhasa, it would take less than eighteen hours to reach one’s destination; in the context of globalization, subjective perceptions of “remoteness” are due for reevaluation. Bearing in mind these dynamics and limitations of cosmopolitan life, I reject the old tendency of anthropology to treat the field as an Other, as if it is completely outside of the institutional and cultural bounds of anthropology, as if this Other could only be “raw,” “wild,” “different,” and finally, “data.” These labels are fables without much in the way of lessons to learn other than those of gross ignorance and arrogance. The fable of the field as an Other continues to haunt the discipline of anthropology and drains the intellectual energy of many fine anthropologists, as shown in Gupta and Ferguson’s *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The perception of the remoteness of the field blocks us from seeing and experiencing different faces of humanity.

With that said, Kham and Amdo were the primary Tibetan locations of my fieldwork; however, I was also on the move, traveling to different communities of Kham, Amdo, and beyond. I followed Tibetan lamas into Han Chinese regions, followed the disseminations of various representations of Tibetan Buddhism beyond their Tibetan regions of origin, and lodged in Chinese cities to help both Tibetans and Han Chinese edit their translations for publication while also organizing descriptive online materials as part of my participatory research activities. Meanwhile, I also interacted with Chinese and Tibetan scholars in urban China. In this style of research, I transgressed the “remoteness” of the field on multiple occasions – as I moved in and out of different social and national communities, as I ascended into the high altitudes of Tibetan landscapes and descended into the lowlands of Han Chinese regions, and as I reflectively traversed my own consciousness in attempts to clarify my own conceptions of religion, civilization, politics, and humanity, all while alone on foot, horseback, bus, train, and airplane. In many ways, my fieldwork was a non-traditional approach to a typology of anthropological research in which one would typically stay in a fixed locality for an extended period of time, in a stationary manner comparable to that found in the works of Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard. My fieldwork could instead be characterized as cross-regional and cross-institutional; I traveled with Tibetans and Han Chinese pilgrims between Han and Tibetan regions, and I attended various Buddhist rituals in Tibetan monasteries while also participating in Tibetan studies conferences in Chinese academic institutions.

### *Nyingmapa communities in Kham and Amdo*

The form of tantric Buddhism that Nyingmapa has preserved, as compared with other Tibetan Buddhist traditions, has the longest history. “Nyingma” (ལྷོ་མ་) means old or ancient, and “pa” (པ་) means school or sect. Although the name of

this ancient sect of Tibetan Buddhism was given in the eleventh century when *sarma* (གསར་མ།) or the New Schools, Sakyapa (ས་སྐུ་པ།), Kagyupa (བཀའ་རྒྱུད་པ།), and Kadampa/Gelukpa were established (Reginald A. Ray 2002:34–5), its practices are commonly identified by scholars and prominent Nyingma lamas as the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism (Anne Klein 1985:4; Damodar Jnawali 2007:32). Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, a renowned Nyingma teacher, states, “The Nyingma is the oldest, mother School, of Tibetan Buddhism” (Tulku Thondup 1977:14). Padmasambhava, the Indian tantric Buddhist master who journeyed to Tibet in the eighth century, is regarded as the founder of the Nyingmapa. All other branches of Tibetan Buddhism began their formative stage after the eleventh century. In this respect, the Nyingmapa is at least 300 years older than its contemporary counterparts, such as the Gelukpa, Sakyapa, and Kagyupa. Prior to the eleventh century, the Nyingmapa was not monastery-based but rather family- and village-based, with most of its teachings involving esoteric practices known as tantrism. Transmissions of tantric teachings were often conducted in a secretive manner, sometimes on a one-to-one basis only between the teacher and the chosen disciple. Nyingmapa practitioners were not of visible institutional establishment until the eleventh century, when “The Three of the the Zur Clan” (ཟུར་གསུམ། zur-gsum) began to systematically articulate Nyingmapa’s doctrines and to construct monasteries. “The Three of the Zur Clan” refers to three individuals of Zur family in three generations. They are Zurpoche Sakyajongni (ཟུར་པོ་ཚེ་གཤུ་འབྲུང་གཞན་པ། 1002–1062), Zurchung Sakyashesrab Krakspa (ཟུར་ཚུང་ཤེས་རབ་གཞན་པ། 1014–1074), and Drohpurpa Sakyasengke (སྐྱེ་ལུང་པ་གཤུ་མེང་གེ། 1074–1134). All three were engaged not only in monastic education but also in healing. Their popularity was not so much with the Tibetan upper class but mostly with commoners (Wang 1991:92).

Throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingmapa had a minimum of political entanglements with temporal Tibetan politics. The branch of Tibetan Buddhism that the Dalai Lama represents, Gelukpa, has been the core of Tibetan theocratic polity centered in Lhasa. This type of governance is called in the Tibetan language *chösin-yitrel* (ཚོས་ལྷིང་ཟུར་འབྲེལ།) meaning the conjoinment of religion and political affairs (Goldstein 1991:2). Besides the prominence of its religious practices, Gelukpa has also had a long history of political dominance in Tibet beginning from the sixteenth century when Sonam Gyatso, then the head of Gelukpa, sought alliance with Altan Khan, the de facto Mongol king. Altan Khan conferred the title of Dalai Lama on him. This alliance strengthened Gelukpa’s religious influence and political dominance in Tibet (Chen Qingying 2006:40). In comparison with the Gelukpa, the Nyingmapa has hardly had any substantial political participation in the ruling of historical Tibet. Although it is the oldest among all branches of Tibetan Buddhism, it has remained on both the political and geographical margins. Although the Nyingmapa did develop a monastic presence, most of its practitioners were not in central Tibet, but spread out on the geographic margins of the historical Tibetan empire, in the regions of Kham, Golok, and eastern Amdo. Besides its monastic practitioners, there are also three distinct classifications of Nyingma practitioners – *ngakpa/ngakma* (སྒྲགས་པ། སྒྲགས་མ།) or those who are holders of secret mantras, *ghama* (བཀའ་མ།) or those who hold the Buddha’s teachings through oral transmission, and *terma* (གཏེར་མ།) or those who

reveal hidden treasures of the past Buddhist saints. At times individuals may be found to embody more than one of these types. For instance, the Late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok was both a *terma* and *ghama*. These three types of practitioners are not necessarily monastery-based, especially *ngakpa/ngakma* which will be addressed in Chapter 3. This continues to be the case in the contemporary revival of Tibetan Buddhism in the regions of Kham and Golok in Amdo.

Since the 1990s, Nyingma communities in Kham and Amdo have become popular pilgrimage destinations for a broadening stream of Han Chinese Buddhists. Unlike many Tibetans who circumambulate sacred mountains as acts of pilgrimage, Han Chinese Buddhists head straight to pre-selected monasteries. It is not that they plan to see the monasteries, but rather their abbots or particular *tulkus* – whom they heard about from veteran pilgrim friends, or whom they read about in online biographies and teachings in Chinese, or whom they met at tantric rituals hosted in private homes in urban China. In Kham, two constellations of pilgrimage sites especially attract Han Chinese and Westerners. Each is centered upon a particular charismatic *tulku*. The late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's Academy in Sertar, bordering Golok, is the center of one constellation. As many of his initial disciples became prominent tantric teachers, their home monasteries are also becoming frequent pilgrimage sites in northern Kham and Golok. Achu Lama (ཨུ་ལ་མ་ལཱ་ལྷ་མོ་ལྷ་མོ་ལྷ་མོ་), another charismatic *tulku*, represents the other constellation of pilgrimage sites in western Kham. Since the Chinese suppression of Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's Academy at the turn of this century, many of his monks and nuns took refuge in Achu Lama's Yachin Monastery (ཡེ་ཚེན་དགོན་པ།). As this monastery is within close distance of the Gathok Monastery (གཏམ་གཞི་དགོན་པ།), a primary historical source of Nyingma teachings, Yachin and related branches in the area are common sites for non-Tibetan pilgrims.

Bus rides from Xining to Nyingma communities in Golok and other parts of Qinghai are fairly pleasant, as Qinghai Province has a relatively better transportation system and road conditions than Sichuan Province. The bus routes from Sichuan to Kham start in Chengdu. Chengdu is an urban portal of the Tibetan Buddhist revival in China; in the vicinity of Wuhou Temple, Minzu Street is the place where Tibetans and Han Chinese Buddhists congregate and where Tibetan craft shops and Buddhist stores contribute to the bustling urban scene. It is a marketplace for both Buddhist texts and ritual paraphernalia, and for the circulation of pilgrimage-related information. Highways 317 and 318 are the primary routes leading urban pilgrims into Kham from Chengdu. Both highways were built in the 1950s, sending the PRC's administrative and military personnel into Lhasa. Since the 1990s, they have been under reconstruction many times. It is said that because corrupt officials usurped considerable amounts from the state construction funds, new roads were often built in poor quality. Every two years these roads need an overhaul. Highway 317 briefly cuts into the Aba Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture and makes its turn toward the west into Kham when it reaches Wenchuan, the most populous town of predominantly Qiang ethnicity. Most Sertar-bound pilgrims take this highway. After an approximately twenty-two hour overnight bus ride, passengers arrive in Sertar – where immense rolling mountains and grasslands make any human presence insignificant. The

blue sky and clean air instantly liberate one's lungs and vision from the human stench and plastic trash on the bus. Those pilgrims heading to Achu Lama's Yachin Monastery take Highway 318, the highway most frequently used by both civilians and military convoys, to Ganzi Township for transfer. In the late 1990s and at the turn of this century, it would have taken a longer time to reach Yachin and other Gathok branch monasteries, as there were no direct buses linking Ganzi Township to the Yachin area. Riding on horseback into the area was one of the few means of transportation available; news of bandits robbing pilgrims en route was common. Pilgrims with more resources now often come with their rented or owned vehicles. These urbanites venture out of their modern discontents seeking spiritual treasures from Tibetans – yet the traffic goes in both directions. While some might choose to stay, many others want to bring back home not only Tibetan tantric teachings, but also Tibetan teachers.

What the non-Tibetan pilgrims are searching for from Nyingma teachers is known in the West as the Great Perfection – or *dzogchen* (ལྷོགས་ཆེན་), in Tibetan. *Dzogchen* is an abbreviation for *dzogpa chenpo* (ལྷོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ།). *Chenpo* means “large,” “great,” or “immense.” *Dzogpa* is both a verb and a noun. As a verb, it means “to complete,” “to end,” and “to accomplish with all necessary conditions needed.” As a noun, it means “end” or “fullness.” In the Nyingmapa tradition, *dzogchen* specifically refers to a tantric Buddhist practice that is traced back to Padmasambhava. It is commonly understood as the primordial or natural state of sentience which is pristine and without worldly contaminants. It is the state in which one sees one's Buddha nature and enlightened being. In practice, *dzogchen* signifies a spiritual process in which one does not depart from the present condition to a future state of enlightenment; instead, one returns to the original state of being. It is a process of homecoming, and yet, neither does this “home” exist in the past tense. Rather, it is omnipresent in all three temporal frames – the past, the present, and the future. This process of spiritual homecoming involves the cultivation of both inner and outer conditions through which the primordial state of enlightenment reveals itself.

Currently, *dzogchen* is a widely spread tantric practice in the West and in urban China. The credibility of its popularity has much to do with its practitioners' perceived and/or experienced self-empowerment and theurgical efficacy in terms of healing and higher mental awareness. Most importantly, its popularity lies in the practical fact that the practitioner does not have to leave home becoming a monk or a nun; it can be practised at one's home with guidance from a teacher of one's choice. Unlike some monastic-based Mahayana traditions which tend to have a Buddhist version of “puritanism” toward sexuality and material possessions, *dzogchen* practice turns actual or perceived hindrances into favorable conditions for one's spiritual maturity and enlightenment. Commonly regarded as a spiritual fast lane, it is a lay-friendly Buddhist path with step-by-step instructions. The process is parsed into two stages, the preliminary (ལྷོག་འགོ། *ngondzo*) and the core (ནང་འགོ། *ngangdzo*). The preliminary stage particularly requires much time from the novice. It consists of four outer preliminaries and five inner preliminaries. The outer preliminaries pertain to one's rational understanding of why one needs to practise the Buddha's teachings, and entail the contemplation of four aspects of

human existence – namely, the rarity of being born as a human, the impermanence of life, the agonies in the cycle of birth and death, and the truthfulness of cause and effect. Then involving a great deal of somatic practice, the inner preliminaries consist of ritual acts pertaining to the taking of refuge in Buddha-dharma, the making of bodhisattva vows, the cleansing of spiritual hindrances, the accumulation of resources, and the practice of guru-yoga. Each of these five preliminaries requires 100,000 mantra-recitations, mandala offerings, or full prostrations. It is common for a *dzogchen* practitioner to break into a sweat while performing the devotional practices two or three times a day.

The external condition that guarantees the success of the preliminary practice is time. Ideally, according to many Nyingma lamas' prescriptions, the practitioner needs four to eight hours a day. Urbanites who have received such instructions from their Tibetan masters most likely have full-time jobs; thus, the most rigorous practitioner would devote four or five hours a day by getting up early and going to bed late. They also spend their vacation time making pilgrimage trips to visit their teachers in Tibetan regions. Among Han Chinese *dzogchen* practitioners, many have resigned from their jobs and some have relocated themselves to where their Tibetan teachers live. The majority continue to hang on to their urban jobs while actively searching for ways and means to shorten the distance between their Tibetan lamas and themselves, as well as that between leisure and their daily working schedules. Both real and virtual pilgrimage trails are linking Tibetan Nyingma communities and Han Chinese adherents of tantrism.

## Chapter overview

This current chapter lays out the backdrop of Tibetan Buddhist revivals in Kham and Amdo, as well as that of their entwinement with Han Chinese Buddhists and China's market economy. It highlights the interpretive schemas that I wish to adopt in developing an understanding of how religious charisma, money, and Buddhist enlightenment are currently enmeshed by close contact between Tibetan Buddhism and contemporary Chinese society. Throughout the eight chapters of this book, many individuals appear in my narratives. Under the circumstances in which the Chinese state treats the religious affairs of its citizens and in consideration of its possessive nature in dealing with Tibet and Tibetans, the names of many of these individuals are altered so as to avoid potential political repercussions; others are unchanged based on individual consent.

My accounts and theoretical interpretations in Chapter 2 are concentrated on Tibetan lamas in their home environments. By focusing on the charisma of *tulkus* in its genuine state, I argue that *tulkus* play the central role in the revivals of Nyingmapa in Kham and Amdo. The collective function of an individual *tulku* is not merely personality-based. Rather, and most importantly, *tulkus* are a religio-cultural institution of Tibet – sanctioned by both monastic institutions and Buddhist philosophical notions of bodhisattva and rebirth. By comparing it with the overt political orientation of the Gelukpa revitalization, I also argue that Nyingmapa's soteriological rather than overt political emphasis has led to the current Tibetan cultural revitalization paralleling the religious revitalization. In

other words, Nyingmapa revivals did not start out as political projects; however, they have yielded political fruits which have been witnessed and noted in many scholars' observations as Tibetan cultural revitalization. The soteriological acts of Nyingma lamas are those which have successfully called forth the Tibetan cultural renaissance in their home regions. The overlapping of Tibetan religion and culture is a given phenomenon; however, the fine line between them is that religion has its own teleology and thus extends beyond cultural bounds. This is a common feature of all world religions, including Tibetan Buddhism. Throughout Chapter 2, with the case of Nyingmapa in Kham and Amdo I attempt to articulate that many currently active Nyingma lamas are responsible for engendering both the inner revolution of their adherents in the spiritual sense and an outer cultural revitalization in the collective sense. On the theoretical level, Chapter 2 argues against Weber's typology of charisma exclusively as a personal quality that is subject to routinization and demise. In the Tibetan context, the reproduction of this type of genuine Buddhist charisma is positively sanctioned by monastic institutions, and is transmissible to those who wish to acquire it.

Chapter 3 connects the genuine charisma of *tulkus* with its physical environment, which I call the "charismatic landscape." Herewith I suggest that the uniqueness of religious charisma in the Nyingmapa case lies in the cultural-ecological fact that *tulkus*, as sacred content of Tibetan Buddhism, are not always human-centered. In many instances they are eco-centered, meaning that the physical locations of their communities were intentionally chosen as marked sacred sites. The marking of the natural landscape and especially mountains as sacred sites, I find, is not only in commemoration of past saints who did their solitary cave meditations in such locales. More critically, the honoring of marked places as sacred sites, in my observation, is patterned on the manner in which the family of sacred Tibetan mountains has extended itself from Central Tibet to Kham and Amdo. *Srid pa chags pa'i lha dge* (སྤོལ་པ་ཆགས་པའི་ལྷ་དགུ), or the Nine Sacred/Spirit Mountain Ranges of Tibet, geologically and geomantically tie all Tibetan regions together. The names of all nine mountain ranges are names of gods who belong to the same family. Ode Gonggyal (འོ་དེ་གུང་རྗེས།), in Central Tibet, is the father of all other eight mountain gods. The order of his reproduction from the oldest son to the youngest son starts from Central Tibet and spatially extends out into Kham and Amdo. In each of the Nine Mountain Ranges, there are human settlements both lay and monastic which cluster together. In this chapter, I attempt to narrate and interpret how *gnas ri* (གནས་རི། sacred mountain) and *bla-ri* (བླ་རི། spirit/soul mountain) are the key charismatic eco-religio-determinants in Tibetans' formation of both lay and monastic communities. In the eco-communal sense, the purpose of connecting *tulkus* with the eco-religious landscape of Tibet is to continue to evidence the critical religious and spiritual role of *tulkus* in revitalizing Tibetan cultural identity. Meanwhile, in Chapter 3 I also lay the foundation upon which my subsequent chapters offer explications on why and how non-Tibetans, especially those from urban China and the West, are drawn to Tibet as one of the few spiritually and ecologically pristine places remaining in the world. I then explore the manner in which the pristine natures (both real and imagined) of charismatic lamas and Tibetan landscapes are simultaneously becoming alternative religio-spiritual

aspirations and destinations of urban Han Chinese, increasingly subject to crude commercialization within the market economy of China.

Chapter 4 is concerned with popular imaginations of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese pilgrims and Tibet enthusiasts. It narrates how life histories of *tulkus* are written and represented as sacred biographies with the joint effort of Tibetan lamas and their Chinese disciples. *Tulkus* represented in these sacred biographies in cyberspace and Buddhist tracts appear to be spiritual virtuosos. The archetypal style of representing *tulkus* contributes to Chinese Buddhists' pre-pilgrimage imagination of Tibet and Tibetan tantric masters as a pristine earthly paradise with saints abounding in magic power. In this chapter I argue that this preconditioned imagination produces two implications for the pilgrim. At the outset it indeed motivates the pilgrim to journey to *tulkus*' home communities; however, it also displaces the mindscape of the pilgrim from the landscape of Tibet as the preconceived imagination is devoid of actual topographic, climatic, and cultural realities of *tulkus*' home territories. In other words, the spiritual use of *tulkus*' sacred biographies does not necessarily prepare the pilgrim for the territorial passages to *tulkus*' communities. The second point that I wish to articulate is that the *communitas* of Chinese pilgrims is not what Victor Turner referred to as the horizontal comradeship which is devoid of the pilgrim's social identity; instead, it mostly pertains to the vertical bonding of the pilgrims and their chosen *tulku* and his or her lineage-based teachings. Moreover, the vertical master-disciple bonding does not necessarily produce a horizontal bonding between pilgrims. Through my ethnographic cases of the discordance between the disciples' vertical dependency on the master and their horizontal relation with each other, I attempt to demonstrate that *communitas* is a liminal time-space but is not free from personal cultural-psychological behaviors that are induced by social happenings in contemporary China, i.e. the emergence of virtual Tibetan Buddhism and ongoing political marginalization of religions in Chinese society.

Tibetan Buddhism, as either actual or imagined, has become a fashionable choice among religious and spiritual seekers in urban China. It particularly attracts those who have a higher income and social mobility, including media professionals, artists, filmmakers, entrepreneurs, mid- and high-level administrators, corporate managers, university professors, and Party members. Chapter 5 examines both the creative and destructive role of money as a form of Buddhist alms and as a primary means of materializing the public presence of Tibetan Buddhism in China. While contextualizing the entanglement of charismatic Tibetan lamas and money with the economic growth of China, I argue that China's globally linked market economy is not merely an economic system, but is also a spontaneous order of things in which the idea and practice of religious freedom are facilitated by the flow of cash in the secular realm. I focus on the case of Buddhist uses of the internet to elucidate the complex relationship between Han Chinese Buddhists, cyber-representations of Tibetan lamas, and the transformative forces of the market. I intend to point out that China's market economy inadvertently engenders an alternative social space for an imagined community of Chinese Tibetan Buddhists, but that this, in the meantime, turns Tibetan Buddhism into

an object of consumption. In this chapter, money is seen as the unifying medium of social relations which is reshaping traditional practices of Tibetan Buddhism.

Following on currently active Tibetan lamas' public criticism regarding the commercialization of Tibetan Buddhism in China, Chapter 6 explores the way in which Tibetan lamas utilize modern media (such as the internet, videos, and print sources) to actively identify the destructive force of China's socialism towards religion in the past in general – and towards Tibetan Buddhism in particular. As more and more Tibetan *tulkus* and lamas have learned to work within the political system of China, they openly engage in public discourses concerning the atheistic representation of religion. Atheistic alignment of religion has been used as a political instrument of thought control since the founding of the People's Republic of China and even now in the early twenty-first century; this reality has contributed to the current spiritual crisis that many Chinese Buddhists have identified within their own culture. This chapter examines how Tibetan teachers and their Han Chinese disciples respond to the impact of the Chinese state's representation of religion, and how they attempt to reclaim the social legitimacy of religion. My primary argument in this chapter is that the process of Tibetan Buddhist revitalization, in addition to manifesting the physical reconstruction of destroyed monasteries, must also manifest an inner restoration in which the abuses and the wrongs committed by perpetrators need to be publicly acknowledged and denounced.

Chapter 7 discusses how urban Tibetans who live and work in cosmopolitan centers such as Beijing, Chengdu, and Lanzhou construct their own version of virtual Tibet – for the purpose of reclaiming their traditional past as a positive contribution to humankind, by emphasizing Buddhism as the basis of Tibetan civilization. I treat Tibetans' virtual Tibet as a part of China's public space; it is situated in the regulatory framework of the Chinese state, and connects itself with the greater Chinese cyberspace by using Chinese language and attracting advertisements from major Chinese Web conglomerates such as sina.com, sohu.com, and baidu.com. Upon this backdrop, I cast three arguments. First, the public space of/for Tibetans in China has not been neutral as some scholars suggest; instead, it has been neutralized by and dominated with Chinese state ideology. However, this ongoing state domination is facing contestation from urban Tibetans – albeit in an indirect fashion. Second, Tibetan Buddhism in urban Tibetans' public space is more an instrument of ethnic nationalism than a practised religion. Its instrumentality is geared toward fulfilling two intertwined purposes: imbuing the traditional Tibetan past with sacred character, and destigmatizing the traditional Tibetan culture which has been defined as “backward” and “oppressive” by the Chinese state. In this sense, educating the Chinese public through the virtual Tibet is a primary objective of urban Tibetans. Lastly, in this chapter I posit that contemporary Tibetan ethnic nationalism is emotive in nature, as modern Tibetan scholars and writers take a primordial turn to re-embrace Tibetan Buddhism in senses both historical and mythical.

Chapter 8, as the ending of the book, reinforces my argument that in addition to Tibetan lamas' roles in their local communities, the forces of globalization have been the main cause of recent Tibetan Buddhist revivals. Globalization in this chapter is not limited to the economic realm; it encompasses also the availability of

local human ideas in securing global well-being, and reciprocally embraces global concern for local issues of social justice, human rights, and cultural heritage. The global exchange of local ideas is no longer limited to the level of different nation-states, but is now a matter of fact between individuals from different parts of the world who have never met each other. In the global scheme of things, Western Buddhists are entitled to take credit for the growing number of Han Chinese who have embraced Tibetan Buddhism. Paralleling Tibetan religious revivals since the 1980s, many Buddhist texts authored by Western Buddhists and Tibetan teachers outside of Tibet have been translated into Chinese and are sold in China. Pema Chodron's *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness* (1993) and *When Things Fall Apart* (2002), Sogyal Rinpoche's *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (2002), and W.Y. Evans-Wentz's *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927) are among the titles that can be found in the Chinese book market. VCD and DVD copies of documentaries about the Dalai Lama from abroad are commonly viewed by Tibetan monks and nuns.

With all things considered in the complexity of Tibetan Buddhist revitalizations, my ending point is that Tibetan Buddhism in both traditional and modern forms has initiated its own version of New Age spirituality, except that it does not limit itself to the Western cultural domain but is also taking place in China and elsewhere. I characterize it as an ecospirituality since contemporary Tibetan Buddhism is clearly socially and environmentally engaged, as well as earth-inspired. It shares commonality with the ongoing planetary concern of global environment and the preservation of indigenous habitat and ecological practices. What is unique in the ecospirituality of Tibetan Buddhism is the "blood relation" between humans, land, and local spirits/deities as discussed in Chapter 3. This blood relation, in many ways, bears a function similar to Australian Aborigines' songlines or dream tracks, in which mythical-historical memories are locally sustained while its ecological values are being globally appreciated and referenced for building sustainable communities around the world.

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